**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AN UNDERSTANDING OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND THE PERCEPTION OF INJUSTICE, AND RACE RELATED STRESS: AN ATTITUDINAL STUDY OF MIDDLE TO UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS AFRICAN AMERICANS**

Gerald L. Ware



Chair, Dissertation Committee



Member, Dissertation Committee

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor

of Philosophy

Omega Graduate School

Graduation Date

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October 2022

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**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Certain beliefs were producing certain attitudes. Positive change was affected because of a critical examination of the status quo. However, based on research, many of the changes were seen as flawed or imperfect, as many legal, social, and political solutions were. Redress meant to prevent racial discrimination was no exception. The difficulty with many racial issues was that the effect of discrimination was not always clearly demonstrable (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020).

Critical race theory, intersectionality, and hegemony were ideologies based on the analysis of power dynamics between the oppressed and their oppressors has become more and more influential in our culture. At the same time, it has becoming less and less visible as people assimilated it into their worldview. Certain ideas were so ubiquitous that they were like the air we breathed; we absorbed them without giving them a second thought. Consequently, recognizing their presence in a conversation can pose a challenge (Shenvi, 2020).

There was a need to examine the need to understand and clarify certain terms, and ideologies central to the issue of social justice.

**Problem Statement**

It was unknown whether there was a relationship between middle to upper-middle class African American’s perception of injustice, race related stress, and their self-reported level of understanding of critical race theory (CRT).

**Background of the Problem**

The efforts of some to use CRT or intersectionality to examine society for the betterment of all (particularly African Americans) were indeed laudable. However, those who use CRT or intersectionality to exalt some and villainize others are not practicing justice. Some spend much time contemplating which injustices are worse (Shenvi, 2020). I feel a strong desire to tell you – and I expect you feel a strong desire to tell me – which of these two errors is the worse. That is the devil getting at us. He always sends errors into the world in pairs – pairs of opposites. Moreover, he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse (Lewis, 2015, p. 186).

**Setting of this Research**

The research sample was taken from a population comprised of middle to upper-middle class African Americans (as defined socio-economically by the U.S. Census Bureau 2021 census data) that had achieved business ownership, advanced degrees, become leaders on their jobs or in their fields of endeavor, pastors, or were considered leaders in their communities. The sample population was from the metropolitan Chattanooga, TN area.

**Thesis Statement**

This study evaluated the relationship between middle to upper middle-class African American’s self-reported level of knowledge of critical race theory (CRT), their perception of injustice, and their race related stress.

**Research Hypothesis**

There was a statistically significant difference in the number of middle to upper-middle class African Americans with a basic understanding of critical race theory (CRT), intersectionality, and hegemony from those with no understanding of these philosophies and theories.

**Scope of the Research**

The research sample was taken from a population of adults at and over the age of 30 who had achieved U.S. middle to upper-middle class as promulgated by the U.S. Census Bureau. The experimental group included those adults who had achieved an academic, professional, and or socio-economic level placing them solidly in range of middle to upper-middle class. These participants resided primarily in the metropolitan Chattanooga, TN area. This study was considered a pilot study focused on the level of self-reported understanding of critical race theory, the sample population’s perception of injustice, and race related stress. The duration of the study was to be determined and would have included participants who willingly volunteered to participate.

**Research Assumptions**

The first assumption was that the African American community was suffering from a lack of understanding of certain sociological philosophies and theories. The second assumption was that actions, based on the lack of understanding, was contributing to the prolonged hardship(s) of African Americans by perpetuating feelings of marginalization, injustice, persecution, and victimhood. A third assumption was that an endless cycle of largely self-imposed sociological conditioning might led to the further destruction of the African American family and by extension, the African American community.

**Significance of the Research**

U.S. middle to upper middle-class African American’s level of understanding of CRT had a significant effect on their perception of injustice. More knowledgeable middle to upper middle-class African Americans could have promoted more meaningful social activity encouraging authentic justice and transformational reconciliation.

**CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A review of the current literature was conducted as part of this research dissertation. The literature study was directly related to the thesis of the dissertation. The information, summarized in this chapter, aided to shape the hypotheses listed in chapter three of this dissertation.

Sources Consulted

The literature reviewed was obtained from journals and books at the National Library of Congress, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Library, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Omega Graduate School. Systemic biographic searches were performed to find relevant English language, peer-reviewed, studies from several databases including but not limited to ProQuest, Google Scholar, and PAIS.

Introduction

In this chapter, first, the researcher provided a review of critical race theory (CRT). The researcher also provided a review of associated sociopolitical topics: hegemony, intersectionality, Marxism and conflict, socialism, and political correctness. The researcher also described CRT (the theoretical framework) and explained its fundamental role in understanding what factors contributed to the presentation of those dependent variables. The researcher will then discuss racial identity attitude, and sociopolitical attitude as contributing factors to the study outcomes using CRT as the guiding rationale. The discussion included empirical and theoretical evidence for the variables. The researcher will use Cross’s (1991) Nigrescence model of racial identity development to conceptualized Racial Identity. The section on sociopolitical attitude integrated discussion on the current sociopolitical environment. Finally, the researcher will provide their research summary, research questions, and hypotheses. The researcher discussed how they will incorporate the Perceived Injustice Questionnaire (PIQ) and Index of Race Related Stress (IRRS) – Brief Version to address gaps in the literature in their area of research. The researcher also used the PIQ and IRRS to guide and support their research methodology concerning data collection and analysis.

**Introduction of Philosophies and Theories**

Critical Race theory (CRT)

Delgado, Stefanic & Harris (2017) defined the critical race theory movement clearly and succinctly:

 The critical race theory (CRT) movement was a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considered many of the same issues as conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses took up but placed them in a broader perspective

(Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017, p. 3).

Unlike conventional civil rights, CRT more closely scrutinized from broader perspectives as economics, history, interest groups, individual interests, and emotions. CRT questioned the foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, rationalism, enlightenment, and constitutional law (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017). Many "communities" have their lane regarding CRT and social justice (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017).

**Influential Thinkers and Movements Within the Philosophies and Theories**

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

“The late Derrick Bell, formerly at Harvard Law School but serving as visiting professor of law at New York University when he died in 2011, became the movement’s intellectual father figure” (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017, p. 6). Derrick Bell was considered the father figure of neoliberal CRT because he wrote many of the underlying principles. There were, of course, many others that could be said to be integral to CRT as ideology leaders and movement leaders. Alan Freedman wrote about how the Supreme Court made rulings under the philosophy of law (specifically racial jurisprudence) that were seemingly liberal in directional push yet legitimized racism (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017). Many scholars believed Kimberle’ Crenshaw's work was based on the writings of Bell and Freedman (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017). Asian scholars, American Indian scholars, and Latino scholars were also integral to the CRT movement (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017).

**Effects of These Philosophies and Theories Upon Society**

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Academia saw many changes in perspective and shifts in focus due to social justice issues:

The growth of the equity and diversity initiatives in the academy, particularly in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, gives us a means of making this argument as the liberal arts have utility in questioning the structures of white supremacy and receiving history and values

(Mondschein, 2020).

Mondschein discussed critical theory, students, racism, curricula, education, and power from the perspective of liberal arts academia from the context of cognitive dissonance brought about by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in an article entitled Liberal Arts for Social Change (2020). However, the overarching topic of the article was how the BLM movement brought new vitality to the discussion about how important a liberal arts education was to social justice issues (Mondschein, 2020). These perspectives impacted neoliberal thought and university governance – in short, the author believed traditional liberal arts programs were inherently elitist and excluded much of society, thus, conflict with the goals of “diversity," "inclusion," and "equity" that modern liberal arts academia claimed to champion (Mondschein, 2020).

At present, there is a severe dearth of Black men teachers in the United States. The alarming shortage of Black men teachers is not only a problem, but it is also, as Ingersoll and May asserted, ““a civil rights issue.”” In fact, there is such a shortage of Black men teachers, the strong possibility exists that many students will never encounter a black male teacher

(Sandles, 2020).

“In the aftermath of Brown, schools could no longer segregate based on race, as the Brown ruling rendered such separation unconstitutional. With the resulting integration, scores of black teachers, including men teachers, who once made up a sizeable percentage of the teacher workforce, faced ejection from the profession” (Sandles, 2020). It appeared Sandles was asserting the favorable ruling of Brown vs. The Board of Education was had hurt black educators concerning their numbers in the teaching profession. Separate but equal was outlawed, with black males exiting the teaching profession as a net result (Sandles, 2020).

**The Influence of The Philosophies and Theories Upon Other Major Fields of Study**

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

“Critical race Theory formally arose in the 1970s, through the critical study of law as it pertains to issues of race” (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020, p. 111). CRT has affected much of American life beyond the academy, specifically in areas that have become known as “identity politics”. People of the same race, sex, or sexual orientation worked together to gain power for their respective groups to restructure what was known as the hegemony (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Since the 1990s, CRT had emphasized "whiteness" and coined "white privilege". CRT drew from certain European philosophers and social theorists like Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, and Jaques Derrida. The American tradition rested in W.E.B. Du Bois (a sociologist and a transcendentalist), Cesar Chavez partnered with the Black Panther Party and Chicano movements from the '60s and '70s, respectively (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Dr. Thomas Sowell (an economist) and Dr. Ibram X. Kendi (African American Studies professor) were two prominent, contemporary influential writers on CRT. Kendi was also a leading author on what had become known as “anti-racism” and how to become an anti-racist (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). CRT had a significant effect on contemporary fields such as economics, sociology, psychology, African American Studies, American History, and many other fields of study (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020).

“Critical race theory is, at root, an American phenomenon. So thoroughly is this the case that although its ideas have been used outside the United States for some time, they are often highly flavored by U.S. racial history” (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020, p. 113). Critical race theory was underpinning an entire social movement meant to enact social reform through a violent revolution - if need be, for some (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Whether or not one believed there was credibility to critical race theory and its concepts, or, that the tenants of critical race theory had been proven beyond theoretical confines, one could not deny its effect on modern, western society (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Critical race theory was discussed in social, political, educational, and religious arenas (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Many churches were struggling to reconcile what they saw as historical, systemic, racial injustice. For many, it was difficult to wholly subscribe to the way of thinking that constituted critical race theory – a theory that asserted that race was nothing more than a social construct created to perpetuate white privilege through white supremacy (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Like many theories constructed to address highly complex issues, critical race theory had many flaws (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). In some cases, many (like Dr. Glen Lowery) believed the theory used simplistic reasoning to substantiate and bring credibility to vast social topics that had grown to influence many fields of study and disciplines (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020).

**Something about Marxism and Conflict, Socialism, Hegemony, Intersectionality, Political Correctness (PC)**

Marxism and Conflict

Much had been written about Marxism and conflict. Ghous (2020) wrote the following concerning both:

Drawing on different schools of Marxist thought, it establishes the case of ideology as one of the potential sources of social conflict. Economic determinism alone cannot precipitate social conflict. Ideology has a part to play. Insistence on mere economic dialect and exclusion of consciousness and moral elements can limit the scope of the theory of social conflict

(Ghous, 2020).

