

REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOLING AND WHITENESS: EXAMINING WHITE
SUPREMACY AND IDENTITY IN SCHOOL SPACES AND PARENT MOTIVATIONS

By

Sara Leo

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Curriculum, Instruction and Teacher Education – Doctor of Philosophy

2018

ABSTRACT

REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOLING AND WHITENESS: EXAMINING WHITE SUPREMACY AND IDENTITY IN SCHOOL SPACES AND PARENT MOTIVATIONS

By

Sara Leo

In this qualitative study, I examined how Whiteness and White supremacy are woven into the public identities of Reformed Christian schools as well as in parents' motivations for sending their children there. I constructed two different data sets. First, I spent time observing the public space of three different Reformed Christian elementary school buildings in a medium-sized city in the U.S. Midwest. I used the critical lens of public pedagogy to construct a curriculum of Whiteness at each school. Second, I conducted interviews with nine different sets of White parents who send their children to those schools (three from each school) about their motivations for choosing Christian schooling for their children as well as for choosing the specific school their children attend. I interpreted those interviews with the help of the psychoanalytic theories of narcissism and melancholia. I proposed that the public spaces of the three Reformed Christian elementary schools I visited reflected the curricula of conservatism, settler colonialism, and respectability politics. I proposed that White parents demonstrate a narcissistic commitment to Christian schooling and a melancholic engagement with issues of race and diversity that precludes an honest reckoning with both the White supremacist pedagogies of their children's school spaces as well as how Whiteness is embedded in their theology and personal identities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to so many people for helping me reach this milestone.

- To my husband Josh, for being way more supportive than I ever could have deserved.
- To my children, Blythe and Ferris, for forcing me to take breaks and have perspective.
- To my parents for always giving of themselves tirelessly and endlessly.
- To Early Bird for providing free coffee refills and a nice place to write.
- To Linda for commiserating and comradery.
- To Avner for being an encouraging and wise advisor and mentor.
- To Lynn, Margaret, and Kyle for everything they've taught me.
- To my MSU friends from my cohort and beyond who inspire me with their talent.
- To my students who gave me a reason to cross the finish line.

Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION, RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY, LITERATURE REVIEW	1
Researcher Positionality	2
A Participant “Objectifier”	2
Reformed Christian Education, A Brief History	4
A Biblical Worldview	5
Reformed Christian Education and Race	8
Research Questions	10
Literature Review	13
Whiteness	13
Religion	19
Schooling	23
CHAPTER 2	28
METHODOLOGY, DATA, METHODS, ANALYSIS	28
Methodology	28
Data	30
Middelburg Christian Elementary	31
CRCES, Shawnee	32
Shepherd’s Grove	34
Methods	36
Field Observation	36
Semi-Structured Interviews	37
White Fragility/Diversity	38
Analysis	39
Public Pedagogy	41
Psychoanalytic Theory	43
CHAPTER 3	47
A CURRICULUM OF WHITENESS: CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS THROUGH THE LENS OF PUBLIC PEGAGOGY	47
Middelburg Christian Elementary: Traditional American Conservatism	49
Conservatism	55
CRCES, Shawnee Campus: A Settler Colonial Project	62
Shepherd’s Grove: Respectability Politics Reign	75
Politics of Respectability	75
History	80
Diversity	82
Excellence	87
Hospitality	88
Spirituality	89

CHAPTER 4	92
UNDERSTANDING COMMITMENTS TO CHRISTIAN SCHOOLING AS A FORM OF NARCISSISM AND MELANCHOLIA	92
The Profile	101
Narcissism	111
Melancholia	119
Middelburg Christian	123
CRCES, Shawnee	128
Shepherd's Grove	136
CHAPTER 5	144
REVISITING MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS, CONCLUSIONS	144
Reformed Christian Theology and White Supremacy	160
Future Possibilities	164
BIBLIOGRAPHY	169

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY, LITERATURE REVIEW

They say write what you know.

Well.

I went to a Christian elementary school and a Christian secondary school. I received my Bachelor's Degree from a Christian college, following which I worked for five years for an international Christian radio ministry, producing and editing Christian educative content. After that, I re-enrolled in the aforementioned Christian college in order to earn a teaching certificate, which I used to acquire a teaching position at a Christian high school. During my five years teaching there, I earned my Masters degree in education, also from a Christian college. My mom taught for 20 years at and is now the assistant principal of the Christian elementary school I attended. My Grandfather's picture is hanging on the wall of the library at the Christian college from which I hold three different degrees. Oh, and I am currently an adjunct professor at that Christian college, too.

The point is: I know Christian education.

I also know what it means to be a White person enmeshed in the world of Christian schooling. And over the course of my journey through higher education, I have become (sometimes painfully) aware of just how White this world I grew up and still participate in is. This dissertation lives at intersection of these two actualities: Christian schooling and Whiteness. Specifically, this study is an attempt to understand how Whiteness and White supremacy are tied up in Reformed Christian schooling in terms of both institutional and individual identities.

In order to look closer at issues of racism and White supremacy in Christian schooling, I *could have* done a straightforward set of interviews and analysis of school curriculum that

directly looks at race and racism and the schools' teaching materials/curriculum and then assesses a representative group of families' positions on issues of race/racism/diversity. However, because I believe Whiteness operates on a discursive level that is often subtle, difficult to see, and hard to shine light upon, I was interested in getting at the issue from alternative angles. Therefore, I have generated data from two somewhat disparate sources, the school buildings themselves and the parents of the children who attend them. I have analyzed each data set separately, using conceptual lenses borrowed from and inspired by public pedagogy and psychoanalytic theory.

In this way, this dissertation comprises two different (but related) studies with two different data sets, both of which are intended to help bring to light the presence of White supremacy in Reformed Christian education. This chapter will first examine my researcher positionality as a member of the Reformed Christian community as well as explicate the history of the Reformed Christian education tradition and its relationship to race more generally. Following that, I will outline how I arrived at my specific research questions and provide a literature review that covers Whiteness, religion and schooling as they relate to both of my studies.

Researcher Positionality

A Participant "Objectifier"

Given my history and experience with Christian education, I was a full participant in this study, "a functioning member of the community undergoing investigation and an investigator" (Glesne, 2011, p. 65). This role presented both benefits and challenges. As a participant in the Christian school community myself I was able to gain the trust of the participants in my study in a way an outsider could not. I can speak their language; I am familiar with their social codes.

(and you will notice throughout this study I often use the term ‘we’ to refer to my participants, rather than ‘they.’) However, as closeness can also often preclude the ability to see certain features of a community as notable, or to be critical of them, I had to strive to “make the familiar strange” (Glesne, 2011, p. 67). I needed to call everything into question, including beliefs and traditions which formed me as a young person and which I have long held dear. I found Bourdieu & Wacquant’s (1992) language helpful in defining my researcher positionality; I call myself a ‘participant objectifier.’ To be clear, I recognize that ‘objectification’ mostly carries with it a negative connotation and I do not adopt that negativity here. Rather, I have attempted to create an object of something (Reformed Christian education) that is not obviously an object, in order to see things that are difficult for me to see. According to Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992), participant objectification is one of the most difficult positionalities for a researcher as, “it requires a break with the deepest and most unconscious adherences and adhesions, those that quite often give the object its very “interest” for those who study it” (p. 253). Furthermore, attempting to critique a community of which I am a longtime member presented emotional and social challenges in addition to the intellectual ones. Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) argue,

In the social sciences, as we well know, epistemological breaks are often social breaks, breaks with the fundamental beliefs of a group and, sometimes, with the core beliefs of the body of professionals, with the body of shared certainties that found the *communis doctorum opinio*. To practice radical doubt, in sociology, is akin to becoming an outlaw (p. 241).

Indeed, becoming an “outlaw” may end up having been both a requirement for enacting this study as well as its result. Reformed Christian White folks, like most White folks, do not like being accused of racism and they, like most longstanding institutions with a conservative bent,

are resistant to change. Simply taking a critical stance towards hundreds of years of tradition puts me at odds with my participants and my community. Thankfully, I am not the only member of this community asking difficult questions about race and the church's history with racism and White supremacy. I have support from both folks I know and love as well as from a larger body of critical religious scholars. And, I would not be doing this work if I did not believe that institutional change was not only necessary, but possible. I have, over the past ten years, been tempted to give up on the religious institutions that formed me, and there certainly are precepts and principles that I firmly reject even as I remain a part of the larger Christian Reformed body of believers. But in the end, I acknowledge that, for better or worse, these are my people. And being both connected to as well as critical of this community positions me in particular ways that I hope can be helpful and life-giving. To begin, let us take a look at the history of the community in this study.

Reformed Christian Education, A Brief History

Religious education in this country is older than America itself and there are hundreds of strands of religiously affiliated schooling being enacted across the 50 states. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I concentrated on one particular strain of religious education in order to both simplify and deepen my examination of the phenomena I encountered: Reformed Christian education.

Reformed Christian education in the U.S. has its roots in the Netherlands and is based on the theology of John Calvin. Today, it is most closely connected to the Christian Reformed Church. Reformed Christians in the Netherlands envisioned a Christian school that was free from state control as well as control by any one religious denomination, and instead was formed and shaped by the families of the students who attended. According to Oppewal's (1963) study,

Much of the uniqueness of the Calvinistic day school movement in America is the direct result of taking ideas about education which were formed in one culture, uprooting them from the place and forces which shaped them, and then transplanting them to America (p. 98).

In the late 1800s, Dutch Calvinists became disenchanted with the state's control over education in the Netherlands, so they left for America in search of more religious freedom. Some years later, this somewhat fundamental group joined forces with Calvinists in America under the leadership of Dr. Abraham Kuyper and started a trajectory that culminated in the Reformed Christian school tradition that exists today. One of its many growing pains during the early years was how much to enmesh the Reformed Christian school in the culture of American schooling. Founders were very eager to maintain the original Dutch traditions of keeping the school free from state and church pressures. However, in the first half of the twentieth century, there was a movement to attract new families by stripping Reformed Christian schools of "foreign" markers and organize the school in line with the features of traditional American public education (Oppewal, 1963). They were by and large successful and there continues to be a robust Reformed Christian school movement across the country today. According to data provided to me by Christian Schools International, during the 2015-16 school year there were roughly 350 Reformed Christian Schools operating around the world with over 92,000 students attending (J. Blamer, personal communication, May 5, 2016).

A Biblical Worldview

Reformed Christians, like pretty much all Christians, are eager to point out that, despite their desire for freedom from outside pressures, they do pledge allegiance to the Bible (Oppewal, 1963). Though variance exists, most Reformed people do not hold a fundamentalist view of the

Bible. Reformed Christian scholars take a historical and interpretive approach to Biblical texts and Reformed Christians generally prides themselves on their robust intellectual traditions. However, since most religious people believe their interpretation of their holy texts is the right one, it is obviously important to parse out here exactly what a Reformed or Calvinistic allegiance to the Bible looks like in a school context. Perhaps the most famous quote that exemplifies the basic philosophy of Reformed Christian education is this, from John Kuyper,

Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’ (*Sphere Sovereignty*, p. 488 cited in James D. Bratt, Ed., 1998).

Reformed Christians refer to this outlook or perspective as a “worldview,” and helping students develop a Christian worldview ranks at the very top of most Reformed Christian school mission statements. Christian Schools International, an educational services organization founded in 1920 to support the mission of Reformed Christian schools around the country, outlines the fundamental components of this worldview on their website.

God and his Word are the source of all truth.

