This special issue of *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* is a welcome edition to the body of literature that tackles the connections between racism and white privilege. Indeed, it takes up the baton of “investiga[ing], analyz[ing], punctur[ing] and prob[ing] whiteness” (Fishkin 1995: 430), while at the same time moving beyond description on the one hand and confession on the other to show what white privilege looks and feels like within a specific context. Thus its strength lies not in its theoretical grounding or analysis of white privilege—although these are solid—but in its insistence that insights are but the first step; action must follow. As the editors, Carole L. Lund and Scipio A. J. Colin, III note:

> The purpose of this volume is not to inform or enlighten peoples of color regarding what they already know about the intersection of white racist ideologies, white privilege, and sociocultural and intellectual racism, but to make white practitioners aware in order to afford them the opportunity (if they choose) to reflect on their paradigm and practice and institute appropriate changes (2).

This is a powerful collection that provides specific examples from the broad field of adult education (such as postgraduate education, vocational education, community health education) and offers fine-grained analyses of white privilege. To illustrate I will focus on three contributions for closer comment: firstly, Chapter 3, “Racism and White Privilege in Adult Education Graduate Programs: Admission, Retention, and Curricula” by Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey; secondly, Chapter 4, “Whiteness at Work in Vocational Training in Australia” by Sue Shore (coincidentally, the only contribution from Australia) and finally Chapter 7, “A Living Spiral of Understanding: Community Based Adult Education” by Melany Cueva. While in no way meaning to impute lesser degrees of rigorous scholarship or depth of analysis to the rest of the collection, these articles stand out for me as professionally and personally relevant and satisfying.
I was particularly taken with Baumgartner’s and Johnson-Bailey’s chapter because it directly engages with the ways in which institutions of higher education support white privilege. While this chapter is set within the United States, I experienced a shock of recognition despite the obvious cultural differences between the US and Australia, and my understanding that white privilege and racism are invariably historically and contextually enacted. I would suggest that we have much to learn from the authors’ case study, both at the institutional level as well as the more personal level of supervising the work of our postgraduate students. Certainly, the authors’ final recommendations are as applicable in Australia as they are in the US. Thus, Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey discuss the “admission process, retention issues, and the evolution of the curriculum” (28) at the University of Georgia in general terms and conclude with their own stories to illustrate precisely how these practices were experienced when they were graduate students at that very university. Lisa, a white American outlines the relative ease with which she was able to negotiate the terrain and the acceptance she felt throughout; she was offered a scholarship, was invited to write academic papers with her advisor, was encouraged to teach to supplement her income—in other words, she felt valued and appreciated but assumed that her ‘race’ had nothing to do with the opportunities that came her way. Juanita, on the other hand, had to fight for admission and was not afforded any of these opportunities. Upon eventually gaining entry to the graduate program she became what she refers to as a “commuter student”. She commented: “Perhaps if I had not been mired in trying to get admitted and then attempting to survive, I would have read the fine print” (33). These stories are not unfamiliar to me. As a white woman graduate student I was offered many of the opportunities that came Lisa’s way and many years later I still see the struggles and obstacles that confront Indigenous students. While admission procedures may be different in Australia, the curriculum that Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey describe rings similarly true: units such as “Introduction to Adult Education” and “Adult Learning Theory and Research” are as ‘white-centred’ in Australia as they are in the US.

Shore begins with the premise that the vocational literature is “often silent on the extent to which whiteness ... functions as a priori description to constitute hierarchies of consciousness about human capital” (41) and goes on to ask “But what do these manifestations of whiteness look like as mundane acts in the everyday?” (43). What follows is a deconstruction of these “mundane acts” within the context of her work with adult educators in a course that was specifically designed to “assist educators to explore the implications of ‘coteaching’ with whiteness” (50). As her interview data shows, these educators were not unaware of the connection between white privilege and racism and were concerned to teach in ways that would enhance their students’ life chances. Nevertheless, her data demonstrates the subtle, yet pervasive discursive practices that positioned their students as not being ‘white enough’. Shore rightly concludes that her insights with this group of students are important in assisting other adult educators to “negotiate the precarious nature of opportunity that is always and already racially structured” (50).
“A living Spiral of Understanding: Community Based Adult Education” by Melany Cueva is the third article in my self-chosen trilogy: like Cueva, I am a woman of European descent for whom it is essential “to examine my own cultural filters critically, to increase my awareness of racism and to take action to eradicate injustices” (80) and who found Cueva’s insights about insider/outside status with particular reference to her work with Yup’ik peoples in Alaska more than pertinent to my own work. Cueva’s discussions cut right to the core of what it might mean for those of us who are white to deconstruct our whiteness in ways that are on-going. An excerpt will serve to illustrate:

I sat across the table from an Indigenous Elder and listened as he described the meeting protocol for his tribe. He shared how they line the table with cedar boughs. In my white woman way, I imagined the beauty of the cedar and the fragrant aroma. Blessed with the presence of mind to still my thoughts and listen, I learned that the cedar boughs are to protect against white peoples’ words. I hope for the day when people no longer need to be protected from peoples’ communication that erupts from a place of unconscious thought and insensitivity (87-8).

It is this quotation that more than adequately sums up the purpose of this volume “not to inform or enlighten peoples of color regarding what they already know” but to “reflect on [our] paradigm and practice and institute appropriate changes” (2). We have known for some time that whiteness bestows privileges on those of us who are white, what we do not yet know how to do is to “partner with peoples of color to create a new reality in adult and continuing education” (3). This volume points the way to ‘putting our money where our mouth is’.

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References