Conflict arose many times when different values were embraced by different people. Some believed humans as a species believe that if one selected one’s values, one could not also have selected the other’s values because one value had to be preferred over the other. One could not subscribe to democracy and authoritarianism simultaneously (Ghous, 2020). Conflict in modern times seemed to be all about different values embraced by different people - incompatible values. It was helpful to understand the elements of conflict. Conflict could have been understood as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceived danger from others to their needs, interests, or way of life (Ghous, 2020). Conflict could take different forms ranging from overt (seen) conflicts to covert (unseen) conflicts. Furthermore, conflict also operated on different levels - person to person, country to country. Clashes (micro or macro) could have been over economic, political, or social gain differences. Conflict might have taken place between interest groups, corporations, and political parties (Ghous, 2020). Ideology was a permanent feature of social and political life. Ideology was continuously shaping and reshaping society (Ghous, 2020). A central factor that led to group identification and consequently to conflicting preferences and choices was ideology (Ghous, 2020). Individuals and groups entered the political arena with different expectations and preferences. Sometimes, these differing preferences resulted in sharp divisions. Heterogeneous (diverse) societies suffered more from differences and divisions than homogeneous (same) societies and were less likely to exhibit political stability (Ghous, 2020). Ideological conflicts were different from personal and other conflicts in that all other conflicts might have been said to occur due to non-moral actions, whereas ideological conflicts were purely value-based (Ghous, 2020). However, factors such as economic determinism were also responsible for social conflict. The theory of economic determinism was introduced by Marx as a reaction to the industrial revolution (Ghous, 2020). The 20th and 21st centuries were burdened with conflicting ideologies. The roots of much of the conflict was found in material disputes (Ghous, 2020). The importance of other factors as potential sources of conflict could not have been underestimated. While a considerable portion of social and political conflict was rooted in different ideologies followed by different people and groups, one must not have neglected other factors such as psychological needs, ethnicity, religion, culture, nationalism, regionalism - all were significant conflict bases and equally viable sources (Ghous, 2020). Therefore, the intention with this rationale was not to under-mind the significance of economic determinism, nor was it to give more weight to other factors. The rational was to give significance to the notion that beliefs, ideas, and values guided the actions of many in social and political worlds (Ghous, 2020). Ideology was a powerful factor. Ideology could lead to conflict in society. Ideology based on values could have tended to lead to conflict (Ghous, 2020). Ideological conflicts were a result of different ideological choices based on espoused values.

Socialism

“Any serious discussion of socialism must begin by acknowledging socialism’s rich diversity” (Wolff, 2019, p. 1). For many, socialism seemed to be a kind of longing for a better life than capitalism already permitted for most people. Socialists' desires were as old as capitalism because of capitalist products or results (Wolff, 2019). Whatever aspect(s) of socialism (or capitalism) one chose to analyze, the particulars needed to be located within each system’s complexities. This approach enabled one to avoid presenting one’s interpretation as if it were the entirety of either socio-economic system (Wolff, 2019). Yearnings for better lives (as many believed socialism proposes) were not new. In slave societies, such as the early United States, slaves dreamed of lives less harsh and brutal and less out of their control. The slaves desired freedom. Ultimately, they sought change that would have made it impossible for any one person to be the property of another (Wolff, 2019). In feudal societies, surfs were "free" because no one "owned" them. Nevertheless, surfs yearned for better lives too. Their subordination to lords included labor and other social burdens. They possibly hoped and dreamed of a society where they would not be bound to the land, the lord of the land, and feudal duties of subservience (Wolff, 2019).

The French and American revolutions denoted pivotal moments in the social transformation of two major pre-capitalist systems into capitalist systems (Wolff, 2019). Any transition from capitalism to any form of socialism did not guarantee that all socialist goals would be achieved or that no one will have been abused, just as with capitalism (Wolff, 2019). The abolition of slavery did not mean freedom was never subsequently abused or that no segment of society was not marginalized (Wolff, 2019).

Hegemony

Hegemony was defined as the dominance or leadership, specifically by one country or social group over others. Dominance might have been social, cultural, ideological, economic, or military. However, dominance was not always necessarily established by force (Ruggiero, 2021). The definition implied the notion of hegemony as possessing overwhelming power, while at the same time implying this power invariably needed the ability of the hegemon to exercise leverage to control others. In this way, hegemony involved a relationship between participants, whether people or states (Ruggiero, 2021). This leadership could have been of a consensual or dominating nature. The relational aspect of hegemony was vital for those who saw hegemony as exercising a form of leadership. Nevertheless, the critical point was that the notion of hegemony entailed a relationship between a predominant state, social group, and others (Ruggiero, 2021).

Antonio Gramsci (January 22, 1891 – April 27, 1937) was not the first to use the term “Hegemony.” Hegemony was a term used previously by Vladimir Lenin (a Russian Marxist) to denote the political leadership of the working class (the proletariat) in a democratic revolution (Sugita, Setini & Anshori, 2021). Gramsci greatly expanded this concept, developing a sharp analysis of how the ruling capitalist class (the bourgeoisie) instituted and maintained control. Gramsci believed that bourgeois values were tied to folklore, popular culture, and religion. Thus, much of his analysis of hegemonic culture was aimed at these elements (Sugita, Setini & Anshori, 2021). Gramsci was impressed with the influence that Roman Catholicism had and the care which the Church took to prevent any gap developing between the religion of the educated and that of the less educated. Gramsci viewed Marxism as a union of the purely intellectual analysis of religion found in Renaissance humanism and elements of the Reformation that appealed to the masses (Sugita, Setini & Anshori, 2021). Gramsci also believed Marxism could have replaced religion - only if it had met the spiritual needs of the people. People would have had to think of Marxism as an expression of their experience (Sugita, Setini & Anshori, 2021). Gramsci's theory of hegemony was tied to his concept of the capitalist state, but only in the narrow sense of government. He divided it between political society (the police, the army, legal system), the arena of political institutions, and legal, constitutional control. Civil society (the family, the education system, trade unions) was commonly seen as the private or non-state sphere (Sugita, Setini & Anshori, 2021). Civil society mediated between the state and the economy. However, Gramsci stressed that division was purely conceptual and that political and civil often overlapped. Gramsci asserted that the capitalist state ruled through force in addition to consent: political society was the domain of force, and civil society was the domain of consent (Sugita, Setini & Anshori, 2021).

“That the two components of power, coercion, and hegemony are intimately connected is clear in Max Weber’s 1978 argument that domination may be established by virtue of “a constellation of interests” and by virtue of “authority” (Ruggiero, 2021). The former (coercion) seemed to fall into the economic realm and originated from the ownership or custody of resources and goods. This control might have been said to determine the actions of those without "possessions" yet remained nominally free and motivated simply by the pursuit of their reproduction or dominance of the marketplace (Ruggiero, 2021). Monopolies could have been understood as an extreme form of this type of domination. The latter (hegemony) was representative of patriarchal, authoritative, or royal power. It appeared the assumption was that it was incumbent upon the proletariat to obey regardless of personal merit, ability, or interests. Domination by virtue of constellation of interests, as Weber suggested, often became domination by authority. Material possessions were converted into duty to obey on the part of the proletariat (Ruggiero, 2021). It appears Ruggiero asserted that coercion as a category was central in right-wing thinking concerning power. Inspired by a dualist juxtaposition, this analysis distinguished between good and evil in the moral realm, profitable and un-profitable in economics, or friend and enemy in politics (Ruggiero, 2021). The distinction of coercion being only a right-wing characteristic of power was not definitively settled. It seemed this unqualified distinction separated the political from the ethical in favor of liberals (or the left), isolating power as a distinct matter to be couched in right-wing (or conservative) terms or ideology (Ruggiero, 2021). Yet, Marxism was a left-wing revolution that led to communism and armed conflict in Russia.

“In brief, it is extremely hard to draw a neat difference between coercive power strategies and consensual exercise of authority, as the analysis of the concept of hegemony may confirm” (Ruggiero, 2021). The “discriminating” procedure by which coercion was hidden required the control of others' agendas. This action was necessary so that the controllers could narrow the scope of “vision” of the controlled. Marx stated that this process was accompanied by the development of what is identified as a “false consciousness” (methods said to mislead the proletariat) concerning the controlled (Ruggiero, 2021). Whatever the method, coercion led to an authoritative power of order that demanded obedience manifested through the acceptance of the norms coercion imposed. Systems of dominance were established through norms that obtain hegemony as a result of perceived customary social practices. One’s thoughts arrived unconsciously, and one usually thought without reference to correct belief or consideration of being controlled or coerced (Ruggiero, 2021). Antonio Gramsci believed that consensus and hegemony were so closely related that they almost overlapped, and that supremacy of a social group manifested in two ways - domination and intellectual, and moral leadership (Ruggiero, 2021). Domination was about power. Power aimed at subjugation, even if liquidation of rival groups was deemed necessary for purposes of subjugation. Yet, leadership wielded the power as moral and intellectual values were widely spread and eventually internalized by the masses. This happened in many cases, even before power was exercised (Ruggiero, 2021). Conflict between social groups resulted in the victory for the party that captured the mind and political heart of the masses, consequently assimilating them into a hegemonic culture (Ruggiero, 2021). Some groups (African Americans as freed slaves, for example), for reasons of capitulation, submission, or intellectual subordination, adopted an understanding of the world that was not theirs but was acquired from another group (former “masters”) (Ruggiero, 2021). All African Americans did not fall into the category of being capitulators as a result of having been the descendants of slaves. Also, all people of European descent in America were not inherently inclined to be dominators due to having been descendants of slave owners (Ruggiero, 2021).

Again, hegemony was defined as the dominance or leadership, specifically by one country or social group over others (Ruggiero, 2021).

All that is solid melts into air. All that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind'. This does not entail that everything religious disappears with the emergence of global capitalism. Indeed, capitalism itself could be perceived in terms of a religion, perhaps as bringing with it a religion of everyday life (Wittrock, 2020).

Karl Marx was known to be a secular humanist. However, Marx often indicated that religion was a complex topic, a paradigm of conflicting propensities and impulses. Marx believed religious suffering was the expression of actual suffering and a protest against real suffering (Wittrock, 2020). Marx described religion as the sigh of the oppressed creature and the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of spiritless conditions (Wittrock, 2020). It would appear Marx understood and held great respect for religion and faith. However, then, he said religion was the opium of the people (Wittrock, 2020). The implication was that people prefer the dulling effect that religion gave them to life’s issues. This was to say, the forgiveness of religion (Christianity) gave people delusional happiness. It was the price people had to pay for their faux happiness (Wittrock, 2020). Marx believed one would do well not to require a rigid understanding of “religion” based solely on Christian or Jewish custom and practices. He felt that rather than attempting to find some essential core that defined "religion," it was more realistic to treat religion as an ambiguous concept (Wittrock, 2020). What did this have to do with hegemony? Marx implied that it was difficult to draw the boundaries of religion or to make a clear distinction between the religious and the secular in many regards. Marx believed there was a relativeness to religion and capitalist hegemony that should never be adhered to too firmly (Wittrock, 2020). Also, that, people should not have reduced religion to hierarchical institutions with rigid doctrines that legitimize existing social structures, which projected the illusion of compensation onto the proletariat in exchange for exploitation by the bourgeoisie (Wittrock, 2020). Marx was stating that religion, like capitalism, had some useful attributes, but only for those in control or for those that would willingly be controlled.

The power of capitalist hegemony today is so overwhelming (allied as it is with the military and police powers of the state) that the only viable strategy for change is a process of negating, avoiding, and eventually consigning capitalism and the state to the dustbin of history

(Sklair, 2019).

Was there a non-capitalist alternative to capitalist globalism from the standpoint of hegemony? The question made it clear that hegemony was a subject of great interest to sociology and sociologists (Sklair, 2019). Some might have said some alternatives would be democratic socialism, communism, or even totalitarianism. Some would have disagreed. There was a saying with western economists and sociologists: 'It is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism' (Sklair, 2019). Whether one agreed with the aphorism or not, there was some truth concerning capitalist globalization and its impact (both positive and negative). Specific historical figures and institutions that established well-known theories of capitalist hegemony (Marx, Gramsci, Althusser, Marcuse, The Frankfurt School) undoubtedly aided in helping to explain why it might have been 'easier to imagine the end of the world than an end to capitalism' depending on one's opinion concerning the historical figures and/or capitalism (Sklair, 2019). To that end, it might have been wise to attempt to understand what was once imagined as democratic socialism (to a certain degree) and what it might have looked like in the 21st century (Sklair, 2019). Nevertheless, it seemed that Marxist ideology had gained steam in recent times. It appeared that Marxist sociology was essentially interested in, but not limited to, the relationship between society and economics – possibly even more specifically, key concepts in sub-fields like modes of production, historical materialism, and the capitalist-laborer relation (Sklair, 2019). Some other critical questions asked by Marxist sociologists: How did the means (or money) control workers? How did a method (way of production) influence the social classes? What is the relationship between laborers, wealth, the government (or state), and culture? How do economic factors influence inequalities? (Sklair, 2019). Here was where one might have gotten into various critical theories and intersectionalism regarding gender and race. Marxist sociology was also concerned with how police forces were used to control indigenous peoples, enslave populations, and the poor laborers in the name of capitalism – all aspects of establishing and maintaining hegemony (Sklair, 2019). Being sure that capitalism was as nefarious as some accused it of being could not be definitively established. That was to say that the wealthy profiting from the labor of others was always exploitative. This dynamic might have been the case if one had lived in other societies in addition to capitalist cultures. At the same time, a robust democracy did have aspects of many social and economic types, including socialism – all employed by the hegemon to “run” the society (Sklair, 2019).