A biblically informed curriculum points to God as the source of all truth, leads students toward biblical wisdom and a response to God’s call to discipleship, and nurtures all students toward Christlike living. God’s truth permeates every academic subject and educational initiative. Faith is imbedded in curriculum, and faith and learning are inseparably linked.

Recognizing God as the source of all truth is freeing.

Everything, from the smallest molecule to the greatest star, was created by God. But he chose not to reveal every part of his creation immediately, but to equip humans with the gift of research and discovery so that these things can be revealed in his appointed time. God created humans in his image as whole persons—spiritual, physical, social, emotional, and intellectual. We have the responsibility to develop all areas of our lives. We are not restricted, but instead we are empowered by our creator to discover, probe, explore, and seek after knowledge in every discipline.

Nothing can separate us from God and his love for us.

There is nothing that has been learned or that will be discovered that will shake our faith in the creator of the universe. New discoveries or theories that discount our creator are to be explored and studied. People of faith must be equipped to understand in order to both support and refute. Knowledge and applications can be used inappropriately or for selfish intents. As Christians, we can participate in the broader community, showing mercy, promoting justice, acting in godly ways, and caring for God's world, or we can dishonor God, disrupt our community, and misuse God's world. We take part in the work of the Holy Spirit and assist in the process of renewal when we share in the work of Jesus as we collaborate to make the world a better place.

One of my first tasks as a participant objectifier was to make these incredibly familiar pronouncements strange. And, indeed these precepts wove their way all throughout both my observations in the school buildings as well as in my interviews with parents.

Reformed Christian Education and Race

There is much lacking in terms of a comprehensive, or even thorough, documentation of the history of Reformed Christian schools and race. The topic has certainly been addressed in various religious publications over the past several decades, but most articles or books are anecdotal and often geographically specific. Meehan (2017) and Mulder (2015), for example, both wrote books about the history of White flight, segregation and racism on the West Side of Chicago in the 1960s. In an article from the Christian Reformed Church publication *Christian Home and School* in 1969, author James La Grand acknowledged that due to their own lack of diversity as well as instances of explicit racism (such as those told by Meehan and Mulder, which I will feature in more detail in chapter five), Christian schools are potentially appealing places for racist White folks who do not want their children to go to integrated schools. He writes,

Racism is one of the forces in our society strong enough to impel parents of even moderate means to sacrifice to send their children to private schools ... On the surface our schools would be acceptable to racists who could pay the tuition – and racists judge by appearances (p. 5).

Historically, there are conflicting reports regarding the extent to which race played a role in the expansion of private Christian schooling around the country. According to Suitts (2016),

From 1950 to 1965, private school enrollment in the South and the rest of the nation grew at unprecedented rates, while the South's growth again exceeded the nation's rate. During this period, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, and White students in record numbers began to flee the public schools to both traditional and newly-formed private schools (p. 7).

However, Reardon & Yun (2002) found that White private school enrollment rates peaked from 1950 to 1965. This was before there was any significant attempt at desegregation after the *Brown* decision. In addition, after declining sharply in the late 1960s, White private school enrollments were stable through the 1970s, which was when the greatest desegregation of the public schools was occurring. In terms of current trends, Reardon & Yun's (2002) study also noted that White private school enrollment steadily increased over the ten years leading up to the study even as public schools were becoming more segregated. That is, they argue, the opposite of what you would expect if you attribute enrollment in Christian schools as a result of White avoidance of the diversity of public schools. On the other hand, also according to Reardon & Yun's (2002) study, there is some evidence to suggest that White families enroll in private schools in order to avoid schools with large non-White populations. They found,

In school districts and metropolitan areas with higher shares of black students in the population, a higher proportion of Whites attend private schools. In many large districts and in many metropolitan areas with high proportions of black students, White students are enrolled in private schools at rates far greater than black and Latino students.

Moreover, it appears that this pattern cannot be attributed to White avoidance of public schools where poverty rates are high, since the strong association between White private enrollments and black student populations persists after we take local poverty rates into account. In all of our models, the strongest predictor of White private enrollment is the proportion of black students in the area (p. 7-8).

In the end, most of the literature on this issue comes up inconclusive about just how much race and racism contributed to the rise of private schooling in the 50s – 70s. It is, of course, impossible to know anyone's motivations at the time, but it would also be naïve to assume race

played no role given what we know about racism in this country in general. And it is also naïve to assume race does not continue to play a role in Reformed Christian school enrollment trends today.

Though demographics vary widely based on region, we do know that in 2012, White students made up 51.7 percent of public school enrollment, but 72.1 percent of private school enrollment (Suitts, 2016). This is data for all private schools and, though no official data exists, it is likely that enrollment in Reformed Christian schools mirrors that trend. It is certainly true of the Christian schools in this study. For this reason, I am interested in how Reformed Christian education in the U.S. is connected to White supremacy.

Research Questions

Before outlining my specific research questions, I feel it is important to discuss the general theoretical framework in which I have positioned them. Much of my work at the graduate level has been situated in the murky waters of the structuralism and poststructuralism divide. On one hand, I am interested in transcending the search for fixed, immutable truths and exploring how cultural and social forces shape meaning and understanding and how power operates discursively to destabilize our understandings of agency and organization. On the other hand, however, I also find it necessary to acknowledge and uncover systems of oppression that have deeply-rooted structural histories and tend to operate in particular, and often predictable ways in society. In 2011, Shim wrote an article in which she articulated this very dilemma in relation to multicultural research. The impetus for her paper came out of a study of both White teachers and teachers of color attempting to enact more culturally responsive pedagogy [CRP] in their classrooms. The study found that the ways teachers interpreted CRP were dependent on how conscious they were of race and the ways in which race and racism affect and define

cultural understandings and actions, and were divided along color lines. Her conclusion was that more work was needed to help White teachers uncover the internalized and unconscious ways that their ways of thinking were determined by how they understood and perceived race. And, to do that, she argued required attention to the social, political and economic organization of the world. This kind of attention, however, need not preclude that individual selves interact with and mediate these organizational structures in unique ways. Rather, Shim (2011) says,

structuralist theorizing helps us to better understand that more than simply being the way it is, our ways of understanding the world, society, other people, different cultures, as well as our multicultural thinking are largely produced by the constitutive social conditions that normalize our perception: it is something that is born out of, developed, implicitly learned from the decades of different social conditions that each of us inhabit (p. 746).

For example, even though I would consider myself an advocate for equity and equality and even though I work to dismantle the forces of racism and White supremacy in society, I am still also a part of those forces simply by the reality of my identity as a White, able-bodied member of the middle class. Structuralist theorizing allows me to recognize that regardless of my intentions and my desires, I am still inherently part of an unjust and unequal system that operates apart from me.

Shim (2011) contends that both structuralism and post-structuralism are necessary in order to make sense of this moment in which multicultural researchers find themselves. Researchers must resist the conclusions drawn by structuralists that the self is entirely pre-determined and stable. However, they must also acknowledge the “weight of history” in regards to critical issues like race and racism. She writes,

We, human beings, are products of multiple histories that embody multiple social structures—histories that constitute the unconscious parts of ourselves, histories that are so deeply rooted within us that we do not even feel their influences but also histories that are active and that constitute the epistemological and ontological ground from which we understand the world today—and the aspects of structuralism can help us not undermine such important social facts. Educators, researchers, and students are human beings before we are educators, researchers, and students. Bypassing or ignoring actual histories and actual processes may render impossible the very possibility of any progressive transformation. (p. 750-51).

In order for this particular study to be meaningful, I had to approach my participants as both uniquely situated and in possession of their own understandings and interpretations of the world as well as participants in larger social and cultural histories and systems. The following two research questions reflect the larger goals of the two studies I conducted:

How do Reformed Christian schools communicate Whiteness as norm/default through their structure, organization and public identities?

How is Whiteness privileged or normed in parents' motivations and rationales for sending their kids to Reformed Christian schools?

Because of my poststructural commitments, I could not, of course, propose to know in advance or understand fully how individual students in Reformed Christian schools either embody or resist the White supremacy that might be internalized in both their institutions as well as their family relationships; however, I believe analyzing racist structures in both the public and the personal is a key step to working toward deconstructing White supremacy. To that end, I was also interested in the following question as it related to both studies:

What are the mechanisms that both obscure and uphold White supremacy in both Reformed Christian education institutions and family commitments to those institutions and how might those mechanisms be dismantled?

Admittedly, this last question was motivated by my desire to be an agent for change in my community. I believe White supremacy and racism are evils that need to be eradicated. I am therefore interested in knowing as much as I possibly can about how I can better work for racial justice and what structures and social realities will make that work difficult. I acknowledge, however, that asking this question did not provide me with any concrete answers, nor did it set me on a path to prescription or methods for regulation. Rather, I approached this question the way Foucault approached the analysis of subjectivity. According to Fendler (2010), Foucault's philosophy is meant to be "provocative, poetic, and problematizing." It is not to establish truth, but rather, the purpose of investigating how discourse works to create subjects is, "to surprise us with awareness – namely, that we do not have to be what we had assumed" (p. 64). In chapter five I will examine how Reformed Christians might imagine a different way of being in the world and deconstruct the purposes of Christian schooling. Now, I turn to a general literature review that situates both studies in the larger context of Whiteness, religion and schooling.

Literature Review

Whiteness

I conceptualize Whiteness in this study using the lens of critical Whiteness studies. There is nothing biological or inherent about Whiteness; it is entirely a social construction. And it is a social construction designed specifically for the purposes of subjugating non-White peoples. Borrowing a phrase from Ian Hacking, Omi and Winant (2015) refer to race as a way of "making up people" (p. 105). While categorizing people is a normal human activity and acknowledging

that all identities are socially constructed to some extent, Omi and Winant (2015) argue that race in America is a “master category – a fundamental concept that has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure, and culture of the United States” (p. 106). Race, of course, intersects with all kinds of other identities in important ways, but it remains structurally dominant in the United States due to the way it was woven into the very creation of this nation.

The construction of Whiteness first appeared in the United States as a designation for European explorers that distinguished them from the indigenous peoples they came into contact with (Roediger, 2007). In the U.S., White Europeans defined themselves according to their [Christian] work ethic and contrasted their moral virtue with the laziness of Native peoples, justifying the genocide of Native Americans and paving the way for the justification of enslavement of Black Africans. Hixson (2013) notes, “without the colonized other, the European could not define his own identity through manliness, Whiteness, godliness, progress, and the civilizing mission vis-à-vis the colonial world” (p. 10). A construction of White racial superiority was (and continues to be) foundational to the settler colonial project. According to Omi and Winant (2015),

The “conquest of America” was not simply an epochal historical event – however unparalleled in terms of importance. It was also the advent of a consolidated social structure of exploitations, appropriation, domination, and signification. Its representation, first in religious terms, but later in scientific and political ones, initiated modern racial awareness. It was the inauguration of racialization on a world-historical scale (p. 114). Slavery specifically, according to Vaught (2012), was also a critical defining moment for the White identity in the Americas as it “produced and protected the White right to own Black

bodies and provided a guarantee against ever being owned.” As such, blackness was defined as property while Whites “owned the rights to humanity” (p. 53). But, as not all White people were slave owners, the benefits of Whiteness needed to also be extended beyond simply the owning of non-White peoples. According to Buck (2010),

Privilege encouraged Whites to identify with the big slaveholding planters as members of the same “race.” They were led to act on the belief that all Whites had an equal interest in the maintenance of Whiteness and White privilege, and that it was the elite – those controlling the economic system, the political system, and the judicial system – who ultimately protected the benefits of being White (p. 34).