The rapid development of digital information and communication technology is currently accompanied by the development of modern entertainment arts in the form of music, films, online games, and other digital-based entertainment facilities. This is following Antonio Gramsci’s opinion that the media is a battleground between competing ideologies

(Sugita, Setini, & Anshori, 2021).

Media was one of the seven mountains of influence. The media was a space in which many ideologies were represented. The media could have been a tool to establish a dominant cultural ideology for the interests of the dominant class (hegemon) or a means of struggle for the oppressed to build opposition and ideology against the hegemon (Sugita, Setini, & Anshori, 2021). Serious thought about hegemony seemed to be a new consideration for Christians concerning media. Western Christians were having to look at increasing scrutiny concerning the truth of Christianity's divine doctrinal claims in the rise of secular rationalism – something which is not new (Sugita, Setini, & Anshori, 2021). The latter had produced much writing and talk recently on the questions raised for Christians concerning individual justice (intersectionality), plurality (critical race theory), and societal power structure (hegemony) (Sugita, Setini, & Anshori, 2021). There were more than a few media outlets that scrutinize Christianity’s place in politics and other areas of society. Many argued for a broadly pluralistic response, which involves many claims about how Christians saw the world – closed-minded and outdated (Sugita, Setini, & Anshori, 2021). Some believed that hegemony (through CRT) was on par with the foundational truths of God’s Word. God’s sovereignty had been judged irrelevant by contemporary popular media. The Bible instructed Christians to honor Earthly authority. This was not meant to say racial injustice should be tolerated or that God’s word condoned it (Sugita, Setini, & Anshori, 2021). A second claim was that to affirm the superiority of hegemony over God’s truth is epistemologically dubious and morally reprehensible no matter what popular media would have had one believe (Sugita, Setini, & Anshori, 2021).

Intersectionality

There had been some debate concerning the definition of intersectionality. Collins & Bilge (2020) defined it in the following way:

Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age – among others – as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences

(Collins & Bilge, 2020).

There was debate about the meaning of intersectionality. It seemed there was no official definition for intersectionality. The above quote was as close as the researcher was able to come to intersectionality's core tenants. Intersectionality asserted that power relations of race, class, gender, and sexuality were all related and were never exclusively mutual. All these aspects worked together and built upon each other affecting every aspect of an individual's life (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Intersectionality was the term used by most stakeholders that applied their understanding of the concept to various uses. These differences in the broad description denoted a consensus concerning how individuals comprehended intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

Law professor Kimberle’ Crenshaw wrote a thesis for her law degree in the 1980s, leading to what would be coined as intersectionality. Many scholars believed Crenshaw's work was based on the writings of Bell and Freedman (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017). Crenshaw introduced the theory of intersectionality in 1989, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Anti-racist Politics." The paper was influenced by black feminist criticism (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017). The central reasoning of the paper was that the experience of being a black woman could not be understood in terms of merely being black and of merely being a woman considered independently (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017). Nevertheless, both must have included the interactions between the two, each reinforced the other. According to Crenshaw, the concept of intersectionality predated her work. She felt her work and thinking were congruous with the ideas of African American women who articulated it before her, such as Anna Julia Cooper, Maria Steward, Angela Davis, and Deborah King. Crenshaw’s inspiration for the theory began during her college studies. She realized the gender aspect of race was extremely under-explored (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017).

In the 1960s and 1970s, African American women activists confronted the puzzle of how their needs concerning jobs, education, employment, and healthcare simply fell through the cracks of anti-racist social movements, feminism, and unions organizing for workers’ rights. Each of these social movements elevated one category of analysis and action above others, for example, race within the civil rights movement, or gender within the feminist movement, or class within the class movement

(Collins & Bilge, 2020).

The implication is that African American women were underrepresented due to their being black, female, and workers. The thinking was that none of the aforementioned distinctions considered separately adequately addressed the complex social issues African American women faced. Collins and Bilge asserted that the plight of black women was not only subordinate but also overlooked within each movement. Intersectionality was used as an analysis to address these issues (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

 “Crenshaw criticizes that the anti-racist interventions tend to think “about discrimination which structures politics so that struggles are categorized as singular issues [, thus importing] a descriptive and normative view of society that reinforces their status quo” (Muller, 2021). For Kimberle’ Crenshaw, it was not enough to insert anti-racist ideals in the framework of inclusion. The goal of the intersectional approach was to cross-examine the principles attached to the social categories that existed in the world – also, the way those principles promoted and generated social hierarchies (Muller, 2021). Intersectionality was also to look beneath the prevailing notions of discrimination and to challenge the laxity that accompanied the belief in the effectiveness of this paradigm (Muller, 2021). There was a popular sense of intersectionality that was politicized for partisan purposes. Crenshaw had some conflict concerning how intersectionality was used for purely partisan purposes. These purposes were exactly what Crenshaw opposed regarding the narrow lenses of particular civil rights activism thrusts. In her opinion, there was very little focus on the respective rights of black women in most civil rights movements (Muller, 2021).

The Bible stated in Proverbs 16:2 that people might have been pure in their own eyes, but the Lord examined their motives. The initial intent of what became known as critical race theory and intersectionality did have merit as the aim was to identify and lay bare real problems with the intent of aiding social and political change. The impetus was laudable (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Positive change was indeed affected because of a critical examination of the status quo. However, many of the changes were seen as flawed or imperfect, as many legal, social, and political solutions were (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Redress meant to prevent racial discrimination was no exception. The difficulty with many racial issues was that the effect of discrimination was not always clearly demonstrable (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). One could not always make the case of injustice towards an entire segment of a population empirically - not to say inequity did not exist. It was simply that matters of human relations were often muddled from issue to issue, person to person, and opinion to opinion (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020).

“The concept of “intersectionality” is increasingly employed within public health arenas, particularly in North America” (Holman, Salway, Bell, Beach, Adebajo, Ali & Butt, 2021). There had been much work conducted that could have suggested any simplistic expectation that any new concept might not have affected the ways in which inequalities in healthcare were understood and tackled. Many African Americans did not trust the government, less the healthcare system (Holman, Salway, Bell, Beach, Adebajo, Ali & Butt, 2021). The theoretical framework of intersectionality posited that several social categories formed a nexus at the most micro level of all individual experiences. At the nexus point is an interlocking system (or systems) of privilege for some and oppression for others (Holman, Salway, Bell, Beach, Adebajo, Ali & Butt, 2021). For many, personal privilege or oppression manifested at the macro or social level through racism, sexism, and classism. So, what was the connection between intersectionality and healthcare? Public health made a commitment to social justice (Holman, Salway, Bell, Beach, Adebajo, Ali & Butt, 2021). It appeared that there was a natural fit between the two, with intersectionality focused on historically oppressed segments of society. However, despite an abundance of existing research focused on the oppressed in healthcare, studies that demonstrate intersectionality within this framework of interpretation were rare (Holman, Salway, Bell, Beach, Adebajo, Ali & Butt, 2021). More research was needed in the area of healthcare through the "lens" of intersectionality – not to discredit intersectionality but to ascertain how this lens might have aided or hindered equitable change in healthcare. The Church had a long history of ministering and caring for those in need, not only spiritually but physically. Perhaps all segments of society would have benefited from the Church's example.

My irritation with the ubiquitous phrase “” we’re all in this together”” quickly ensued. Although seemingly innocuous and often well-intentioned, the phrase reflects an intersectional color and class blinding that functions to obscure the structural inequalities that befall black and other marginalized groups

(Bowleg, 2020).

The current presidential administration's response to COVID-19 compounded pain and suffering unnecessarily for many. The pain and suffering were not borne equally. COVID-19 had, in many cases, revealed disproportionate risk and impact based on some structured inequality (Bowleg, 2020). Not just at intersections of racial/ethnic minority status and class or occupation. Many of the most stressful and high-risk jobs deemed essential (not just frontline like ER's or first responders) offered meager wages and were employed by people at some of the most peripheral intersections such as racial and/or ethnic minorities, women (sex trafficking), and undocumented workers (Bowleg, 2020). There was no doubt these intersections differed sharply from those of predominately white, middle-class, and affluent people (white, black, Hispanic, Asian) who hired, legislated, and directed/managed the conditions under which the so-called “essential” (or expendable, depending on one's point of view) worked in the COVID-19 era and even lived or died (Bowleg, 2020). There was undoubtedly inequality and racism at all levels of society and in all areas (white to black, black to white, black to Hispanic, Hispanic to black, white to Hispanic, Hispanic to white, Asian to, so on), but not solely because people were inherently evil, but because humans were flawed. Moreover, it was human instinct to look out for oneself and one’s “kind” (Bowleg, 2020). Yet, people are not all beholden to their predispositions as fallen beings. When the COVID-19 shut-down ended, and in the present, policymakers, public health officials, and society at large had what the author called a "moral imperative" to address issues of inequality in health care and the economy as well as social needs (Bowleg, 2020). The author believed this action would bring society closer to being “in this together.”

COVID-19 is not a great equalizer. Like other more recent pandemics such as the Spanish flu in 1918 or HIV in the '80s, the virus spread more easily among the more vulnerable population. Furthermore, the economic consequences of social distancing measures are leading to an increase of inequalities compared to pre-pandemic times

(Maestripieri, 2021).

The relationship between COVID-19 and the so-called inequality structure transpired along two ranges – first, how existing inequality structures affected the spread of the infection, and secondly, how its containment measures affected the existing systems of said existing inequality (Maestripieri, 2021). There had long been debate about the social determinates of health by sociologists and public health officials. Much of the focus had been on how education, socio-economic conditions, and the environment in which people lived affected their health (Maestripieri, 2021). COVID-19 was undeniably a social disease. Meaning, one's likelihood of being infected might have been influenced by some socio-economic inequalities. The virus was more likely to propagate more readily among those that had a concurrent illness or pre-existing condition or lived in overcrowded housing, also among those who lacked regular access to health services (Maestripieri, 2021). Furthermore, COVID-19’s distribution was also correlated with the vulnerability of specific communities. COVID-19 was not only a medical disaster. It had been in many ways a “social disaster.” The social distancing deemed necessary to avoid the spread of the virus in some cases exasperated its social impact (Maestripieri, 2021).

Intersectionality as a concept is growing, and literature has captured the discourse of intersectionality theory as a catalyst for social change and intersectionality as the roots of activism. However, the evaluation of intersectionality strategies or those strategies using an intersectional lens to transform organizational behavior and culture is extremely limited

(Cate, MacMilan, McKinnon, Torabi, & Osmond-McLeod, 2021).