However, after slavery was abolished, poor White people were increasingly becoming aware that their Whiteness was affording them very few material or economic benefits and many started identifying more with freed slaves than their wealthy White previous owners. In order to prevent a potential revolt of the underclass, wealthy White elites attempted to re-emphasize Whiteness as a benefit in itself. This work became the work of White intellectuals and was funded by White elites. According to Buck (2010), these White intellectuals emphasized Whiteness as an inherent advantage by feeding White superiority propaganda through “newspaper discussions, speeches, scientific analysis, novels, sermons, songs, and blackface minstrel shows” (p. 35). The supremacy of Whiteness has since been codified into and through almost every aspect of American culture. Whites control power and resources in political, economic and cultural systems and all of these systems continue to consciously and unconsciously promote White entitlement and dominance (Ansley, 1997).

Antonio Gramsci’s articulation of the concept of hegemony has been taken up in critical race theory and critical White studies in various ways to describe how Whiteness continues to

maintain dominance through the unconscious acceptance of society (Hall, 1986; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). While a thorough discussion of White racial hegemony would fill a library, there are two aspects of its coding that are particularly relevant to this study which I will briefly explicate here. The first involves the ways color-blindness combines with the mantra of “racial uplift” from the late 1800s and early 1900s to form the modern political notion of respectability. Gaines (1996) explains,

The self-help ideology of racial uplift describes the response of educated African Americans, who, according to Alfred Moss, numbered roughly 2 percent of the black population in the 1890s, to de jure, or legal, segregation. Against the post-Reconstruction assault on black citizenship and humanity, black ministers, intellectuals, journalists, and reformers sought to refute the view that African Americans were biologically inferior and unassimilable by incorporating “the race” into ostensibly universal but deeply racialized ideological categories of Western progress and civilization. Generally, Black elites claimed class distinctions, indeed, the very existence of a “better class” of Blacks, as evidence of what they called race progress. Believing that the improvement of African Americans’ material and moral condition through self-help would diminish White racism, they sought to rehabilitate the race’s image by embodying respectability, enacted through an ethos of service to the masses (p. xiv).

The idea that Black people and other racial minorities can avoid racism by performing and assimilating into White cultural norms and practices was scorned by Du Bois (1903) and other Black intellectuals but has nevertheless persisted in modern American culture. And one of the ways this faulty ideology of racial uplift continues to be coded into society is through the discourse of American conservatism. Beginning with the election of Nixon and solidified during

Reagan's presidency, the alignment of American conservatism with the tenants of White nationalism is well-documented. In addition to their problematic positions on voting rights, welfare, and affirmative action, core conservative values like laissez-faire capitalism, states rights, and limited government are all mired in the myth of meritocracy that explicitly denies the reality of institutional racism and White supremacy (Phillips, 1968; Myrdal, 1944; R.C. Smith, 2010).

Much of the popular contemporary critique of hegemonic racism and Whiteness, particularly in educational settings, is framed in terms of privilege. Peggy McIntosh's (2010) now famous essay on the invisible knapsack of advantages that all White people carry around has become a foundational text for helping White people understand how Whiteness secures them position and comfort in modern American society. However, most critical race scholars, myself included, believe it is important to discuss Whiteness in terms of supremacy and not just privilege. Leonardo (2009) distinguishes between the examination of White racial hegemony vs. White racial domination. The latter, he argues, creates the conditions for the former and vice versa ad infinitum. That is, "in order for White racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that White subjects perpetrate on people of color" (p. 75). In order to dismantle White racial supremacy, it is important to examine the processes that continue to secure White domination rather than just the privileges associated with it (Leonardo, 2009).

Unfortunately, critical conversations about White supremacy have proved to be incredibly difficult due to what DiAngelo (2012) calls "White fragility." White supremacy has heretofore been understood mostly in relation to radical extremists like the KKK. Asking average

well-meaning White people to identify with “those kinds of White people” has proved to be a non-starter for many anti-racist educators and activists. DiAngelo (2012) explains,

White fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation (p. 183).

In her research, DiAngelo noted several common patterns of well-intentioned White people, including (but not limited to) claiming ignorance or only acknowledging racism in other Whites. Leonardo (2009) problematizes this supposed “White ignorance” by arguing that “it promotes the ‘innocence’ of Whites when it comes to the question of race and therefore conceals their personal and group investment in Whiteness (Lipsitz, 1998), as if racial oppression happens behind their backs rather than on the backs of people of color” (p. 107). He says that White people must acknowledge our full participation in race relations if we are to challenge racism and White supremacy. He also notes that, “Whites are comfortable with constructing racial knowledge when they feel threatened” (p. 116). This suggests that White people are more capable of seeing and evaluating race as a structuring principle than perhaps their outward White fragility suggests.

In this study, I am interested in going behind the reality of White fragility to explore how and why White folks arrive at such fragile places when it comes to their own identity as well as their understanding of a racialized society. Thandeka’s (2000) work provides a helpful foundation for this enterprise. While acknowledging the complicated history that I have outlined above, Thandeka’s research uncovers the painful realities of how White people learned to adopt White supremacy from a very young age. Using a phenomenological lens, she tells “stories of

children and adults who learned how to think of themselves as White in order to stay out of trouble with their caretakers and in the good graces of their peers or the enforcers of their community.” As such, she argues, “White America’s first racial victim [is] its own child” (p. 20). In order to maintain White supremacy, White children must be indoctrinated into it, and this can take many forms. One of those forms is through religion, to which I turn now.

Religion

Thinking about Thandeka’s sympathetic reading of the ways White children are also victims of White supremacy, I chose to focus on early childhood enrollment in Christian schooling and specifically think about the ways in which unexamined White supremacy in parents’ motivations might contribute to the problematic/harmful formation of their children’s White racial identity. In order to do that, it is important to tease out some of the more salient features of the theology that plays a role in Reformed Christians’ identity development. In this section, and in my research generally, I am not interested in claiming to know exactly what Reformed Christians believe, nor am I ignoring the fact that theology and religion are highly complex and personal, affecting all people of faith and their identity development differently. Rather, I am interested in taking an “archeological” look (inspired by Foucault) at some of the more salient features of Reformed theology as well as how those ideals have become intermingled with general American ideologies over time (Fendler, 2010). The goal is not to define what the people in my study believe about God or others or themselves, but rather to outline the various discourses that constitute the Reformed tradition in order to anticipate how I might witness those discourses in both subtle and overt ways during my observations and conversations.

One of the most contentious components of Reformed theology posits that all people who are saved through faith in Jesus are predestined by him to do so. That is, our eternal fate is determined before we are even born. John Calvin (1921, 1536) wrote,

When we attribute prescience to God, we mean that all things always were, and ever continue, under his eye; that to his knowledge there is no past or future, but all things are present, and indeed so present, that it is not merely the idea of them that is before him (as those objects are which we retain in our memory), but that he truly sees and contemplates them as actually under his immediate inspection. This prescience extends to the whole circuit of the world, and to all creatures. By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestined to life or death (Ch. XXI).

It should be noted that I cannot think of a single person I know who grew up in the Reformed tradition who has not at one time questioned (or eventually abandoned) this particular component of Reformed theology. However, despite its controversy, the spirit of this tenet remains alive and well and continues to permeate the ethos of both Reformed people as well as Reformed institutions. Among other more problematic things, this theology allows Reformed people to view themselves as “chosen” and to ascribe all of their social and material wealth as direct blessings from God.

It is easy to see, therefore, how Reformed Christian theology of predestination became entangled with manifest destiny in America. Horsman (1997) notes,

Since the seventeenth century the idea of the Americans as a “chosen people” had permeated first Puritan and then American thought. It is not uncommon for a people to think of themselves as chosen, but it is much rarer for a people to be given apparent abundant empirical proof of God’s choice. God’s intentions were first revealed in the survival and prosperity of the tiny colonies, elaborated by the miracle of a successful revolution against the might of Great Britain, and confirmed by a growth that amazed the world in the sixty years after that conflict (p. 140).

White supremacy and manifest destiny intersect in the American conception of Anglo-Saxonism. The term, according to Horsman (1997), has never really been a particularly accurate social or racial designation, and has historically been adapted by White people simply as a way to distinguish them as superior to whomever they happened to be in contact or conflict with. White European-Americans found the term useful to help assuage their guilt over slavery and Native genocide and took comfort in the claims of scientists and anthropologists of the time who proposed that Anglo-Saxons were inherently gifted in arts and government and who had descended from “those Aryans who followed the sun to carry civilization to the whole world” (p. 141). All to say, White Americans (from varying and various religious denominations, of course) found direct evidence of their “chosenness” in the success of their exploits in the new world and continued to live into that understanding by believing it was their duty to bring “Christian civilization” to the whole world (Horsman, 1997, p. 144).

Another way Reformed Christian theology has seeped into larger White supremacist American narratives is through capitalism and the myth of individual social and economic meritocracy. Max Weber (1930) famously wrote on this subject. To summarize, Reformed Christians (along with many other types of Christians) believe that God calls individuals to live

according to his commands (as laid out in the Bible) and to use their gifts and talents in service to him. Weber (1930) notes that this idea of service to an individual “calling” is a fundamental characteristic of the social ethic of capitalism. However, he also points out the “extreme inhumanity” of the doctrine of predestination in that it engendered a “feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual” as they worked to fulfill their calling all the while knowing their eternal destiny was sealed and required of them no help from their fellow believers (p. 60-61). This loneliness and, indeed, inhumanity is exacerbated by the Reformed doctrine of total depravity, which, as Dewey (1842) illuminates, teaches that all people are by nature wicked and sinful and that any outward goodness is only “seeming.” I turn to a section from Roediger (2007) to explain how all of these threads (capitalism/total depravity/White supremacy) come together,

George Rawick, in his enormously suggestive conclusion to *From Sundown to Sunup*, argues that racism grew so strongly among the Anglo-American bourgeoisie during the years America was colonized because blackness came to symbolize that which the accumulating capitalist had given up, but still longed for. Increasingly adopting an ethos that attacked holidays, spurned contact with nature, saved time, bridled sexuality, separated work from the rest of life and postponed gratification, profit-minded Englishmen and Americans cast Blacks as their former selves. ... All of the old habits so recently discarded by Whites adopting capitalist values came to be fastened onto Blacks. ... The racist, like the reformed sinner, creates a “pornography of his former life” ... In order to ensure that he will not slip back into the old ways or act out half-suppressed fantasies, he must see a tremendous difference between his reformed self and those whom he formerly resembled (p. 95).

In Roediger's astute rendering, I recognize something deep within my religious tradition that I doubt many people like me would be able to name, but which I suspect has woven its way into Reformed institutional and individual identities in extremely complex ways. Thandeka (2000) writes of religious White people's "theology of shame" that prevents them from being able to fully wrestle with identity politics and identify (much less purge) the pernicious racism that permeates their own identities as White people. James Baldwin (1963) also comes to mind here,

White people in this country will have quite enough to do in learning how to accept and love themselves and each other, and when they have achieved this – which will not be tomorrow and may very well be never – the Negro problem will no longer exist, for it will no longer be needed (p. 22).

Understanding the ways Reformed doctrines and larger American social narratives manifest in individual people's hearts and minds is a challenge, and it required particular methods of analysis that I will preview in chapter two. However, it is easier, perhaps, and also important to explore how these religious beliefs weave their way into Reformed Christian school curriculum and pedagogy.