Again, Kimberle' Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality as the concept is understood by most in 1989. Crenshaw's objective was to disturb the prevailing ideologies concerning how inequalities present as distinct systems and processes of an individual's race or gender rather than contemplating how various inequalities intersect, multiply and are reciprocally mutual components rather than mutually exclusive (Cate, MacMilan, McKinnon, Torabi, & Osmond-McLeod, 2021). Crenshaw originally based intersectionality within the framework of feminism and critical race theory. Her concepts were now being applied more widely at the level of individuals as well as socio-structural and political levels across multiple disciplines (Cate, MacMilan, McKinnon, Torabi, & Osmond-McLeod, 2021). Obviously, there were many particulars that made an individual. However, it seemed intersectionality attempted to reduce an individual’s identity to its’ “social components” of identity of race, gender (not that gender was a social construct), sexual orientation (not that sexual orientation was a social construct), disability, and socio-economic status on a micro level of experience simply to demonstrate isms such as racism, sexism, classism, and even sexual orientation. Every human was an individual – an undisputed point. One’s individual characteristics were what made each individual unique from others (Cate, MacMilan, McKinnon, Torabi, & Osmond-McLeod, 2021). Nevertheless, all still had universal similarities that constitute a shared sense of humanity and universal connection to one another. If people focused only on the individual aspects of every person, how was it possible to identify with each other as individuals and as one society equally at the same time? Intersectionality desired society to acknowledge that aspects of society tended to act upon specific individuals in particular ways (Cate, MacMilan, McKinnon, Torabi, & Osmond-McLeod, 2021). Intersectionality yearned for society to acknowledge there were aspects concerning society that affected large portions of society in specific ways through the systems the society had created (Cate, MacMilan, McKinnon, Torabi, & Osmond-McLeod, 2021). Racism was real. As precious as individuality was, humanity always had some limitations of understanding and perspective (Cate, MacMilan, McKinnon, Torabi, & Osmond-McLeod, 2021).

Political Correctness (PC)

Political correctness was an interesting topic of discussion. It was a powerful force for change that was unique from other social change initiatives:

This ideology has no economic basis for its goal of changing and revolutionizing society, but a socio-cultural one, wanting to standardize cultures and ethnicities by eliminating any individual differences. The most powerful weapon of this current is political correctness or PC

(Stoica, 2021).

The world was undergoing very rapid, sweeping societal change. After all the social conflict the West had experienced, particularly in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, a new ideology had emerged, a postmodern ideology (Stoica, 2021). This ideology was inspired by older ones - Marxism and the theories of the Frankfurt school, more precisely cultural Marxism, or cultural neo-Marxism. These ideologies had led to what had been coined, in modern times, political correctness (Stoica, 2021). The term political correctness (or PC) was used to describe policies and measures to avoid offenses or for highlighting the apparent disadvantages of certain groups or individuals (Stoica, 2021). In the public arena of discourse and the media, the term political correctness was usually employed pejoratively. As recently as the late 1980s, PC referred to a preference for inclusive language. PC also meant to avoid language or behavior that could be interpreted as excluding, insulting, or marginalizing groups considered discriminated against or disadvantaged (Stoica, 2021). Groups might be race, gender, or gender-defined (trans, gender fluidity) based. The emphasis was usually on so-called identity groups.

Ostensibly, the initial intentions of political correctness were hailed as laudable or righteous, as it was used to eliminate discrimination of marginalized people on ethnic, sexual, or religious grounds. PC was viewed as a struggle for social progress (Stoica, 2021). However, over time, some would have said political correctness had developed extremist tendencies. Proponents of political correctness seemed to have come to practice precisely what they desired to abolish – the discrimination against those they presumed were attempting to discriminate against others or them (Stoica, 2021). Political correctness had come to possess legal status in some Western societies - France, Canada, Sweden, and others. Political correctness, through cultural Marxism, sought to apply critical theory to many societal segments such as gender, race, family, culture, and identity in Western society. The Marxist ideals were the same as they had always been. However, the techniques were less physically violent in nature, subtler, with effects that took effect over time (Stoica, 2021). Multiculturalism and DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusivity) initiatives seemed to now be pursued equally with political correctness. However, multiculturalism was probably not a direct descendant of Marxism. PC seemed to be a result of globalization in some regards (Stoica, 2021). Such trends had been enthusiastically advanced and championed by followers of various other components or complementary elements of cultural Marxism. Some believed that multiculturalism was the final state of both a natural or synthetic process that exhibited on a national level or within communities within nations (Stoica, 2021). Supporters of political correctness asserted that many conservatives used the concept of political correctness to minimize or distract from actual discrimination towards disadvantaged or marginalized groups (Stoica, 2021). Nevertheless, cultural Marxism is increasingly present in Western societies, particularly in education, entertainment, and corporate environments (Stoica, 2021).

Current African Americans and Activism

The historical record attested to the rich, deep history of African American activism in effort to escape racial oppression after slavery (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). African American activism historically had been “intentional action aimed at fostering social and/or political change and often included engaging in behaviors aimed at reducing and/or eliminating racism and its negative effects and proactive behaviors to enhance the everyday lives of African American persons and the African American community as a whole” (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015, p. 171). African American activism had always covered a wide range of formal and informal proceedings including marches, protests, strikes, sit-ins, and boycotts. African Americans had also supported other groups and organizations that worked for informed voting, putting together rallies, organizing community, letter writing to politicians or news media, donating resources to causes, providing education concerning social inequalities, and mentoring to name a few (Szymanski, 2012). Studies indicated involvement in African American activism to be one of the main responses to racism for African American adults (Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Szymanski, 2012). African American activism continued to be vital to dismantling racist systems and ideologies while fostering positive changes in the African American community (Thomas, 2001).

According to Auerbach (Auerbach, Alonso, Cuijpers, Ebert, Hasking, Nock, WHO WMH-ICS Collaborators, 2018), “college students are a key population segment for determining the economic growth and success of a country” (p. 625). Data from the 2018 midterm elections showed that (a) Generation Z (eligible voters aged 18 to 21 years), Millennials (ages 22 to 37 years), and Generation X (38 to 53 years) individuals combined outvoted the Baby Boomers (ages 54 to 72 years) and older generations, and (b) the voting population was the most racially and ethnically diverse for a midterm, with “historic jumps” in voter turnout for non-white racial and ethnic groups (Cilluffo & Fry, 2019; Krogstad, Noe-Bustamante, & Flores, 2019). Activism by university-level, African American students had grown over the past decade, primarily due to sociopolitical changes and rising racial tension in the U.S. (McElderry & Rivera, 2017). Particularly, within the last five years, African American students from more than eighty universities (including Duke, Yale, Harvard, University of Missouri) formally insisted that their institutions acknowledge their histories of oppression and work to improve policies, and practices, and treatment of people from marginalized backgrounds - with an emphasis on African American students (Anderson & Span, 2016; Jones & Reddick, 2017). Consequently, it was increasingly vital to understand African American students’ current activism efforts to impact the political engagement in the current sociopolitical sphere (Samayoa, Stolzenberg, Zimmerman, & Gasman, 2018).

Research had indicated many factors in regard to the proliferation of activist tendencies in African American populations. Szymanski (2012) discovered that exposure to racist events or perceived discrimination was notably (and positively) associated with African American activism, particularly for university students with more thoughtful or reflective coping skills. Leath and Chavous (2017) described the propensity of African American students that attend predominantly white institutions (PWIs) to take active social action by means of protesting as a response to institutional and interpersonal experiences of racism on their respective campuses. In a study concerning the resurgence of activism in African Americans, (Livingston, Hughes, Dawson, Williams, Mohabir, Eleanya, … Brandon, 2017) discovered racial centrality (for example, more progressed and Afro-centric racial identities) and emotional and intellectual empowerment to be crucial influences on activist behavior. Results from Szymanski and Lewis (2015) suggested that cultural and race-related stress as well as more-developed racial and ethnic identities (for example, Immersion-Emersion Anti-White, Internalization Afrocentricity, and Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive) were positive predictors of African American activism in undergraduate university students. Established on racial identity theory, individuals who had progressed to more developed afro-centric racial identities were more aware of the existence and effects of racial oppression and tended to be more prepared to work to redress racial inequalities.

Cultural factors, like visual arts, music, and social media also played a role in African Americans’ exposure and feelings concerning issues of race in U.S. society. Music had long been a major means for oppressed people to build community, establish and enact resistance (for example, songs sung by slaves, Bob Marley’s music in the liberation of colonial Africans; Sanger, 1995; Shaban, 2019). U.S. Hip-Hop culture had historically been a driving force in African American young adults’ foray into activism through lyrics focused on structural inequalities, poverty, race, and class struggles (for example, Grandmaster Flash, Russell Simmons, Furious Five; Ellis-Williams, 2007). Hip-Hop lyrics had exhibited a decline from Civil Rights-related content (Ellis-Williams, 2007). Yet, there had been a resurgence of social justice-oriented African American artists producing “conscious” Hip-Hop (for example, Common, Nipsey Hustle, YG, Nas, Kendrick Lamar, Public Enemy, and The Roots; JayQuan, 2018). This resurgence had been influenced by the contemporary sociopolitical environment (Black Lives Matter movement, deaths of African Americans at the hands of police officers; JayQuan, 2018). College-aged African American students were increasingly becoming conditioned and prepared to fight systemic, sociopolitical inequalities through music as the target audience.

A qualitative study conducted by Ellis-Williams (2007) found that African American university students separated their campus activism endeavors from their community activism endeavors. Students thought it was easier to navigate issues, make themselves heard, and make a difference on campus. That was not to say their community efforts were insignificant or localized; several institutions had enacted changes because of African American student activism – these changes had not gone unnoticed in the media. During the 2015-2016 academic year, African American students at the University of Missouri at Columbia objected to the university’s responses to a series of discriminatory events. Through protests, sit-ins, hunger strikes, and athletic strikes, the students list of demands were accepted by the university and resulted in the resignation of the institutions’ President and Chancellor (Anderson & Span, 2016). This effort inspired other grassroots student activism groups to demand improved campus climates for students and communities of color (McElderry & Rivera, 2017).

Political and social activism may have been a useful coping strategy for racial/ethnic minority students attempting to transition to college life. Such activism provided a defense against feelings of isolation, experiences of discrimination, and other ramifications of being underrepresented on campus. Activism increased feelings of pride, strength of character, and courage (Douglas, Pinto, Arnold, & Willis, 2017; Hope, Velez, Offidani-Bertrand, Keels, & Durkee, 2018). Political activism was a protective factor for racial and ethnic discriminatory experiences that could have led to stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms in some minority students (Hope et al., 2018).

However, higher levels of political activism may have led to increased experiences of racial and ethnic microaggressions, and greater stress and anxiety for African American students. This was likely due to the prolonged exposure to race-related stress, injustice, and adverse race-related experiences (Hope et al., 2018). Nevertheless, students continued in activist engagement in the current sociopolitical environment. It was vital to learn more about how African American students became involved in, executed, and reacted to activism, also what factors were related to African American activism. A review of the literature revealed relatively few studies concerning activism by African American university students. This condition may have been due to the current sociopolitical zeitgeist as the context in which such activism had emerged. This study used the lens of critical race theory to understand what factors contributed to African Americans attempting to promote personal development considering it a response to, or as a coping mechanism, for experiences of racist events.

Critical Race Theory Today

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated as scholarly work in academia and the legal system in the early 1980s by Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams (Bell, 1995). These individuals sought to use CRT as a way to look at social structures and institutions as racism and inequity were built in and institutionalized and made legal (Bell, 1995; Dixson, 2018). In contemporary social sciences research, CRT was a theoretical framework that stipulated that certain sociopolitical problems be placed in historical, political, and social context, while demanding the ramifications of privilege, power, oppression, and racism be considered (Daftary, 2018). CRT had been found to be a uniquely relevant lens for guiding research on inequities, oppression, and varying social issues with historically disenfranchised and marginalized populations by many (Daftary, 2018). According to Johnson-Ahorlu (2017), CRT was “a set of ideas that explain what racism is, how it functions in our society, the emotional and psychological experiences of being subjected to racism, and the factors that contribute to the manifestation of racism” (p. 730).