Schooling

As Leonardo (2009) argues, "To the extent that racial supremacy is taught to White students, it is pedagogical. Insofar as it is pedagogical, there is the possibility of critically reflecting on its flows in order to disrupt them" (p. 83). Thankfully, there have been several studies already that have modeled what it can look like to evaluate how race and Whiteness play a role in the formal and informal school curriculum and context. For example, Ali Michael (2015) profiles a particular Kindergarten classroom with a diverse population of students and a teacher who was motivated to address issues of diversity, race, and racism by using a

multicultural curriculum with lots of Black and brown representation. However, Michael (2015) found that despite the formal curriculum reflecting diversity, there were still Black students in the class who felt alienated. She noted that as the year progressed, she realized that there were factors outside the formal curriculum that were contributing to the negative experiences of the students. These factors are corroborated throughout the literature on race and schooling and affirm the assertion that racism and White supremacy must be challenged both in the formal as well as informal or hidden curriculum. And though my study does not look at the formal or explicit curriculum of the Reformed Christian schools I visited, these realities are nevertheless relevant and helpful for me to think about how young children might take up ideas about race and Whiteness as reflected in the public pedagogy of their school as well as their parents motivations for sending them there.

First, Michael (2015) discovered that general societal rules were reflected inside the classroom, despite what her formal curriculum attempted to enforce. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) witnessed children as young as three years old showing preferences for and selecting playmates based on race. Their observations revealed that young children developed complex social capabilities quickly and were able to adapt and refine those capabilities as they took in new information about the social world around them. They concluded, “the idea that young, allegedly ego-centric children are somehow disconnected from the larger social world and its deeper understandings does not hold up in light of field observations” (p. 180). In fact, they observed that, “White children frequently used social tools from the toolbox provided by the larger society” and that “doing racialized power [was] central to many events at the day care center” (p. 182-3). It is reasonable to assume that some of those tools in the toolbox of larger

society are reflected and encouraged in the school's public structure and persona in addition to being subtly or explicitly communicated by parents in the home.

Michael (2015) also found that the reality of White privilege and the politics of respectability based on hegemonic White cultural norms had alienating effects for students of color in the classroom. She said, "the lack of explicit boundaries and expectations seemed to lend power to certain students over others" (p. 68). The students policed each other according to existing social hierarchies, which resulted in White students calling out Black students more often than others for behavior deemed outside the norm or acceptable. Consequently, in this classroom, as reflected in American schools generally, Black students and students of color were punished for bad behaviors at disproportionate rates than their White counterparts (Morris, 2014, 2016; Malave & Giordani, 2015). Along with that, she found that while the curriculum itself reflected multicultural principles, the larger classroom culture, including classroom management, was more aligned with White norms and principles.

Finally, Michael (2015) confirmed what various other scholars and advocates have long observed that White parents had more influence over the culture and philosophy of the school than Black parents or other parents of color (Delpit, 1988). This is noteworthy because parents and family relationships have a large impact on how well a multicultural or diverse curriculum is both perceived by students as well as its impact out of the classroom. In addition, as my observations of Christian schools will demonstrate, those who have the power in the school control the goals, culture, and general tone that the school takes affecting how the children of color are evaluated and policed as well as who feels welcome and safe in the school and who does not.

For this study, I chose to look at elementary schools rather than middle or high schools. Teachers and parents of young children tend to ignore racial realities due to children's perceived innocence and naiveté (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). Bronson and Merryman (2009) discovered that rather than being explicit about race with their children, many White parents adopt what they refer to as the "diverse environment theory" regarding race and racial exposure. They explain that many White parents think that they, "don't have to talk about race – in fact, it's better to *not* talk about race. Just expose the child to diverse environments and he'll think it's entirely normal" (p. 55). However, their research also showed that the more diverse a school environment was, the more students were likely to self-segregate, making cross-racial or cross-cultural interaction actually go down. Leonardo (2009) notes,

As White children are socialized into everyday life and schooling, they learn their place in the racial hierarchy. They begin to know who they are. By knowing, I do not suggest a conscious, self-present mode of thinking, but rather a social condition of knowledge, sometimes buried in the unconscious, sometimes percolating to the level of consciousness (p. 109).

Many parents in my study subscribed to the diverse environment theory, citing school diversity as an important component of helping their children grow up into well-rounded and empathetic individuals. But none of the parents expressed any awareness of how the cultural norms of the school might be impacting their children's views on race, racism or Whiteness.

This dissertation is an attempt to broaden the concept of *schooling* as it relates to race and Whiteness beyond the structure of the formal classroom. It is my belief that our identities as are constituted by the public spaces we inhabit as well as by the demands placed on us by our families and communities, and that both of those things can mirror the effect of schooling in a

variety of ways. To examine these types of schooling, I used the conceptual frameworks of public pedagogy and psychoanalytic theory. The next chapter will outline my methodology as well as preview those conceptual frameworks.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY, DATA, METHODS, ANALYSIS

Methodology

I adopted a blend of methodologies for this project. Simply put, it is a critical qualitative study with an (auto)ethnographic component. This particular project was not as immersive or lengthy as a traditional ethnography, but my collection and analysis methods borrow heavily from the field. Due to my previous immersion in the culture of Reformed Christian education, I was able to reasonably situate the data I generated in the larger context of Christian education using my own experience and continued connections. Also, I added the label (auto) because, given my immersion in the culture of Christian schooling, I could not study it without, at least in part, studying myself. While most of the work being done with autoethnography right now relies heavily on post-structuralist analysis and highlights the discourses of minority, oppressed and misunderstood cultures (ie. it is not written by/about White people), my study does have some of the features of the methodology. I am studying my own people from a cultural perspective; I am looking at the larger context of Christian schooling while also acknowledging how my experience has been shaped by and continues to shape my understanding and interpretation of that culture (Van Maanen, 1988; Denzin, 1997). This qualitative study borrows tools from critical ethnography because it merges a study of the lived experiences of real people with a theoretical analysis of social structures and forces (racism/White supremacy). According to Thomas (1993), “critical ethnographers describe, analyze, and open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain” (p. 3). Lather (1986) refers to it as “openly ideological research.” This project does not aim to study the culture of Reformed Christian schooling as a whole. I am using the very particular lens of Whiteness in

order to uncover painful truths and use them to write “tiny moral tales,” as Denzin calls them (1997, p. xiv). Like most ethnographers, my desire was to observe, explain, and understand the world of Reformed Christian Education, but it did not stop there. Anderson (1989) notes that critical ethnographers are not in the business of simply recording and reporting their experiences; rather their goal is to interpret them. Critical ethnographers assume that, “although the informant's constructs are, to use Geertz's (1973) expression, more "experience-near" than the researcher's, they are, themselves, reconstructions of social reality” (p. 253).

Of course, doing this kind of interpretation required reflexivity in order to avoid simply dumping observed data into a pre-determined critical framework. According to Anderson (1989), Reflexivity in critical ethnography, then, involves a dialectical process among (a) the researcher's constructs, (b) the informants' commonsense constructs, (c) the research data, (d) the researcher's ideological biases, and (e) the structural and historical forces that informed the social construction under study (p. 254).

My role as a researcher in this project is perhaps the opposite of objective. Reflexivity was a critical process for me to engage in to prevent issues of bias. But perhaps more importantly for me, I needed to guard against being overly negative in my critique. Criticality has always come easy for me, but it has often gone hand in hand with pessimism and negativity. It was important for me throughout the process of writing this dissertation to practice charity along with my critique. I needed to carefully engage in reflexivity in order to ensure that I was not reading more into my participants and subjects than was fair or just. At the same time, I also needed to engage in critical reflexivity in order to be sure that I did see things that might be easy for me to take for granted.

Data

This study took place in the U.S. Midwest in a city I will call, Crown Ridge. I generated data from three different Reformed Christian elementary schools in the greater Crown Ridge area as well as from interviews with nine sets of White parents who send their kids there (three families per school). The Christian schools in this area have a very strong reputation; many of them are considered the best schools in their respective cities or townships. Most are highly resourced and well-funded by the many wealthy Christian donors who live in the area. As such, parents who decide to send their children to Christian schools have several options from which to choose. For the purpose of this study, I selected three schools from across a spectrum of racial and ethnic diversity. These three schools are characterized by differences in the diversity of their student body as well as the neighborhoods in which they are located. There are also significant differences in the physical makeup of the three school buildings and their surroundings. I then selected White parents who send their children to each of these three schools to interview. I chose to interview exclusively White parents for this study because I wanted the data I generated to be as experience-near as possible to my own (Geertz, 1973; Hollway, 2009). In addition, it is well-documented that White folks are the most oblivious to the realities of White supremacy and this study is my attempt to understand why. I did not pre-select for socioeconomic diversity and, based on the fact that they are able to afford private school and also based on my crude appraisal of each of their homes and the neighborhoods they were situated in, I believe it is safe to say that all my participants could be categorized as middle to upper-middle class. It is also important to note that my selections for which parents to interview were not random, rather they were a product of network and convenience sampling (Glesne, 2011). I reached out to friends of mine who have connections at each school and asked for contact information for families who fit my

criteria, specifically White families with White children. After receiving contact information, I sent out emails and Facebook messages to as many parents as I could and set up interviews based on their willing responses. I will now briefly introduce each school that I visited (a more detailed description of each school is included in chapter three) followed by a description of the parents I spoke with from that school.

Middelburg Christian Elementary

The first school is located in one of the many majority-White and rural suburbs of Crown Ridge. The suburb contains both older, established neighborhoods as well as an ever-increasing number of new housing developments. Many parents in the Crown Ridge area choose Christian schooling for their children because it offers a private alternative to a lesser quality public education. The Middelburg public schools, however, have a strong reputation and many families move to this particular suburb to be able to attend them. They are also well equipped with excellent technology and educational resources. Middelburg Christian School also has a strong reputation, but it is not nearly as well resourced as its public counterparts. For this reason, it is safe to assume the families who choose Middelburg Christian are doing so specifically for the Christian nature of the school. Middelburg Christian's student population is majority White with most of the few students of color being adopted members of White families.

Ann and Jim. Ann and Jim both grew up in Crown Ridge and attended Christian schools in the area. Jim even went to Middelburg Christian school himself as a child. They have three children, all of whom attend Middelburg Christian Elementary. Their youngest child has a significant cognitive disability and so inclusive special education services for him were at the top of their list when choosing a school system to attend. They moved to Middelburg as both the public and private schools in the area have a good reputation for special education services, but

they ultimately chose Middelburg Christian as they felt it was the best choice for their children's spiritual development and they loved how the teachers there enveloped their older children in prayer and support after their youngest child was born.

Betsy and Joshua. Betsy and Joshua were both born and raised in the Middelburg area. Betsy attended Middelburg Christian Elementary as a child and they met when they both attended the local Christian high school. They have three children who all attend Middelburg Christian Elementary. Like Ann and Jim, they moved to Middelburg specifically to send their children to Middelburg Christian schools and have never questioned or regretted their decision.

Kelly and Paul. Kelly and Paul are also both from the Middelburg area. Paul attended Middelburg Christian schools as a child. Like Betsy and Joshua, they also met at the local Christian High School. They have four children at Middelburg Christian Elementary and Kelly is part-time employed at the school as well. Kelly and Paul were the last of the three couples I interviewed from the school and when I noted how similar their story was to the other two families, Kelly replied, laughing, "let me guess, Middelburg? We'll never leave! It's a cult!"