CRT was meant to provide an informed foundation for understanding issues of racism against African Americans in the U.S. by emphasizing that racist oppression comes from a longer and more nuanced narrative that must have acknowledged the role of white supremacy in all American institutions – such as cultural, political, social, health, and legal organizations. To understand contemporary “social injustice”, any discussions of racial oppression must have been placed in the context of historical events like slavery, also, subsequent centuries of unequal treatment and discrimination must have been pondered (Aymer, 2016). CRT was meant to examine and challenge the social, political, and institutional constructs that established and perpetuate the status quo of racial oppression and inequalities (Milner IV, 2017). However, CRT did not simply document disparities. CRT was meant to advocate for meaningful change which addressed systemic racial inequality (Dixson & Anderson, 2018).

Lawrence, Matsuda, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) assembled six domains or tenets of CRT:

1. CRT recognizes that racism is endemic to American life; (2) CRT expresses skepticism about the dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, and meritocracy; (3) CRT challenges a-historism and insists on a contextual historical analysis of the law; (4) CRT insists on the recognizing of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society; (5) CRT is interdisciplinary and eclectic; and (6) CRT works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of eliminating oppression in general

(Aymer, 2016, p. 368).

These domains guided the conceptualization of this study of how African Americans could have been studied and understood through the lenses of the sociopolitical structures and climate in American society and the cultural identity and race related experiences of African Americans – yet not exclusively. However, these domains did relate closely to the items in the researchers two instruments, the Perceived Injustice Questionnaire, and the Index of Race Related Stress – Brief Version. CRT was vital in guiding interest in the researcher’s dependent variables (race related stress, perceived injustice with African Americans) as well as selection of the predictor variable (African American racial identity attitude) in the current study.

As it related to the researcher’s study, the first tenet was crucial to identifying the independent variables as potentially contributing factors to the dependent variables. It must be understood many factors influence the lives of African Americans. Their experiences with racism could not be separated from their development, psychological and mental states, or their civic engagement. Recognition of racial inequality and a healthy skepticism about the concepts given in the second tenet of CRT put in perspective the emphasis on the unequal circumstances African Americans faced by virtue of being black; African Americans were treated differently and reported more negative experiences compared to whites. However, this paradigm was shifting. Claims of reverse discrimination were becoming more prevalent among non-blacks. The third tenet called for a meaningful exploration and understanding of African American history as the backdrop to be able to explain contemporary problematic situations.

The fourth domain of CRT was represented in the focus of all study variables in the subjective experiences, knowledge, actions, and opinions of African Americans - the consideration of African American identity as an important factor. In the fifth tenant there were interdisciplinary influences employed in using an “environmental” systems approach pulling from history, psychology, education, sociology, feminist theory, social justice, and politics to attempt a more comprehensive analysis of African Americans. Finally, in the sixth tenant, a goal of this study was to contribute to the improvement in the quality of life of African Americans through better understanding of factors that affected their race related stress and perception of injustice, and, what drove involvement in the activism that empowered them and made positive changes in the U.S. The researcher believed it worth noting that by adding to the body of literature on African American sociological issues (specifically that of his study population) an effort would have been made battling oppression by aiding in switching the narrative of a seemingly understudied group.

The researchers study’s use of the CRT domains as a framework was consistent with Johnson-Ahorlu’s (2017) explanation that such research should have been based on the premise that race and racism were fundamental to the experiences and outcomes of African Americans (no argument is being offered to support that racism does not exist); incorporated relevant interdisciplinary concepts to understand how race and racism functioned; challenged dominant discourses that frame African Americans as being deficient or inferior (or whites as superior); recognized and included personal experiences and opinions as legitimate and valuable ways of how race and racism functioned within the researchers study population; and be designed, analyzed, written, and used for the promotion of transformational reconciliation.

CRT had been used by other researchers to select, explain, and ground variables and phenomena of interest, much like the current study. Reynolds and Mayweather (2017) provided an example of good use of the framework in a study to combat hate crimes on a PWI campus in the fall of 2016 following the U.S. presidential election. Their qualitative study examined the activism- and social justice-based responses of black students in order to cope with racial epithets and threats of violence toward African American students at a PWI in the Midwest (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017). The students acted using sit-ins, walkouts, and social media (Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat) to create their own narratives and affirm their humanity (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017). In an article by Dixson (2018), CRT was used to guide the analysis of how youth- and young-adult-led activism, conducted mainly through social media, reflected a failure of mainstream discussions on race and education systems in teaching and contextualizing the historical and contemporary contexts.

Race was not a mere historical social construction. However, racism was embedded in the society and institutions of the U.S. The framework of CRT had been used to guide the selection of variables (perception of injustice, sociopolitical attitudes, race-related stress, African American identity) which had been indicated as associated with the discrimination and activism experiences of African American college students (Leath & Chavous, 2017). Being African American in so called white spaces was unavoidably political to many. Thriving was seen as an act of defiance in the face of oppression. Consideration of any issues related to African American college students had to be political, particularly when sociopolitical factors were seen as such a stark and salient influence by many in America at present.

Recent National Attitudes Concerning CRT

Opponents of CRT in the United States had publicly, politically, and legally challenged the rhetoric and the goals of CRT. Much debate had emerged about how, when, and whether CRT should have been taught in academic curricula, particularly at the K-12 levels. Nine Republican-majority states had instituted laws or other stipulations that banned the teaching of CRT, with some lawmakers referring to the concept as “toxic,” “divisive,” and responsible for making some students feel “guilt and anguish” based on their race (Dutton, 2021; Zurcher, 2021). For many, this controversy seemed to lie in whether people believed CRT was a framework for understanding how racism had molded American institutions and culture. Or, for others, CRT was instead a divisive narrative that permanently set people of color against caucasian people (Sawchuk, 2021). It was vital to note that the differences in thought were not representative of a perfect split between Democrat and Republican ideologies. There were liberal public figures who criticized CRT as “illiberal” (Zurcher, 2021). There appeared to be a fundamental misunderstanding of the meaning and underpinnings of CRT, with it often being conflated with other related topics of discomfort in the U.S. (for example, anti-racism, social justice, discrimination), or presented as an “elitist” “academic” concept (Sawchuk, 2021; Zurcher, 2021). Regardless of the reasons for disagreement (insufficient knowledge/grasp of the theory, sensationalism), it was vitally necessary to further scholarly work that demonstrated and elucidated the tenants of CRT.

Race as a Construct

People created belief systems, judgments, characteristics, and identities about themselves, and others based on skin phenotype and concentration of melanin in societies. Genetic and biological similarities among humans greatly outnumbered differences; in this limited regard, it can be said that race is physically constructed. Despite the distinctions or inaccuracies of the construction of race, it was still an important factor in societies. It was possible that race was contextually constructed since different sociopolitical contexts and locations affected how race was “constructed.” In the U.S. it might have been thought that race was legally constructed given in laws and history. For example, many legal cases such as Brown v. Board of Education, played an integral role in defining and constructing race in the country, specifically in education. Furthermore, the historical construct of race might have been understood further within the historical treatment and outcomes of societal groups (the Three-Fifths rule designating black slaves as 3/5 of a person) which might still have affected how said group is currently perceived and treated (Nguyen, 2004).

It was crucial to understand that racism was different from racial stereotyping, mere racial discrimination, or prejudice and microaggressions. Racism was a historical, systemic matter of disparity and injustice. Racism created the context that perpetuated the context for the condition. Semantically, stereotypes were simplistic, normally inaccurate generalizations used to categorize a group. Discrimination denoted unfair treatment of a person or people due to (actual or perceived) membership in a particular group. Prejudice described preconceived, usually negative judgments, opinions, and attitudes about a particular group. Microaggressions were perceived “subtle statements and behaviors that unconsciously communicate denigrating messages to people of color” (Nadal, 2011, p. 470). Harrell defined racism as:

A system of dominance, power, and privilege based on racial-group designations; rooted in the historical oppression of a group defined or perceived by dominant-group members as inferior, deviant, or undesirable; and occurring in circumstances where members of the dominant group create or accept their societal privilege by maintaining structures, ideology, values, and behavior that have the intent or effect of leaving nondominant-group members relatively excluded from power, esteem, status, and/or equal access to societal resources

(Harrell, 2000).

By Harrell’s definition through the lens of CRT, racism was inescapable in the lives of African Americans. Racism occurred on the individual level (through personal experiences), the institutional level (experienced racism due to racism being embedded in policies), the cultural level (when the values and practices of one group are treated as superior compared to others), or the collective level (when non-blacks actively restrict the rights of blacks) (Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996).

The definition of racism was complex. Racism was multifaceted in its nature, presentation, effects, and constituent components (discrimination, power, dominance) that was rooted in its expression, and its total influence in the lives of African Americans. Racism was a difficult concept to operationalize for many. Utsey (1999) proposed using the concept of race-related stress to represent the physical, emotional, psychological, and mental toll exerted on African Americans as a result of chronic exposure to racism, racial prejudice, racial discrimination, and racial stereotypes. Harrell defined race related stress as “the race-related transactions between individuals or groups and their environment that emerge from the dynamics of racism, and that are perceived to tax or exceed existing individual and collective resources or threaten well-being” (Harrell, 2000, p. 44).

Recalling Johnson-Ahorlu’s (2017) definition of CRT as “a set of ideas that explain what racism is, how it functions in our society, the emotional and psychological experiences of being subjected to racism, and the factors that contribute to the manifestation of racism” (p. 730), this study will conceptualize race-related stress (using Utsey’s Index of Race Related Stress, or IRRS – Brief Version) as the psychological distress experienced by African Americans from cumulative and persistent experience and effects of racism, racial prejudice, racial discrimination, racial stereotypes, and microaggressions. These concepts were not used interchangeably. However, they were used with the understanding that they may have overlapped with the assumption they all stemmed from racism and possibly contributed to race-related stress.

Additional support for this conceptualization could be found in Comas-Díaz, Hall, and Neville’s (2019) and Anderson and Stevenson’s (2019) descriptions of racial trauma as a form of race-related stress – stress which developed as a reaction to continuous exposure to real or perceived, direct or vicarious experiences of racial discrimination. A comparable phenomenon had been documented whenever videos went viral on the internet of African Americans dying at the hands of law enforcement. The vicarious trauma of viewing these graphic images combined with personal experiences of racial discrimination coalesced to produce racial trauma (Downs, 2016). Exposure to stereotypes could have been just as destructive. In a study of African American undergraduate and graduate women, Jerald, Cole, Ward, and Avery (2017) discovered that awareness that others held negative stereotypes about them was predictive of hostility, depression, and anxiety.

Studies had been conducted to examine the ways in which African American university students perceived and experienced racial discrimination, both the roles of stress and coping strategies (alcohol and substance use, rumination, confrontation, avoidance), and their psychosocial and academic outcomes (DeFreitas, 2012; Hoggard, Byrd, & Sellers, 2012; O’Hara, Armeli, Scott, Covault, Tennen, 2015). Results generally tended to indicate that regardless of the presentation of racism and race-related stress - overt, blatant, interpersonal, systemic, vicarious, or direct—the effect on the mental health of African Americans was exceedingly negative (Miller at al., 2018).

Black Racial Identity Development

There were many models of racial identity development that could have bene applied to minority populations. These identity development models were used to describe the process through which individuals developed a sense of self, or ego, including interactions with the greater societal context (Sanchez, 2013). One of the most prominent models of racial identity in African American individuals had been Cross’s (Cross Jr., 1971) Nigrescence Model of Racial Identity and Esteem (Schmidt, 2006; Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross Jr., & Worrell, 2001). The five stages of the model described a developmental progression that ran from internalized self-hatred to self-acceptance.