CRCES, Shawnee

The second school is called Crown Ridge Christian Elementary School, Shawnee Campus. I will refer to it in this dissertation by the abbreviation CRCES, Shawnee or just Shawnee. It is located in an area of the city where racial and socioeconomic differences are quite stark. Within blocks, demographics change from predominantly White and upper class to predominantly Black and high poverty. The school is located in a mostly White enclave which is surrounded by much more diverse neighborhoods. The school building itself is less than ten years old and was built in place of an historic neighborhood public school building. This elementary school is part of the Crown Ridge Christian School system, which is one of the

largest members of Christian Schools International. The school is highly resourced and high performing and has a moderate amount of racial and ethnic diversity, though not necessarily reflective of its geographical location.

Katie and Adam. Katie and Adam were my outlier couple in this study in almost every way. They both grew up in Ohio and neither of them have any familial connections in Crown Ridge. After having lived in several states all around the country, they moved to Crown Ridge several years ago because Adam was offered a faculty position in the philosophy department at a local Christian college. They have three children who all attend CRCES, Shawnee. They, like Ann and Jim, also have a son who has a cognitive disability and cite the excellent inclusion services at CRCES, Shawnee as the main reason they chose to send their children there. While neither of them attended Christian schools as children, they met while both were attending a small Nazarene college in Northern Ohio.

Theresa and Nick. Theresa and Nick are both from Crown Ridge. Theresa attended Christian schools in the Middelburg area growing up, while Nick was educated in the Crown Ridge Christian school system. They have four children, three of whom currently attend CRCES, Shawnee and the fourth who is not currently school age, but who will attend there once he is. Theresa was a Christian schoolteacher for some time before she had children and now stays home full time with them.

Jane and Zach. Jane and Zach also attended Christian schools growing up, though not in the same city. Jane went to Christian schools in Chicago before moving to Crown Ridge for college. Zach grew up in the Crown Ridge Christian school district and attended one of the more racially diverse schools in the system. Zach cites the racial and ethnic diversity he grew up with as being incredibly influential and meaningful for him. He spoke affectionately about growing up

with Black peers and parental figures surrounding him. Jane attended a mostly White Christian school context in Chicago but grew up in a racially diverse neighborhood. In addition, she emphasized how important the Spanish language and culture has been to her; she lived and worked in several different Central American countries before settling in Crown Ridge with Zach and their three young children.

Shepherd's Grove

The final school is located in a part of the city with a particularly high Hispanic population. It is surrounded by single-family homes as well as multicultural businesses and restaurants. There is a small public park across the street with some limited playground equipment which serves as the only outside play space for the school. Unlike the other two schools in this study, racial, cultural and socioeconomic diversity are built into the mission of Shepherd's Grove. Among their core values listed on their website are the following statements,

We invest in school families, focusing on strengthening low-income, urban families through education and academic support.

We are committed to ethnic diversity among students and staff because we believe God's Kingdom is most fully expressed when every tongue, tribe and nation praise Him as one voice.

We are committed to the Lincoln Valley neighborhood and the greater community of Crown Ridge, working together with neighbors, non-profit organizations and businesses to encourage reconciliation and holistic success.

Jill and Dan. Jill and Dan are both from Crown Ridge, though they come from very different school backgrounds. Dan attended one of the smaller and strict conservative Christian schools in the area, not affiliated with the Reformed Christian schools in this study. Jill, on the other hand,

grew up in the Crown Ridge Public School system and attended schools with high levels of socioeconomic and racial diversity. She joked during our interview that she “survived public school,” and while she talks about her experience positively, she also said that as a child she would have loved to attend a Christian school and she was so happy to be able to provide that experience for her two young children now.

Emily and Eric. Emily and Eric also grew up in the Crown Ridge area. Eric attended Christian school in a Crown Ridge suburb while Emily attended public schools in one of the more affluent districts in the city. Emily’s parents actually grew up in the Crown Ridge Christian school system and both had a negative experience. So, when they had Emily and her siblings, they made a conscious choice not to send them to Christian school, despite familial pressures. Emily and Eric have three children, all of whom attend Shepherd’s Grove. They were both motivated to send their children there after Emily was employed as a teacher for a brief time and loved her experience.

Elizabeth and Frank. Elizabeth is also employed at Shepherd’s Grove and cites her excellent experience as one of her and Frank’s main motivations for sending their children there. Elizabeth grew up in a Crown Ridge suburb and actually attended the same Christian schools as I did growing up. Frank grew up on the other side of the state and had several different schooling experiences. He attended a small Christian school for some time, then was homeschooled and eventually attended public school. In addition to Elizabeth’s positive experience with the school, one of the other main reasons they are sending their four children to Shepherd’s Grove is because one of their children is adopted and biracial. They emphasized how it was important for them that he grow up surrounded by people who look like him.

Methods

Field Observation

I generated data for this study using two different methods. My first method was field observation. I spent a morning at each school. I walked around. I listened. I looked at the physical organization of the school and how students were organized according to it. I studied the architectural details, the art on the walls, the colors and textures and sounds, etc. During these observations I took detailed field notes in a written journal as well as pictures with my cell phone. My original plan was to spend several days at each school, observing not only the physical structure of the space, but also how students interacted with it. However, after my introductory mornings there, I found myself inundated with data. The details that spoke to me were mostly the static elements of the school, things like public art installations and architecture, that do not change from day to day. I was able to devote a significant amount of time to analyzing these details of the school without needing to be physically present at the school because I received permission to take pictures during my visits. As noted by Emmerson et al. (1995), I found that collecting field notes and taking pictures was both an intuitive and empathetic process. I needed to observe and capture both what felt important to me about the structure and the space, as well as what might be important to the teachers and students who inhabit it. Emmerson et al. (1995) argue that ethnographers succeed best in selecting and describing details according to a specific purpose and point of view. Using the critical framework of public pedagogy (described below) allowed me to view each school as a curriculum, and specifically for this study, as a curriculum of Whiteness.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Secondly, I conducted semi-structured interviews with White Christian school parents (Glesne, 2011). Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in the interview process and thereby aided in building rapport with my participants (Seidman, 2006). I met each set of parents for one interview; each interview lasted roughly an hour, with some lasting longer. I offered to meet parents in their homes after their children went to bed, so they would not have to procure a baby-sitter in order for us to have uninterrupted conversation. I wanted to speak to parents together rather than individually so that our interactions were more conversational and so that the couples could bounce ideas and answers off of each other (also because arranging and conducting eighteen distinct interviews seemed like a logistical impossibility, especially with busy young parents involved). While I used the same interview instrument for each conversation, my questions also evolved depending on what topics garnered the most passionate or compelling responses from my participants. Here is the basic interview instrument I used for each conversation:

Why did you choose to send your children to a Reformed Christian school as opposed to a public school?

What is your personal history with Christian education?

What role did diversity play (or not play) in your decision?

What do you feel your children are gaining from a Christian school environment that they could not get elsewhere?

Could you articulate how your theological beliefs and commitments play a role in your decision to send your children to Christian schools?

I wanted to be sure that I had a clear set of questions in place for each interview that got at the essential issues I was examining. I anticipated (correctly) that my conversations with these parents would be both interesting and enjoyable, and also easily veer off topic! These simple questions allowed me to zero in on the intentions, history, and commitment of my participants while also providing discursive space for our conversations to expand. I recorded and transcribed all of the interviews. Following this, I open-coded (Glesne, 2011) them as well as coded them according to pre-selected critical conceptual lenses, which I will describe in a moment.

White Fragility/Diversity

First, I should mention why I used the word “diversity” in my interviews as opposed to more explicit terms like race, racism or Whiteness. In my review of the literature I mentioned the work of Robin DiAngelo on the topic of White fragility. My goal in the interview process was to encourage my participants to be as open and honest with me as possible. DiAngelo (2012) notes, however, that when talking about issues of race and racism, there are several patterns that well-intentioned White people fall into that preclude that type of openness and honesty. Her research reveals that White people often feel guilt or shame when talking about race and racism and will consequently shut down conversation in attempt to avoid the awkwardness that those feelings can invoke. DiAngelo (2012) also notes the pattern she labels “carefulness” which articulates the posture that White people take in order to avoid offending people. This pattern is particularly relevant in this study as my participants are almost exclusively born and raised in a culture that values conflict-avoidance and congeniality. My two participants who were not raised in this area. Adam and Katie, referred to this phenomenon in their interview as “Crown Ridge Nice.” In an attempt to assuage this combination of guilt and carefulness, I chose to use the term “diversity” with my participants because, in my experience, it is an easier concept for White folks to discuss.

I found this approach largely successful as it engendered the openness and honesty from my participants that I was seeking about issues of race and schooling.

Analysis

My data analysis is organized in two distinct ways. I handled my analysis of the school buildings like individual case studies, while I chose to combine my parent interviews all together and analyze them thematically. While there certainly were common themes across all three school buildings that I visited, I found that analyzing each as its own “bounded system” helped me to think about each school building as a separate curriculum (Stake, 1995). While visiting each school and recording my field notes, elements of the school curriculum started to become visible. After that, in my early data analysis stage, I made use of analytic files (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). I reviewed all of the photos that I took of the buildings and began grouping them by theme in a document. Following that, I developed some rudimentary coding schemes with which I could go back, locate, and name my data bits (Glesne, 2011). During this process, I also actively discussed the themes I was noticing with family and friends who are familiar with and also able to adopt a critical posture towards Christian schools. Telling the story of my data out loud helped my ideas to cohere into the final codes, or curricula, which I will discuss in chapter three.

My process for analyzing my parent interviews was both similar and different to my analysis of the school spaces. Rudimentary codes and themes began to appear after only two interviews and continued to coalesce the more couples I talked to. I practiced reflexivity in this process in order to avoid asking leading questions or making assumptions by member-checking during my interviews (Anderson, 1989). When I noticed one of my participants stating something that sounded familiar, I stopped, re-stated to check for understanding, and often

paraphrased or quoted statements I had heard from my other participants to see if they felt similarly. This process helped me develop my codes during the interview process instead of waiting until I was done collecting data. Rather than code electronically, I found it helpful to print out my interview transcripts and read and re-read to be sure I was placing quotes in context. I played with a somewhat unique way of representing the themes I uncovered during these nine interviews, which is the subject of chapter four.

I filtered all of my codes through the discourses of Whiteness and White supremacy in both the physical space of the schools as well as in the motivations parents have for sending their children to those schools. I borrow Foucault's understanding of the term discourse as including both language and systems. As Fendler (2010) explains, Foucault's conception of discourse includes "everything we can access with our minds." Discourse is created by people, though people do not control it nor are they controlled by it. Discourse is not contained within clear boundaries, but it does exist in time and space, and is therefore historical (p. 36-37). In this dissertation, many discourses are present and constantly interacting with and challenging each other. In addition to the discourses of Whiteness, religion, and schooling as outlined in my literature review, I am also engaging with(in) the larger discourses of academia and critical theory. All to say, nothing in this dissertation is neutral, including my perspective. Everything I notice here could be interpreted in myriad other ways and through myriad other discourses. What follows is my attempt to notice and name particular White supremacist discourses present in both school spaces and in parent motivations. In order to do this, I analyzed these spaces and motivations using conceptual critical lenses borrowed from public pedagogy and psychoanalytic theory.