In the first stage, pre-encounter, an African American created a worldview and self-image through the lens of the dominant non-black American culture. These individuals tended to think or act in ways which devalued being black and idealize being white. The second stage, encounter, was defined by the experience of and subsequent internalization of challenging or significant experience which forced a re-evaluation of the values and views established in the pre-encounter stage. In the third stage, immersion/emersion, a reversal occurred wherein the individual focused primarily on being black and becoming immersed in black, African, or African American culture, to the exclusion of other racial and cultural groups, particularly those of non-white cultures. One in this stage felt a strong connection to other black people and may have endorsed anger or hostility toward the dominant culture or hegemon (Schmidt, 2006). The fourth stage of this model was internalization. This stage represented the developmental milestone of feeling positive and secure about black identity but also exhibits acceptance of other cultural groups. The internalization stage showed maturity and resolution of the negative feelings from previous stages. Significant value was placed on “blackness” and greater confidence and acceptance were exhibited (Schmidt, 2006). The fifth and final stage was internalization and commitment. This stage was characterized by an understanding of the negative effects of racism, as well as a long-term commitment to opposing racism and oppression in other forms and circumstances.

The Nigrescence model was revised and expanded by Cross (Cross Jr., 1991) in order to shift the conceptualization from a developmental stage model to a more complete theory based on attitudes, social identities, and shifts in thinking (Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross Jr., & Worrell, 2001; Worrell, Vandiver, & Cross Jr., 2004; Worrell, Vandiver, Schaefer, Cross Jr., & Fhagen-Smith, 2006). The updated model applied changes in the number of stages and differentiated amongst many specific racial identities in each stage. More specifically, stages four and five, internalization and internalization and commitment, were now combined under the label internalization (Worrell, Vandiver, & Cross Jr., 2004). Additionally, six racial identities were described as follows. For the first stage, the pre-encounter stage, three racial identities were newly distilled: Assimilation (PA; a denial or low focus on membership of racial minority), Miseducation (PM; believing and endorsing negative stereotypes about black people), and Self-Hatred (PSH; having negative feelings about being black). The encounter stage was the only Nigrescence concept without distinct attitudes (Worrell et al., 2004). There was one immersion-emersion racial identity: Anti-White (IEAW; endorsed strong negative feelings toward white people). Internalization had two racial identities, Afrocentricity (IA; had a deep connection to and positive focus exclusively on black heritage and culture) and Multiculturalist Inclusive (IMCI; embraced a black identity but also respected and celebrated the cultural identities of other groups).

Current Sociopolitical Attitudes

The term sociopolitical attitudes connoted emotions or feelings regarding facts or the state of the unique combination of social and political factors in a social or political environment (Chaiklin, 2011). Sociopolitical could have included beliefs about gender equality issues, what responsibilities governments might have undertaken, adherence to various social norms that affected the citizenry, support for various civil liberties, inclination to participate in political activity or political activism, and perspectives about maintaining order (Campbell & Horowitz, 2016; Nugent, Switek, & Wu, 2016). Sociopolitical attitudes were often affected by political orientation, ideology, knowledge of politics, generational and other demographic factors, structure of political parties. Moral preferences and beliefs, and nature of tertiary education were also factors (Campbell & Horowitz, 2016; Furnham, 1985; Haidt, 2012; Proch, Elad-Strenger, & Kessler, 2019; Tansey & Kindsvatter, 2020). Political ideology, conservatism, or liberalism were fundamental contributors to the attitudes individuals held about their sociopolitical environment (Kivikangas, Fernández-Castilla, Järvelä, Ravaja, & Lönnqvist, 2021; Leong, Chen, Willer, & Zaki, 2020). Yet, it was crucial to note that there were cultural and subcultural differences in how political ideology, moral foundations, and sociopolitical attitudes were related. In a cross-cultural meta-analysis, Kivikangas and colleagues (2021) also found that research on political ideology, moral values, and attitudes, results were smaller in samples that did not consist of individuals who were white, American, or had political interests. Further research on political ideology and sociopolitical attitudes of African American populations was needed.

Recent Sociopolitical Climate and Current Attitudes

There was and remained significant pre- and post-election anxiety due to then Presidential candidate (and former President) Donald Trump’s political campaign and the subsequent sociopolitical environment. Groups “targeted” by Trump during his campaign may have experienced his election and presidency traumatically (Panning, 2017; Teng, 2017). The Trump administration’s ostensible intolerance, isolationism, and discrimination had a negative effect on mental health of certain minority groups (minorities and immigrants) due to stigma and is likely to have had long-term implications for help-seeking (Bialer & McIntosh, 2017). The so-called zero-tolerance policy enacted by the Trump administration in 2018 to separate minors from adults at the U.S.-Mexico border, to many, had a significant, detrimental effect on the mental health of the children - symptoms included post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psychological distress, depression and anxiety, and withdrawal (American Psychological Association [APA], 2018a; APA, 2018b; APA, 2018c; Stringer, 2018). According to a report from the Department of Health and Human Services, children separated at the boarder were exhibiting more symptoms of PTSD, fear, and feelings of abandonment compared to children who were not separated from their families (Long, Mendoza, & Burke, 2019).

Perceived Injustice

People perceived different actions as unjust and reacted differently to injustice experiences (Fetchenhauer, Huang, 2004). This subjective perception of injustice could not have only determined their actions but also their mental health. For example, research on people suffering from pain after traumatic accidents had shown that people who subjectively perceived their situation as less just felt pain longer and more strongly (Trost, Scott, Buelow, Nowlin, Turan, Boals, Monder, 2017; Sullivan, 2020; Carriere, Pimentel, Yakobov, Edwards, 2020). To better understand the impact of injustice experiences on mental health, it was necessary to validly assess experiences of injustice with appropriate instruments. Yet, it appeared all the common inventories to survey the perception of injustice had been developed in Western societies (Dalbert, Montada, Schmitt, 1987; Schmitt, Baumert, Gollwitzer, Maes, 2010). Furthermore, most evaluations of a sense of justice were conducted in Western cultures up to this point. Frequently, the focus was on concepts such as social injustice, fair distribution of goods, or justice sensitivity (Schmitt, Baumert, Gollwitzer, Maes, 2010) or the questionnaire was developed to determine the belief in a just world (Dalbert, Montada, Schmitt, 1987); a concept that was developed based on Western ideas of justice. In collaboration with non-Western experts and participants, the developers wanted to develop an inventory that might have captured the perception of justice from a more diverse perspective to be able to be applied across multiple cultures. This showed that not many scales were measuring the justice perception after traumatizing war experiences. Most studies in that field developed and used specific questionnaires which only referred to the target group or the conflict concerned (Pham, Weinstein, & Longman, 2004, 2004b). Research had shown that the perception of injustice was likely to increase through situations that were characterized by basic human rights violations (Sullivan, 2020). For these reasons, it seemed necessary to have an inventory that could have been widely used to approach people’s perception of injustice after experiences of severe human rights violations.

The developers of the Perceived Injustice Questionnaire (PIQ) aimed to develop a new inventory that collected information on how individuals in critical areas categorized potentially unjust experiences, whether those affected their perception of justice in general, and how they coped with that perception. This was particularly relevant as it was assumed that one’s perception of injustice had an impact on various mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, somatoform disorder, and PTSD (Sullivan, M. L. 2020; Carriere, Pimentel, Yakobov, Edwards, 2020; Pham, Weinstein, Longman, 2004).

Description of the PIQ

The PIQ consisted of 18 Likert scale items in four scales plus five additional items. Excel was used to randomize the order of all items. The items for the subscales “emotional and cognitive consequences” (EEC), “injustice perception” (IP), “injustice experiences” (IE), “revenge and forgiveness” (RF), and the additional items can be answered on a Likert scale of 1–5, where the value 1 corresponds to the statement “strongly agree” and 5 to “strongly disagree.”

With the PIQ, the developers developed an inventory to determine both the relevance and perceptions of injustice among people in conflict areas. Since the developers used an academic sample, further validation studies with a larger and more heterogeneous sample were planned. This study demonstrated that traumatic exposure, PTSD symptoms, and other factors were associated with attitudes toward justice and reconciliation. Societal interventions following mass violence should have consider the effects of trauma if reconciliation was to be realized. The researcher intended to use items from the PIQ to collect data pertaining to injustice from the researcher’s study population (Neumann, Berger, & Kizilhan, 2021)

Conclusion

Deeper examination using CRT as the framework revealed additional considerations such as historic racism and the oppression of African Americans in the current sociopolitical context, unique knowledge and experiences of the African American population, multidisciplinary influences, and actions for social justice (Daftary, 2018; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017; Aymer, 2016). With CRT guiding the research conceptualizations of race-related stress and the perception of injustice, systemic racism was considered as an important predictor variable (how much direct racism the researcher’s population had experienced based on their responses to the instruments versus the professional and/or socio-economic station in life they had achieved). Race-related stress was defined as psychological distress experienced by African Americans due to sustained exposure to overt or vicarious effects racism - discrimination, microaggressions, stereotypes, prejudice (Harrell, 2000; Utsey, 1999). Studies indicate race-related stress to have been associated with physical and psychological well-being (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; 2016; Miller, Keum, Thai, Lu, Truong, Huh, … Ahn, 2018), African American activism (Hope et al., 2018; Leath & Chavous, 2017; Prosper, 2018; Szymanski, 2012), and racial identity attitude.

The result that individuals with the attitude that, things were generally good and alright with the world, would have been more inclined to take up activism work for social change seemed counterintuitive based on the body of literature. One goal of the current study was to add to the literature around sociopolitical attitudes and African American activism to gain a better understanding of the ways those variables might have been related concerning perception of injustice, race related stress and the professional/socio-economic status of the study population. Considering the results and gaps of previous research and my conceptualization of the variables of interest through the lens of CRT, I am suggesting the following potential model and subsequent research questions and hypotheses.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT)

INTERSECTIONALITY

MIDDLE TO UPPER MIDDLE-CLASS AFRICAN AMERICANS

PERCEPTION OF INJUSTICE, RACE RELATED STRESS

HEDGEMONY

Figure 1. Hypothesized model of the current study CONSIDERING OMITTING

**Research Hypotheses, Null Hypothesis, Hypotheses**

* Research Hypothesis: There was a statistically significant difference in middle to upper-middle class African Americans perceptions of injustice and race related stress with more understanding of CRT than middle to upper-middle class African Americans perception of injustice and race related stress with less understanding of CRT.
* Null Hypothesis: There was no statistically significant difference in middle to upper-middle class African Americans perceptions of injustice or levels of race related stress with more understanding of CRT than middle to upper-middle class African Americans perceptions of injustice or race related stress with less understanding of CRT.

H1: Individuals with more understanding of CRT have a healthier perception of injustice and less race related stress.

H2: Individuals with less understanding of CRT have a less healthy perception of injustice and more race related stress.

H3: Individuals with more understanding of CRT had a greater capacity for reconciliation.

 H4: Individuals with less understanding of CRT had less capacity for reconciliation.

**CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

Chapter III provided a description of the methods used for data collection in this quantitative sociological study of attitudes and dispositions of a segment of the African American population of Chattanooga, TN. The purpose of this study was to examine how theoretically selected moderating variables of sociopolitical attitude functioned in the relationship between race-related stress, perception of injustice and one outcome variable (that was, the study populations self-reported level of knowledge of critical race theory, CRT) for middle class to upper-middleclass African Americans. Upon the completion of a review of literature of CRT and various other connected and interrelated areas that potentially affected one’s perception of CRT, the researcher established a need for this study. This research was quantitative; data was collected via an on-line survey. This chapter discussed the participants, sampling procedures, measurement, and statistical analysis.

**Null Hypothesis:**

There is no statistically significant difference in middle to upper-middle class African Americans perceptions of injustice with more understanding of CRT than middle to upper-middle class African Americans perceptions of injustice with less understanding of CRT.

**Participants**

Participants in this study were African American, aged 30 and older, currently occupying what was understood as leadership in their professional field or community, who self-identify as Black, African American, or belonging to the African diaspora. Participants identifying as biracial or multiracial were also eligible, provided they met all the other criteria required for this study. Eligibility criteria included: a) self-identifying as self-identify as Black, African American, or belonging to the African diaspora; b) living in the U.S. and possessing a graduate degree; c) being at least 30 years old; d) a business owner); e) being a pastor or senior pastor of a local church; f) be management, senior management, or executive in profession; g) speaking English as a primary language. Those who did not meet these requirements were excluded from the analyses of the study.

**Demographics**

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire which contained items regarding their gender identity, age, racial and ethnic self-identification, U.S. immigration status, English proficiency, academic level, political ideology, and professional status (business owner, position, place in job hierarchy, time in profession/position).

**Sampling Procedures**

The sampling procedures utilized purposive and snowballing techniques. After initially obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Omega Graduate School (Appendix A), POSSIBLE amended approval (Appendix A) was obtained to include an open-ended question addressing experiences of possible ongoing anti-black racism and COVID-19 pandemic. Following this approval, the researcher contacted the Director of Human Resources for Hamilton County Schools, the Head of Human Resources for the City of Chattanooga, the Head of Human Resources for Hamilton County, the Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Engagement at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga, pastors that met the educational and/or experience criteria, and local business owners. Upon receiving this list, the researcher distributed the initial recruitment email (Appendix B) and a follow-up email (Appendix C) to the study population on the list. The recruitment email included information about the study, inclusion criteria, a link to the online survey, information about winning a small incentive.

(for example, gift card) for participation, and the snowballing request for the recruitment materials to be forwarded to other Black students who may be eligible to participate.

While approval was granted for distribution over social media, this recruitment method (Appendix D) was not employed for the study. The online survey first provided an informed consent form (Appendix E) with information regarding confidentiality and privacy, the voluntary nature of the study, and anticipated risks. After agreeing to continue, participants were presented with the survey instruments (Appendices F-J) followed by a demographic/background questionnaire (Appendix K). Upon completion, participants were given the option of redirecting to a new survey to enter the random drawing for the incentive. Data were collected between April 2023 and August 2023.

**Measurement**

In total, the survey to which participants responded consisted of a) the demographic information questionnaire (Appendix K), b) The Index of Race-Related Stress-Brief Version (IRRS-B; Utsey, 1999; Appendix F), c) The Perceived Injustice Questionnaire, (Neumann, Berger, & Kizilhan, 2021; Appendix J).

An open-ended qualitative prompt inviting them to share any reflections about their experiences as Black individuals in the U.S. amidst concurrent anti-Black racism and COVID-19 pandemics.

**Index of Race Related Stress-Brief Version (IRRS-B)**

The Index of Race Related Stress-Brief Version (IRRS-B; Utsey, 1999) is a multidimensional self-report measure designed to assess the stress (perceived and encountered) experienced by Black individuals when they face racism. It is a shortened form of the Index of Race Related Stress (IRRS; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1999) and contains 22 items. The IRRS-B has three subscales: Cultural Racism (where one’s culture is vilified or degraded; 10 items), Institutional Racism (due to systemic racism inherent in institutional policies or customs; 6 items), and Individual Racism (interpersonal experience of racism; 6 items; Utsey, 1999). The total score represents a measure of Global Racism.

Sample items include, “You notice that when Black people are killed by the police, the media informs the public of the victim’s criminal record or negative information in their background, suggesting they got what they deserved” (cultural racism); “You have been subjected to racist jokes by Whites/non-Blacks in positions of authority and you did not protest

for fear they might have held it against you” (institutional racism); and “White people or other non-Blacks have treated you as if you were unintelligent and needed things explained to you slowly or numerous times” (individual racism).

Items are scored on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (This never happened to me) to 4 (This event happened and I was extremely upset). Mean scores are calculated, and higher scores are indicative of more experiences of cultural, institutional, individual race-related stress as well as global racism (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). Utsey (1999) reported Cronbach’s alphas for IRRS-B subscales as .78 (Cultural Racism subscale), .69 (Institutional Racism subscale), and .78 (Individual Racism subscale; Utsey, 1999). Convergent validity was found with other similar measures of racism and psychological distress for African Americans. The measure has also been found to discriminate between the racism-related experiences of Black Americans and White Americans (Utsey, 1999).

Only the total score, Global Racism, was used in these analyses, with internal consistency, Cronbach’s alpha of .89 in the current study. This was due to two reasons. First, reliability analyses of the subscales revealed low Cronbach’s alpha for the Institutional Racism subscale (.57). And second, the Institutional Racism and Individual Racism subscales presented with high multicollinearity (.66). As further support for this decision, in a study examining the item functioning and structural performance of the IRRS-B through item response and confirmatory factor analyses, Chapman-Hilliard and colleagues (2020) indicated that the Institutional Racism subscales has often been found in the “questionable” (that is, Cronbach’s alpha of .60 to .69; p. 556) range of internal consistency in numerous studies. They also reported that the three-factor structure did provide a good model fit and a one-factor solution was the “most parsimonious” fit.

**Perceived Injustice Questionnaire (PIQ)**

First, an unsystematic, preliminary literature research was conducted by the developers to determine questions for the focus groups. Keywords such as “perceived injustice”, “injustice in psychotherapy”, “trauma and injustice”, “perceived injustice”, “justice and mental health”, “transitional justice”, and “restorative justice” were searched for in various combinations. In connection to a literature review, the developer aimed to sufficiently encompass the concept of perceived injustice in order to adapt it to the chosen target group accordingly. The existing justice and injustice inventories were reviewed (Neumann, Berge, & Kizilhan, 2021).

Between May 2019 and October 2019, the developers conducted several focus groups and interviews with refugees and survivors of war and prosecution in Germany and Iraq. The developers aimed to identify feelings of injustice, an understanding of justice, and coping mechanisms. The topic was discussed with experts in psycho-traumatology, legal practice and reparations, and social work. Experts were contacted in Germany, Turkey, Israel, and Iraq. Detailed information on the people interviewed and the setting could have been found in Appendix A of their research study (Neumann, Berge, & Kizilhan, 2021).

Based on the interviews with affected individuals and experts, focus groups, literature research, and existing questionnaires, the developers developed a first preliminary item pool. Repetitive items were then deleted, and the wording was adjusted. All these steps were taken in consultation with an expert in psycho-traumatology. This process resulted in 27 items for the questionnaire and further questions on each person.

The further questions inquired about demographics and whether injustice was experienced and what kind of injustice this was, distinguishing between injustice experienced based on gender, religion, ethnicity, political, or sexual orientation, social injustice experiences, and experiences of physical, sexual, or psychological violence. In addition, it was recorded whether the experiences were made in the past or are still taking place. In addition, the ancestors’ experiences of injustice were also examined, as their emotional and possibly traumatic consequences could have been passed on through generations (Kizilhan, Noll-Hussong, 2017). These questions were essential for both therapy and research. Persistent experiences of violence and injustice could have affected the outcome of therapy. In connection with that, knowledge of past experiences could have provided clues that could have been used to find the right interventions. All items were administered in English. As there were not enough clinical questionnaires translated and validated into Kurdish or Arabic, it was not uncommon to use English language inventories in the planned areas of application.

**Study Population**

For the first validation phase, the preliminary items were presented to and completed by 89 students at the University of Dohuk, Northern Iraq by the developers. Without a power analysis, the best accessible sample was used for this first preliminary validation – this point might have been considered a limitation. The geographical area of Northern Iraq was part of the Kurdistan region (KRI), an autonomous region that was recognized by the constitution of Iraq. The population in this region was characterized by its ethnic diversity. Muslims coexisted with religious minorities such as the Yazidis and some Christians. In August 2014, troops of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS) conquered areas of Northern Iraq, employing extreme brutality against religious minorities such as the Yazidis.

Around the city of Dohuk, there were currently 20 refugee camps for about 600,000 refugees including 450,000 Yezidi and 50,000 Christians. Due to the ongoing war in the neighboring country of Syria, new people were still arriving (https://www.igfm.de/so-hilft-die-igfm-fluechtlingenim-nordirak/, retrieved 29 October 2020). Although the developer’s sample were all students at the university, they were born and raised in the conflicted area of Northern Iraq, lived through the Iraq war and part of them were members of the Yazidi or Christian minority. They were survivors of an ongoing crisis, although they were not diagnosed with PTSD.

A total of 38 students (42.69%) completed the questionnaire online. At that time, all participants were students at the Institute for Psychotherapy and Psycho-traumatology at the University of Dohuk. The other 50 students (57.31%) completed a paper–pencil version of the same questionnaire. At that time, all participants were students at other faculties at the University of Dohuk. Both questionnaire versions allowed participants to write comments after every scale to note difficulties or suggestions for improvement.

A total of 52 students (58%) were male and 36 students (42%) were female; the average age was 26 years old (SD = 6.24, between 19 and 54). Out of all interviewed students, 67.4% (n = 60) strongly agreed or agreed with the item “Some of my experiences were wrong and

acts of injustice”.

Almost all the students (n = 51) who completed the paper–pencil version agreed or strongly agreed with either “I think I have experienced injustice because of my religion” and/or to “I think I have experienced injustice because of the community or ethnicity that I belong to”. Furthermore, many (n = 49) responded that their ancestors had experienced similar acts of injustice before them. A total of 28.1% (n = 51, n = 22) of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they had experienced physical violence.

Students who completed the online version could not provide the same detailed

information about themselves. Yet, it could have been assumed that most of them would have answered the same way, as all the participants belong to the Kurdish minority in Iraq, even though their religion (Muslim, Yazidi, and Christian) differs.

**Methods of Analysis**

Principal component analysis (PCA) was used for factor extraction and internal consistency was determined. Internal consistency is a widely used measure of the reliability for a psychiatric instrument. It refers to the extent to which a scale measured a common underlying construct. It could have been assessed by Cronbachs’s alpha; a correlation statistic proposed by Cronbach (Cronbach, 1951). The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin score (Kaiser, 1974; Tabachnick, Fidell, 2012) and Barlett’s test of sphericity were used.

To get a first simple impression of whether there were differences between two groups, the developers artificially divided the Likert scale into two groups (“yes” and “no”). The developers divided the sample according to their demographic responses regarding their experiences of violence and injustice. The developers used a Kolmogorov–Smirnov to test whether the data followed a normal distribution. Since this was not shown, Mann–Whitney U tests were used to calculate the group differences between people with and without experience of physical violence and strong experiences of injustice.

**Limitations**

However, psychometric properties such as reliability were dependent on the population and sample size and could not be treated as fixed characteristics of the test (Schmidt-Atzert, L., Amelang, Fydrich, Moosbrugger, 2012). Additionally, no test–retest validity had been assessed to date. This can be considered a limitation.

For this reason, the characteristics of this instruments could have been, at the time of data collection, neither have been easily transferred to other populations nor to specific subgroups within this population. All participants in the developer’s example were healthy enough to be able to go to university and had an academic background, although many of them lived in refugee camps themselves due to the ongoing crisis in this area.

The PIQ was formulated in the English language to be used as extensively as possible in a global context. Yet, the English language might have been seen as a limitation because sensitive words such as justice or injustice could not have been translated in other languages as easily without changing their meaning. The sample knows English well and had been studying in English since their bachelor’s degrees and were used to working with English textbooks, questionnaires, and literature because there was not much material in Arabic and even less in Kurdish. Furthermore, English was the only common language of the sample, as Arabic and Kurdish, as well as various Kurdish dialects, were spoken in the region, which were not understood and spoken by all. Once the developer’s inventory was further reviewed and somewhat established, the plan was to create and validate further translated versions.

Based on the literature research, it could have been assumed that people who had experienced more physical violence, such as people with severe physical trauma (3), were likely to be more sensitive to perceived injustice than people without those experiences. To validate the content of the questionnaire, groups with and without experience of violence were therefore compared. Further, the results of the Mann–Whitney U tests gave the developers first indications that there were large differences in the perception of justice depending on the experiences one had experienced in life.

However, the developers could not at the time of development yet see whether the perception of these events and justice directly affected or moderated mental health or not. For this, it was relevant to retest this inventory with, among others, people who had received a PTSD diagnosis due to their experiences.