Public Pedagogy

We already know that most schools are failing to name and break down White supremacy in the enacted or explicit curriculum. I am interested in what we might not see, what is educating us subtly without us knowing, and what might prevent even the best anti-racist curriculum/pedagogy from being salient because of the way it is being delivered and among what other (potentially contradictory) messages. Shim (2011) identified this concern in her examination of multicultural curriculum implementation in schools. She noted, “simply changing curriculum is not enough without examining who delivers the curriculum, how it is delivered, and what institutional structures and forces are at work when attempting to implement the new curriculum (p. 750).” Or, in other words, we must expand our conception of curriculum to include more than just the content, but also the context. In order to do this kind of examination, I approached the school buildings themselves as a curriculum and analyzed that curriculum using the framework of public pedagogy. Public pedagogy refers to all the ways that we learn and are taught outside of a formal school context. In many ways, the field of public pedagogy can be understood as educators taking up the work of sociology. Giroux (2011), for example, is concerned with forms of public pedagogy that seek to control us – that tell us how to live our lives, what we should value, and who we should be. According to Giroux (2008), these public pedagogies can be communicated through a variety of social institutions, ranging from, “libraries, movie theaters, and schools to high-tech media conglomerates that circulate signs and meanings through newspapers, magazines, advertisements, new information technologies, computers, films, and television programs” (p. 17).

Because the study of public pedagogy is so wide and diverse, it requires specification to be useful in a particular research project (Savage, 2010). For the purposes of this dissertation,

therefore, I used a public pedagogy framework to examine the curriculum of physical space. More specifically, I examined the curriculum of the physical space of three Reformed Christian elementary schools and its potential to operate pedagogically on the students who attend them. Similar work has been done on spaces ranging from shopping malls to highway rest stops (Fiske, 1989; Austin, 2012). Sandlin, O'Malley and Burdick (2011) note that roughly 15% of public pedagogy scholarship looks at the curriculum of physical space, including a robust interest in the study of public museums and how they construct and situate historical artifacts and knowledge in particular ways. Much of this current scholarship is influenced by Elizabeth Ellsworth's (2005) work. According to Ellsworth, architecture can communicate ideas, sensibilities, assumptions and sometimes hidden power relations; however, our embodied responses to those things are also important and influence our perceptions (p. 4). As such, my examination of the school space needed to be fluid and flexible, taking into consideration all the ways in which people's interactions with the space (including my own) both enhance and obscure its meanings.

In addition, I am looking at Whiteness, which is also a larger social construct and thus being taught in many other public spaces. This serves to tie my specific analysis of Reformed Christian school buildings to a larger framework/structure that has previously been theorized and analyzed. Burdick and Sandlin (2010) note,

...critical public pedagogy inquiry – much like ethnography – has the differential purpose of revealing the forms of power that undergird our own perceptions, epistemologies, and knowings of education. That is, by witnessing the alterity of other pedagogies, other curricula, we effectively illuminate the constructed, arbitrary, and power-laden nature of our own inquiry, teaching, and understanding of educational practice (p. 122)

If the “hidden curriculum” of their school buildings and rituals continues to reflect and promote White supremacy, any attempt to focus the formal curriculum on issues of racial justice will fail to bring about meaningful change (Eisner, 1994). Therefore, analyzing the public pedagogy, or the curriculum of Whiteness, in Reformed Christian school spaces is a critical step towards justice.

Psychoanalytic Theory

It is my contention that the vast majority of White people have absolutely no idea the extent to which racism and White supremacy permeate their existence in this world. As such, had I simply asked my participants direct questions about racism and Whiteness, I would likely have received predictable answers reflecting general principles of love, colorblindness and unity. Moreover, I could have also reasonably expected to hear contradictory messages regarding the value of diversity as well as an adherence to the principles of social/economic meritocracy (Brown, 1997). Therefore, partly in an attempt to reconcile what Brown (1997) calls a “schizophrenia” of White people’s perspectives on racism and Whiteness, I am interested not in what we think we know/think/believe about race, but rather what lurks under the surface in our motivations and intentions. In order to get at these underlying beliefs and understandings, I analyzed my participant interviews by borrowing concepts from psychoanalytic theory. And I join with other scholars doing this work in combination with poststructural discussions of identity and the “simultaneous articulation of the social/political, and the constitution of the individual in a psychic-social space” (Boldt, Salvio, & Taubman, 2006, p. 4). Specifically, I take up the psychoanalytic theories of narcissism and melancholia.

Narcissism. For the purpose of this study, I consider narcissism as part of the process of human self-development, in which people form positive ideas about themselves and their own

attributes. Freud (1914) distinguished between primary narcissism and secondary narcissism.

The first, he explained, was present in all humans and can be understood as a phenomenon, while the second constituted a pathology. This dissertation will engage predominantly with primary narcissism as it relates to human development and attachment. I understand this development not in terms of an essential nature, but rather as a set of processes that infants, children and adults go through as a result of a variety of social and emotional influences. (Foucault, 1988; Althusser, 1971). One of the critical elements of this self-development and identity formation is race. Boldt (2006) explains,

Race preexists us in culture... it is experienced as highly personal – as identity – and it is carried out in the demands we make upon ourselves and one another in the big and little things that are the material of ordinary life. Race is neither outside, as in culture, nor inside, as an attribute of the human. Race exists in a psychic-social space; it is something that we demand of ourselves and each other to stabilize the psychic-social contexts of our day-to-day lives (p. 144).

In designing this study, I had assumed that I would encounter examples of this racial component of narcissism in my participant interviews. I expected to hear how my parent participants chose Christian education at least in part to contribute to the racial formation of their children.

However, racism and White supremacy revealed themselves in other ways. In the end, narcissism helped me understand how Christian schooling was embedded in my participants identities, but it took a coupling with melancholia to see how Whiteness is tightly woven into the Reformed Christian parent identity, or selfhood, and manifested in the education choices they make for their children.

Melancholia. I believe most religious White people take for granted that our identities and institutions are not neutral, but rather steeped in unexamined traditions and ruled by complex power relations that have evolved and become masked in myriad ways over time. In order to examine this, I coupled my analysis of narcissism with a consideration of the psychoanalytic theory of melancholia. In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud (1917) explained two different human responses to loss. Mourning persons deal with the loss of a specific person or object in their conscious mind. While melancholia refers to the grieving of a loss a person cannot fully comprehend and which happens in the unconscious mind. Freud articulated that mourning is a healthy and natural process of grieving, while melancholia is pathological. Cheng (2001) argues that melancholia is present in the very foundation of the United States, in which settlers fled subjugation from England only to create a subjugation state in the new land. Building on Cheng’s research, Vaught (2012) notes that this melancholia has created an unresolvable contradiction in that freedom for White Americans was/is predicated on the denial of freedom for all others. She says, “In their construction of independence, Whites lost the truth of independence. Such loss is absolute and becomes the basis of all national narratives. It becomes unresolved discursive grief – a form of institutional racist melancholia” (p. 62). This articulation of melancholia allowed me to couple my analysis of my participant interviews with my analysis of the public pedagogy of the school buildings in order to examine how race and Whiteness are both consumed and denied in Christian school contexts.

In the next chapter, I will tell the story of the three Christian schools I visited through the lens of public pedagogy and explain how each school produces a curriculum of Whiteness. In chapter four, I will examine my participant interviews through the lens of psychoanalytic theory. Following that, I will return in my final chapter to my research questions and consider more

specifically how the curriculum of Whiteness I identified in the school spaces as well as the narcissistic and melancholic identity demands that parents place on their children as demonstrated by my participant interviews are tied to specific issues of race, racism and White supremacy in the Reformed Christian Church as well as in Reformed Christian education.

CHAPTER 3

A CURRICULUM OF WHITENESS: CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS THROUGH THE LENS OF PUBLIC PEDAGOGY

This chapter is an exercise in noticing and theorizing the public pedagogies of three different Reformed Christian elementary schools. Acknowledging that public space is dynamic and, as Triggs et al. (2010) point out, has the potential to “literally [sculpt] itself around our participation,” I used my experience of the school’s physical space to study the curricula that may be educating the students, parents, staff and visitors of these Christian elementary schools subtly and perhaps without their knowing. Ellsworth (2005) posits,

To think and to speak about aspects of learning that exceed the realm of language presents educators and educational media producers with special difficulties. It challenges many of our assumptions and practices. In the wake of these difficulties and challenges, the following question remains desperately under-theorized: How does the fact of human embodiment affect activities of teaching and learning (p. 2)?

During my visit to each school, I stayed mostly in the hallways and public spaces, rarely venturing into the classroom. In this way, I attempted to embody places in the school that contain no formal curriculum, but in which nevertheless a significant amount of teaching and learning takes place. These are the in-between spaces of the school. The spaces where student artwork and projects are displayed. The spaces where the school hangs up homages to its past, creates meaning out of its present, and articulates hopes for its future. These spaces evoke Ellsworth’s (2005) usage of Winnicott’s theories of “transitional space.” Ellsworth (through Winnicott) conceptualizes transitional space in the abstract. She notes,

Winnicott's transitional space is what makes possible the difficult transition from a state of habitual ("natural" feeling) compliance with the outside world, with its expectations, traditions, structures, and knowledges, to a state of creatively putting those expectations, traditions, and structures to new uses (p. 30).

My experience wandering the hallways of these busy and dynamic elementary schools was an experience of transitional space in the concrete. These public places house the informal curriculum of the school. They tell a story about who and what the school is. They create a curriculum of identity.

In the process of reading these identity curricula, I inevitably privileged some details of the school space and ignored others. My readings and interpretations of these spaces are certainly not the only ones possible. The beauty of public pedagogy is its flexibility and playfulness. One text can be taken up in countless ways. Therefore, it is important to note that my readings in this chapter are not meant to be seen as final or fixed. It is also impossible to predict how children may be reading these same spaces. However, speaking from my own experience growing up in Christian schools like these, I believe that the curricula I create in this chapter are acting on students in lots of unexamined ways (they were on me!) and therefore can and must also be acknowledged and disrupted.

I approached each school's curriculum through the critical lens of Whiteness. As I walked around, I tried to let the school teach me and in doing this I discovered that each school told a different story about its relationship to Whiteness and White supremacy. After my visit, using the notes and pictures I took, I constructed a different curriculum for each school, resulting in the following three sections. It is worth noting that elements from each curriculum were present in some ways at all three schools. For this chapter, I will leave it up to the reader

to observe those crossover details and I will make some explicit connections between the three curricula in chapter five.

Each section begins with an italicized vignette from my experience, which serves as a metaphor to introduce that school's curriculum. Following that vignette, I rendered each section a little differently in hopes that the narrative variety would heighten the reader's enjoyment. I will begin with the most archetypal of the three schools I visited - the suburban Christian school located in the rural suburb of Middelburg.

Middelburg Christian Elementary: Traditional American Conservatism

I drive past the city, through myriad cornfields, to arrive at the school. Across the street, along a row of almost identical modest post-war suburban homes, an older White man in a striped short-sleeved button down shirt and old cap sits on a John Deere tractor mowing his meticulously kept lawn. Three flags (the United States flag, the Christian flag and a flag displaying the school logo) fly tall and proud at the entrance to the school. I feel as though I've driven through a time portal back to the 1950s.

In 2017, Middelburg Christian School celebrated its 100-year anniversary. Much like other Christian schools in the area, it started out humble and small with only a handful of students and a couple of teachers in a one or two-room building. The one-story tan brick structure that currently houses the Preschool through 4th grade was built in the 1950s and remains much the same on both the inside and the outside as when it was first erected. As part of its 100-year celebration, the school set up a display in one of the hallways showcasing old photographs of the various school buildings and growing student body over the past century. A banner, presumably from a previous historical celebration hung high over the table bearing the message, "1st Grade Honors the Legacy of the White Building." Though obviously

referring to the color of the original school's exterior, the comical irony of this proclamation simply cannot be overlooked. This is a very White place.

During my time at the school, I had the opportunity to sit down and talk with the Superintendent and acting Elementary Principal, Bill Smith. I found him to be refreshingly honest about Middelburg's lack of racial and ethnic diversity, at one point joking that, "around here, diversity is which Christian Reformed Church do you go to." He also explained that the school's roughly 15% non-White population was mostly made up of what he also jokingly referred to as, "White Black kids," or Black children who were adopted by White families. Indeed, in my self-guided tour of the school building, with the exception of the occasional one of those "White Black kid's" brown-skinned self-portrait, the main images of racial and ethnic diversity on display in the school were those that could be purchased from a store. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's take a tour of the building.

The main entrance to the school leads directly into a reception area. In addition to a front desk and some seating, the space also contains the offices of the school leadership. This collection of rooms looked to be recently renovated with new, and out-of-place looking modern furniture and generic decorations on the walls. It reminded me of a hotel lobby. There was nothing about it that would distinguish it from the lobby of any other public building, school or otherwise. The main receptionist was a middle aged White woman and I saw only White people working there. On a table in the seating area, there was a collection of school literature as well as the yearbook from the previous school year. Flipping through the pages of the yearbook, my suspicions were confirmed. The entire teaching staff is White, including a very blonde-haired, blue-eyed Spanish teacher. No hay mucha diversidad aqui.

Exiting the lobby I found myself in a large, non-descript space with no physical markers except for a permanent Middelburg Christian School sign mounted on the light grey brick wall consisting of a logo of a cross and the slogan “Challenging minds and lives for Christ.” That large empty area led into the two main hallways of the school, one for early childhood and lower elementary classrooms and the other for grades 2-4. Two hallways diverged from a cavernous entryway and the one I chose... made absolutely no difference whatsoever.

The hallways were mostly unremarkable. They were clean and orderly, wide and straight, lined with small lockers for individual students, many with their names and pictures on them. Above the lockers were brightly colored bulletin boards, all decorated meticulously. Touring through the rest of the school, I found the majority of my notes focusing on the bulletin boards. The brick walls and formica floors are generic and forgettable, and the bulletin boards, found on almost every single wall of the school, provide a blank canvas on which the teachers and staff can plaster their identity. To provide fodder for these distinctive displays, each year Middelburg Christian Schools adopt a new theme. Most of these themes are derived from familiar Bible verses or Christian doctrine, and all can be easily reduced to simple platitudes and incorporated into just about everything, from bulletin boards to parent letters to t-shirts to chapel services. The year I visited, the school’s theme was “The One.” Referring to God as “The One” is a very common exhortation in Reformed Christian circles, and I suspect many evangelical Christian communities, generally. There are several Bible passages which use this phrasing for God, most notably Deuteronomy 6:4 which reads, “Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!” In a parent newsletter I picked up during my visit, teachers and staff wrote stories referencing The One in the following contexts: Jesus is

the ONE way to get into heaven, God is the ONE who gives us what we need, He is the ONE who leads us, and the ONE who is faithful. And that was just on the first page.

Getting back to our previously scheduled tour... the aforementioned above-locker bulletin boards were used for one of three purposes. The first was, of course, to convey the school's theme for the year. There were many creative visual metaphors teachers used to do this. For example, one board utilized the image of a potted plant growing leaves and roots to portray how a Christian individual might grow closer to "The One." It featured the questions, "Are you growing in your faith? Who is helping you grow? Are you helping others grow closer to God?" The center of the board had a hand drawn plant in a pot, presumably representing the teacher, with a large yellow sun above it labeled "The One." Then, there were seven watering cans pouring onto the plant, each with a different label, including things like Church, Family, Parents and finally, a Man's Name – most likely the teacher's husband. For more information on that charming little detail, see: Patriarchy.

In addition to the themed bulletin boards, each classroom typically had one bulletin board dedicated to welcoming the students in the classroom. One particularly impressive board had a large train on it, with the engine displaying the message, "welcome aboard the first grade express!" It was followed by four primary color train cars with the words, "reading, writing, friends and fun!" written on them, respectively. The caboose contained a Bible verse from the book of Proverbs and finally, there were little suitcases decorating the rest of the board, each with a student's name on them. It should be noted that almost all of the bulletin boards like this utilized pre-made clip-art, borders and graphics that one could purchase at a traditional teacher or art and craft store. In fact, the shape and look of these decorations reminded me exactly of the bulletin boards from my own elementary school experience. My

mom was a teacher at the Christian elementary school I attended and I have many memories of helping her staple up those ubiquitous wavy border strips. You know the ones.

Finally, the remaining classroom-adjacent bulletin boards were used as a place to display a collection of rotating student artwork and school projects. When I was there they contained an eclectic mix of art, including student self-portraits – several of which portrayed students holding guns and standing in front of the American flag. It was jarring to see these violent crayon drawings hung next to humorous ripped paper interpretations of elephants and whimsical word art collages. Even now as I type this, I get a pit in my stomach thinking about those self-portraits, so proudly sketched and uncritically hung up in the face of the increasing prevalence of student-perpetrated gun violence on school campuses across the country.

The early childhood hallway featured a designated science room with workshop-style tables and adorable little White lab coats hanging on pegs on the wall. Elementary classes can go here to conduct experiments and pursue scientific inquiry with more space and resources than a traditional classroom. Outside the room was a cheeky yet earnest bulletin board proclaiming, “you take up space, you are made of atoms, you have mass,” all flanking the crowning message, “You ‘Matter’ to God.” I could not help but smile – but then, I have always been partial to puns.

To get to the school’s library, you follow a series of small dim corridors to arrive in a somewhat charmless and windowless space, lined with dark wood bookshelves and boasting canned posters and decorations on multiple bulletin boards, most with varying exhortations on the importance of reading - dripping with desperation in the digital age where attracting young people’s attention is fierce competition. The bulletin board that catches my eye on the way out the door is stuck with a 3D cardboard model of The Holy Bible and displays the

phrase, “The One Book Written by The One.” I felt my eyes roll back into my head - desperation, indeed.

In addition to the school name and logo on the wall near the entry, there are only two permanent displays of art in the school. The first is a small bronze statue located outside the entrance titled, “Journey to Imagination.” It portrays a small boy wearing untied tennis shoes, goggles and a cape and pretending to fly on a paper airplane. The second permanent art display is a stained glass installation next to a door leading to a small courtyard play area used for early childhood education. On it, a pale-skinned White Jesus holds a staff with one hand and a baby lamb in the other. A variegated blue sky shines out behind him and the familiar words of Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd,” are etched in his purple robes. I was initially surprised when I came upon this window at the shade of brown glass used for Jesus’ skin. However, I realized quickly, this was only due to my angle of view, with the tan brick exterior wall jetting out behind it. Viewed straight on, with only the light shining in from behind, his skin was as fair and peachy as the storybook Bibles I grew up reading always depicted him.

During the time I visited, the students and teachers were mostly in their rooms; however, when they did venture out, they proceeded in orderly lines and without incident. Though, I did receive a few friendly waves and several enthusiastic hellos from students and teachers, respectively. At least two of the classrooms I walked past were playing Christian contemporary music from a small stereo. Eager students sang along loudly, confidently off-key, to the canned generic beats that vaguely resembled hip-hop or gospel music, but without any of the risky social context or commentary. My only other direct human contact came from a janitor who swept past me while I was taking pictures of one of the bulletin boards. He remarked how his wife had done the same thing during their visit to The Creation Museum.

Apparently, there were so many plaques with simply too much [mis]information to read and take in on just one visit.

Before getting back in my car to head home, I went for a short walk around the exterior of the building to observe the grounds. Other than part of the building currently under construction for a new gym, the surrounding area was well-groomed and clean with a playground full of shiny new equipment. I admired the freshly mowed grass and choked a little as the fragrant smell of new fertilizer application wafted through the air and burned my lungs.

Conservatism

Middelburg Christian Elementary School represents the type of school I would imagine many people think of when they think of Christian education. It may be cliché or obvious to tie my analysis of the structure I observed to conservatism in America. But considering that, according to Pew Forum Data, 85% of political conservatives identify as Christians, it would be irresponsible not to interrogate how conservative ideologies are tied up in the public presentation of Christian education institutions. In the case of Middelburg Christian Elementary School, conservative ideologies are woven tightly into their institutional identity, both through the structure of the building itself as well as how the teachers, staff and students inhabit it.

Scholarship from the last thirty to forty years suggests that the core defining characteristics of conservative ideologies in the United States include an emphasis on policies that promote order, stability, and prioritize the needs of businesses. Furthermore, conservatives typically consider people to be inherently unequal and subscribe to ideas of meritocracy and are therefore content with an uneven distribution of wealth and resources in society. Finally,

conservatives esteem tradition, respect authority, and are characteristically satisfied with the status quo (Erikson, Luttbeg, & Tedin, 1988; Jost et al., 2003; McClosky & Zaller, 1984).

In my research on the history of conservative thought, I came across an article written by Ketcham in 1955 that presents a somewhat romantic, and certainly uncritical, vision of conservatism that is nevertheless consistent with much of the characteristics of the current conservative political identity listed above. As the school's first impression is very much one that is unchanged from its 1950s identity, using an article written in the 1950s to begin my analysis seemed an appropriate choice. Ketcham begins his essay with a five-part definition of conservative or "traditional" thought that I will now use to help me explicate how Middelburg Christian School embodies traditional principles of conservatism in their public structure and identity. Following this, I will complicate and critique these simplistic definitions of conservative ideology and explain how conservatism (and therefore also traditional Christian schooling) and White supremacy in the United States are inextricably linked.

In the first place and perhaps most importantly, the traditionalists insist that the history of mankind is full of wisdom and that its lessons ought not to be lost in the rush to discover new things and overcome the so-called "dead hand of the past." There is a preference, as Irving Babbitt has said, for "the wisdom of the ages to the wisdom of the age." The revival of tradition has as one of its principal functions the preservation, understanding, and transmission of this wisdom (p. 425).

In many ways, it is no surprise that so many Christians identify with conservative ideologies given that the text on which they base their entire existence was purportedly written over two thousand years ago. Well-known and loved Bible verses permeate the public identity of Middelburg Christian School. Nearly every bulletin board or poster has a Bible verse quoted on

it somewhere. Next to the aforementioned bulletin board in the library boasting about the Holy Bible, for example, there is another banner that proclaims, “In the beginning was the Word.” Bible verses – like this one from the Gospel of John presented completely without context and instead tied to the generic idea of literature and reading in a school library – serve to enforce the idea that there is one way to interpret the Bible and that its meaning is consistent throughout history. Indeed, all of the public messages about faith, religion, spirituality and the Bible in the school have to be boiled down to something that can be easily displayed on a bulletin board. While it is certainly possible, and probably even likely, that inside individual classrooms, teachers are adding depth and complexity to Biblical truths with their students, the “bulletin board spirituality” that permeates Middelburg Christian sends a powerful message to students, teachers, parents and visitors alike about the character of Christian faith. The Christian identity is presented as fixed and static, easily conforming to the theme for each year, which is dictated from above with no controversy or challenge.

Secondly, in facing the crucial question of the nature of man, the traditionalist is deeply impressed with human fallibility, with the irrationality of passions and impulses, and with the stubborn presence of evil in the world (p. 426).