Therefore, further validation studies should have been focused on more specific samples. For example, future studies should have examined reliabilities for groups of individuals with and

without diagnosed depression and PTSD or with both disorders, as these were some of the most common disorders in survivors of genocide, war, and mass violence (Kilzilhan, Friedl, Neumann, Traub, 2020). Another idea was to perform a split-reliability assessment based on people’s sex, since trauma upon women were one of the researcher’s research focuses.

It was planned to further validate the PIQ in the outpatient clinic recently founded at the Institute for Psychotherapy and Psycho-traumatology (IPP) at the University of Dohuk, Iraq. Thus, the validity of this instrument could have been verified again for the intended target group. The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board of University of Dohuk (Protocol Code: IPP-3-2030, 10 January 2021). Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Problem Statement**

It was unknown whether there was a relationship between middle to upper-middle class African American’s perception of injustice, race related stress, and their self-reported level of understanding of critical race theory (CRT).

**Thesis Statement**

This study evaluated the relationship between middle to upper middle-class African American’s self-reported level of knowledge of critical race theory (CRT), their perception of injustice, and their race related stress.

*Research Hypothesis*

* Research Hypothesis: There was a statistically significant difference in middle to upper-middle class African Americans perceptions of injustice and race related stress with more understanding of CRT than middle to upper-middle class African Americans perception of injustice and race related stress with less understanding of CRT.

*Null Hypotheses*

* Null Hypothesis: There was no statistically significant difference in middle to upper-middle class African Americans perceptions of injustice or levels of race related stress with more understanding of CRT than middle to upper-middle class African Americans perceptions of injustice or race related stress with less understanding of CRT.

**Operational Definitions**

For the purpose of clarification, the important terms used in this study have been defined.

The following terms are:

**Justice**. Just behavior or treatment, the quality of being fair and reasonable, the administration of the law or authority.

**Injustice**. Lack of fairness or justice, an unjust act or occurrence.

**Racism**. Prejudice, discrimination or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized; the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities, especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another.

**Discrimination**. The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of ethnicity, age, sex, or disability.

African American. A black American of African descent.

**Non-white(s)**. Denoting or relating to a person whose origin is not predominantly European; a person whose origin is not predominantly European.

**Activism**. The policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about politicalor social change.

**Assumptions About Methodology**

The first assumption was that the African American community was suffering from a lack of understanding of certain sociological philosophies and theories. The second assumption was that actions, based on the lack of understanding, was contributing to the prolonged hardship(s) of African Americans by perpetuating feelings of marginalization, injustice, persecution, and victimhood. A third assumption was that an endless cycle of largely self-imposed sociological conditioning might led to the further destruction of the African American family and by extension, the African American community.

**Limitations of the Study**

Limitations to research were defined as aspects of which the researcher had no control, however, could have had a negative effect on the results of the ability to generalize the findings **(**Leedy & Ormrod**,** 2020). When utilizing a Likert type survey, it was expected that the respondents devoted the requisite time and energy to carefully consider the items (or questions) and respond accurately and honestly.

Also, respondents could have sometimes been influenced by socially desirable expectations which could have impacted the angle used to respond to certain survey items (or questions) (Cresswell, 2018).

In the next chapter, the results of this study were be reported with a summary of survey findings and statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were utilized to report the outcomes regarding the guiding questions generated for this study.

**Ethical Compliance**

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

The Relationship Between an Understanding of Critical Race Theory and Perception of Injustice and Race Related Stress: An Attitudinal Study of Middle to Upper-Middle Class African Americans

Research Project Number IRB-XXXX-XXX

Dissertation Chair, Ph.D.

Committee Member, Ph.D.

Committee Member, Ph.D.

Omega Graduate School

**Purpose of Research**

The purpose of the study was to evaluate whether an understanding of CRT influenced middle to upper-middle class African American’s perception of injustice, and their amount race related stress.

In order to participate, the participant needed to a) self-identify as Black, be African American, or belonging to the African diaspora; b) live in the U.S. and possesed an undergraduate or graduate degree; c) be a business owner; d) have obtained management level or above in profession; e) be at least 30 years old; f) be considered a leader in the community (for example, a pastor); g) be at least 2nd generation U.S. citizen or DREAMer; and h) speak English as a primary language.

**Procedures**

If you wish to participate in this study, please click the “participate in the study” button below after reading this form. You will then be directed to the online survey to complete the questionnaires. You will also be provided with the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a $50 Amazon.com gift card.

**Duration of Participation**

This survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

**Risks**

Completing the survey should not be harmful to you. However, some of the information you encounter when completing the questionnaires may be mildly irritating or upsetting to you. These risks are considered minimal and no greater than you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits**

You understand that there are no obvious personal benefits to you from participating in this study. However, the findings may benefit the African American community and society as a whole. This study may increase understanding of contributing factors to racial conflict and promote racial reconciliation.

**Compensation**

No compensation was offered.

**Confidentiality**

All your responses are completely anonymous and will be kept confidential. Your survey answers will not be able to be traced directly to you or your email address, and all data will be coded and entered into a computerized data file. The data will be stored in password-protected computers to which only Gerald Ware, Dissertation Chair, Committee Member and Committee Membe will have access. The project’s research records may be reviewed by Omega Graduate School for regulatory and research oversight.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation**

You do not have to participate in this research project. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw your participation at any time and you can skip questions if you choose, without penalty.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact either Gerald Ware at gware@ogs.edu or Dr. Dissertation Chair at xxxx@ogs.edu. If you have concerns about the treatment of research participants, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at Omega Graduate School, Omega Graduate School

American Centre for Religion/Society Studies (ACRSS) 500 Oxford Drive Dayton, TN 37321. The phone number for the Board is (423) 775-6596. The email address is irb@ogs.edu.

**Documentation of Informed Consent**

I have read the information provided above which describes this study and my participation in the study. I have had the opportunity to read this consent form and have the research study explained. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research project and my questions have been answered. I am prepared to participate in the research project described above.

If you agree to participate, please print a copy of this form for your records, and then click on the button at the bottom of the page.

**Procedures for Gathering Data**

The approach chosen for this study was a descriptive quantitative research design. Cresswell defined the quantitative approach as the process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results of the study (Cresswell, 2018). Quantitative research seeked to test hypotheses but also recognized that there were fallacies. The evidence and data collected were utilized to reject the hypotheses (Cresswell, 2018). Quantitative studies often utilized experiments with validated and reliable survey instruments.

The study used a quantitative research design and survey instruments to identify the level of knowledge of CRT, the perception of injustice, and the level of race related stress of the research population. Due to the methodological soundness of measuring reliability and validity, the researcher conducted the quantitative design method to conduct this quantitative study. Because of the possibility of researcher bias, a qualitative study, which relied primarily on the researcher as the primary data collector, did not seem the most effective approach. Possible bias could have been introduced when there was a connection between the environment and the researcher conducting interviews. Interviewees may have been prone to respond in the way they believed the interviewer desired versus responding from their experiences and beliefs (Cresswell, 2018). However, this was not to say that qualitative research design had no validity. Nevertheless, the quantitative approach aided in helping to minimize research bias and promoted a greater level of reliability and validity with this research study.

***Population***

***The Sample***

***Instrument(s)***

* Perceived Injustice questionnaire
* Race Related Stress Index
* Survey Monkey

***Data Collection***

Data collection began with identifying the population (or group) for the study. To be included in this study the participants needed to be African American middle to upper-middle class socio-economically as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Participants also needed to be college educated, business owners, hold leadership positions in their professional field of endeavor, clergy, and be over the age of 30.

A paragraph about the particular statistical test(s) used to analyze collected data for this dissertation was provided. A potential threat to this data collection would have been confirming construct validity to ensure that the intended construct was actually what was being measured. There were several other factors that could have influenced certain middle to upper-middle class African Americans considered community leaders. There was also the potential concern of generalizability due to possible small sample size (total participants from target population). Finally, the researcher recognized the threat of mortality due to the lack of access to participants or respondents.

***Time Schedule***

The researcher anticipated data collection taking place between May 2023 and July 2023.

**Procedures for Analyzing Data**

***Organization of the Data***

***Analysis of the Data***

**CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

**[Brief introductory paragraph.]**

**Descriptions of the Sample**

***Response Level***

***Demographic Data***

**Tests of the Hypotheses**

***Tests and Results of Hypothesis 1***

***Tests and Results of Hypothesis 2***

***Tests and Results of Hypothesis 3***

**Other Observations**

**CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

[Brief paragraph of introduction to the chapter without a heading.]

**Conclusions**

**Interpretation**

**Recommendations**

***[Appropriate Level 2 Headings of Your Choice]***

**Suggestions for Further Research**

**[BACK MATTER]**

 Many details are compiled in a section known as back matter. This information is more detailed than is needed for general comprehension of the purpose and outcomes of the research but is preserved in the report so that the entire process can be verified or repeated. Include all elements that were part of your research. These pages all carry page numbers.

 Works Cited. All materials referred to in the text.

 Related Works. (Rarely used). Materials used in the development of the project, but not cited in the text. These materials provide prerequisite or supplemental information not used in the research but that is closely related to the topic.

 Appendixes

 The author’s vita

 Index (Rarely used)

**[OTHER BACK MATTER]**

Anything else that is important to add follows the appendixes. Such items, which are optional and depend upon the nature of a particular project, could include:

Bibliography (materials consulted that contributed to your project but not cited)

Sources recommended for further information on the subject of the research

These are used uncommonly, but if you have materials that you believe must be included to enable optimal comprehension and use of the content, talk to your advisor about including them. Extraneous material diminishes the credibility of the study.

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**RELATED WORKS**

Works read in preparation for a research study but not quoted, and thus omitted from the Works Cited section, may be listed alphabetically in an optional section entitled Related Works placed immediately after the Works Cited. The references follow the same APA 7th format. Use only if the information is useful to the reader lest you appear to be padding your report.

APPENDIX A

TITLE OF APPENDIX

**APPENDIX A: TITLE OF APPENDIX**

The plural form of “appendix” may be either “appendixes” or “appendices.” The dictionary followed by APA 6th (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2005) shows “appendixes” as the preferred form, as do most other current dictionaries. The appendixes follow immediately after the Works Cited and are placed in the sequence in which their material appears in the body of the dissertation. The appendixes that are included depend upon the nature of the research. Each has a title page identified by a letter—A, B, C and so on. (This book does not follow that practice.) Should you have more than 26 (!), continue from Z as AA, AB, AC.

An appendix may contain only one item although that item may be multiple pages. For example, a survey would be in one appendix, but a permission form for a minor child to fill out the survey would be in another. Include all material that would help a naïve reader to comprehend exactly what you did, but only if the material is relevant. Do not open yourself to criticism of padding out a weak report.

Side margins of an appendix may be narrowed to accommodate a data table, but reducing the size of the table is generally preferred. If the size of a figure or historical document is reduced, insert that information on the title page for that appendix (E.g., Map is 80% of actual size.)

 **[Common Appendixes in Quantitative Dissertations]**

Create a separate appendix for each significant element. Common components include:

All of the raw data collected for the project. This should be in an Excel spreadsheet or a similar recapitulation of the data. This is required.

Cover letter that accompanied a survey or other instrument.

A copy of every instrument unless it is a restricted instrument. If you created it and modified it after a pilot study, include the preliminary version. Include the scoring key for the instrument unless it is restricted.

Any instruction or other information given to participants. If given orally or by

 recording, include the script.

Letter requesting permission to do research at a location or to sample a group.

Authorization received in response to a request for permission.

A copy of a release form signed by parent/guardian/conservator.

Forms for permission, release of information, or waiver of liability

**CURRICULUM VITAE**

A one-page vita is placed immediately after the last appendix. The vita includes significant summary information, including: date of birth; granting institution for previous college degrees with dates, degree nomenclature, and field of study; a brief summary of employment; and any other facts (such as awards) that describe your qualifications as a researcher. The information is limited so that it fits on one page with adequate white space.

***Congratulations! This is the end of your dissertation! Be sure to delete this text!***

***[Example Table]***

Present your results here. Refer to the rubric for guidance on the content of sections in this chapter.