I have already written on the Reformed doctrine of total depravity and so this facet of conservative thought is also easy to connect to Christian education. At Middelburg, its public manifestation is subtle, but powerful. All of the bulletin boards that depicted the school’s yearly theme of “The One” were geared towards ordering worldly impulses. There was, of course, the image of teacher as a plant growing straight and tall toward The One with the help of the institutions of church, school and marriage. Another board proudly proclaimed “we will never be done learning about the One” and inside a large cutout #1 were various exhortations about God

including, “He is the one who gives us all we need” and “He is the one who leads us.” A similar board next to it contained a bunch of one-word descriptions for God including, “powerful, strong, and unchanging.” One particularly artistic interpretation showed a watercolor painting of a treasure map with a large compass in the middle. In place of East, South and West were the words “Way, Truth, and Life” while the true north pointed proudly to the image of a cross with the “the One” written on it. Around the compass were the names of every student in the class. Finally, one board portrayed a country road with each student’s name written on a car, all driving in a single file line in the same direction towards the phrase, “We will follow the 1.” Each of these bulletin boards communicates the idea that humans are lost without God, incapable of growth or goodness without a strict orientation toward Biblical ideas and principles.

Thirdly, and closely related to a sense of human limitation, is a recognition of the complexity and variety of both individual people and particular societies. In Burke's words, "the nature of man is intricate and ... his society complex." Instead of being depressed with the difficulties this complexity presents in solving life's problems, the traditionalist finds it the source of much of the zest and "kick" it is possible to get out of life (p.426).

This third feature of conservatism at first glance seems to present a direct contradiction to the other messages of faith and belief that permeate Middelburg Christian school. But both my observations of the school as well as my own experiences with Christian education confirm that this contradiction is alive and well in Christian institutions. The school building itself is as drab and neutral as a school building could be, with beige floors and neutral brick walls stretching out as far as the eye can see. As such, before you encounter the worded messages on the bulletin boards and signs, the first things that catch your eye are the bright and vibrant colors that

decorate them. In addition to the vivid and lively images and colors, the word “fun” appeared on these boards more times than I could count. I have already noted the humorous pun on the science room bulletin board. Outside the music room, the bulletin board proclaimed simply and boldly, “Music makes me smile!” And several of the bulletin boards dedicated to welcoming the students to their individual classrooms were based loosely on popular animated movies for kids, such as the undersea themed board that replaced the familiar mantra of a certain famous Disney fish, with the phrase, “Just keep *learning*... Just keep *learning*...” Student artwork and projects are displayed proudly and completely uncritically, even those that many might find problematic or offensive such as the portraits of students wearing camo and brandishing weapons of war. My experience growing up in Christian schools and churches confirms this tendency toward lightheartedness over criticality. For example, every year around Thanksgiving, my Facebook feed is filled with images of Christian school children wearing the same construction paper feather headdresses we made and wore when I was a child and celebrating the, now very easy to debunk, lie of the first Thanksgiving and the harmony between the Pilgrims and the Indians. Attempting to call into question the validity of or even potential harm in these types of traditions, or in the case of Middelburg Christian, the potential problem with the displaying of commercial or violent images, would likely elicit eye rolls and not a few exclamations of, “It’s innocent fun! We’ve been doing it for years and it’s never been a problem! Don’t overthink it!”

Fourthly, the revival of tradition appropriately returns to the simple and forthright view of freedom which antedates the state supervised idea of freedom which has been in vogue increasingly during the 20th century. Totalitarianism has been defined as that society where everything which is not forbidden is compulsory. The traditionalist says frankly

that both prohibitions and compulsions on individuals should be kept to a minimum (p.427).

That Middelburg Christian School even exists at all is an example of the conservative value of freedom from the state. It is a private institution and there is very little intrusion of the state in the public identity of the school. I saw no reference to curriculum standards or student rights displayed. Outside the building the Christian and American flags are flown at equal heights. America is certainly venerated in conservative Christian schools, but largely for the freedom it provides that makes those schools possible.

Fifthly, the traditionalist is not reactionary, or even simply static. The attitude is one of tinkering and practical revision rather than one of sweeping change and extensive social engineering (p. 428).

The school's logo and tagline, inscribed on the wall of the entryway, is "challenging minds and lives for Christ." This mantra includes the word challenge, which typically has connotations of bucking the status quo, but it is couched in the context of the identity of Christ, which we have observed, at Middelburg Christian, has a very particular and unchanging quality. Thus, the school can safely nod to the idea of engaging changing attitudes and ideas in society, but also retain traditional ideas of who Christ is and what it means to believe and follow him. Similarly, as the school body itself remains mostly homogeneous, teachers and staff can also safely nod to changing attitudes towards racial and ethnic diversity by purchasing controlled and comforting images of diversity at a store, such as the poster framed and hung in the library corridor that featured eight colorful children holding hands under the phrase, "children love each other, children love the world," or the three small posters hanging above a bucket of playground toys directing children to, "be quick to forgive," "talk it over," and "think before you act," each

featuring a cartoon image of a rosy-cheeked and smiling child in one of three shades of brown skin.

Mid-century writing and analysis on conservatism in the United States tends to paint an idealistic picture of the movement's concerns and commitments. R. C. Smith (2010) argues that scholars like Ketcham tend to portray conservatism as a set of "enduring principles, usually derived from Burke but in some cases traced to Plato and the Ancients" (p. 8). However, as R. C. Smith unpacks in his book on conservatism and racism in America, conservatism is best understood in reactionary terms – its tenets depend on a concrete set of circumstances in a particular location or situation. After all, applying even the most basic of critical analysis leads one to the inevitable question, what and whose values are we conserving anyway? R. C. Smith (2010) writes, "Conservatism as an ideology is thus a reaction to a system under challenge, a defense of the status-quo in a period of intense ideological and social conflict" (p. 9). Smith then spends the rest of his book arguing that the chief social challenge that conservatism has defined itself against over the course of United States history is racial equality, making the compelling case that, in America, conservatism and racism are the same. Recent scholarship on conservatism in America confirms that one of the chief characteristics that distinguishes conservatives from liberals in terms of their political ideology is their position on equality (Jost et. al. 2003). However, it remains unclear how many conservatives are conscious of their ideological commitment to racism and White supremacy. It is very easy to hide behind the comforting ideals of tradition, consistency and generational wisdom if one remains uncritical of exactly whose wisdom and traditions one is embracing. In the case of Middelburg Christian School, this issue is compounded by problematic commitment to Biblical ideals as being consistent and unchanging.

In chapter five, I will discuss in more detail how these Biblical ideals and traditions are also rooted in Whiteness and White supremacy.

In my interview with Middelburg Christian Schools Superintendent Bill Smith, he mentioned how important it was for his staff to be “on message”, referring to the vision and mission of the school. Middelburg Christian reflects conservative values of stability and tradition by cultivating and repeating that message, year after year. Staying on message makes Middelburg’s faith commitments clear and easy to consume. In addition, by adopting a new theme for each year, the school’s message can *appear* fresh and dynamic, while also remaining comfortable and familiar. In fact, Middelburg’s reliance on heavily curated bulletin boards to display the school’s message feels almost performative. The messages are reassuring and appealing, but also somewhat detached from reality, the canned images of diversity being the chief example. In the end, Middelburg’s teachers can hang up all the laminated posters of smiling brown-faced children holding hands that money can buy, but Jesus will always be a White dude in purple robes holding a lamb.

CRCES, Shawnee Campus: A Settler Colonial Project

I walk over to the school at 8am on a crisp and sunny Friday morning. The quiet city neighborhood has been momentarily invaded by rows of large shiny black SUVs, all lined up along the winding roads to deposit their smiling-faced (mostly White) children, who pour into the brand-new building, decorated with remnants from the historic public high school that it razed and replaced.

“...settler colonialism is an ongoing project that must continually code, decode and recode social norms and social spaces...” (J. Smith, 2011, p. 111).

In the 1920s a group of city planners and architects set out to design and create an idyllic new neighborhood, a “garden city” at the edge of the city of Crown Ridge. They would position it just beyond the reach of the streetcar lines and charge almost twice the typical home price in the city for one of the neighborhood’s grand brick houses. In the center of the neighborhood, they built a beautiful green park and a large public school. The wide streets (designed with automobiles in mind) radiated in concentric circles around the park and school, the houses boasted large front yards and there were no visible power lines permitted. Legend had it that this area was once the camping grounds of an Algonquian tribe led by Chief Tecumseh. As a nod to its original inhabitants, they would name the neighborhood and school, Algonquian Hills. They decorated the school building itself with Native American paraphernalia and motifs, including several carvings on the pillars at the main entrance of generic Native American people and scenes. They declared its mascot to be an Indian. They called the park, Tecumseh Field. And they named the surrounding streets, Seminole, Pontiac, Menominee, Chippewa, and Shawnee.

After it was built, the neighborhood mostly retained its White upper middle-class prestige and desirability even as desegregation caused massive White flight to the suburbs. The school, pulling from the larger surrounding area, however, went from a majority White population to a majority Black population over the course of several decades. In the 1970s, Algonquian Hills High School officially moved to a larger building about three miles South (and changed their mascot to a tiger). It now has the reputation of being one of the lowest performing public schools in the city, serving a majority Black and high poverty population. Over the next thirty years, the original Algonquian Hills school building would house a few different public elementary and middle schools and undergo several shoddy renovations.

Finally, in 2009 it was purchased by Crown Ridge Christian Schools, torn down and replaced with their new elementary campus. Local news articles from the time reported that Algonquian Hills residents were thrilled with the decision, presumably because it would ensure a particular set of (White, upper middle class) values remained in place, with one resident purportedly excited that a, “vibrant school will anchor the neighborhood.” (citations from this section withheld to ensure anonymity)

The land on which the Algonquian Hills neighborhood and subsequent school buildings were erected was already long since settled and occupied, with the indigenous populations wiped out. But the colonial project is always ongoing. The CRCES Shawnee Campus is marked by a continuing commitment to settler colonial paradigms, which I will now examine.

“In settler colonialism, the object is to acquire land and to gain control of resources. To realize these ambitions, the first thing that must be done is to eliminate the indigenous occupants of the land... The second thing that must be done is to secure the land for settlers” (Glenn, 2015, p. 55).

The entryway and lobby of the building is an open and airy space with several tables, couches and chairs for visitors. Light pours in from a wall of two-story windows that feature a geometric stained-glass installation titled, The Light of Learning Window. The installation is made up of glass shapes in various cool-toned colors. Four purple glass rectangles display the mantras, “eyes to see,” “ears to hear,” “hands to do,” and “hearts to understand.” And seven large pale blue glass circles exhibit etchings with various educational themes. In addition to one circle containing the names of previous Christian elementary schools that merged to form this campus, there are six circles representing traditional school subjects, including

mathematical symbols, music notes, scientific measurements, punctuation marks, Bible verses, and finally a “social studies” circle including a number of important dates. The largest date on the circle is 4BC, the supposed year of Christ’s birth. The second largest is 2010AD, which is the year the school building was completed. The next two largest and most discernable dates on the circle are 1776AD and 1492AD, followed by an only-slightly-smaller 1620AD. Those well-versed in U.S. History trivia will recognize those as the signing date of the Declaration of Independence and birthdate of the United States, the year “Columbus sailed the ocean blue,” and the year the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, respectively. The plaque hanging next to the window explains, “The Light of Learning Window stands as a lasting reminder of our rich heritage and our mission to provide students with an education infused with the light of God.”

And speaking of that rich heritage, on the wall opposite the stained-glass installation hang four framed posters of modern artistic interpretations of the American flag. A plaque explains that the posters were created by various artists in 2014 in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Star Spangled Banner and were generously donated by two local philanthropists.

There are two main hallways leading away from the entryway to the rest of the school building. To pass through to the area containing the upper elementary classrooms, you must first reckon with yet another permanent heritage-themed installation. It is a floor-to-ceiling display protected by glass panels featuring a black backdrop with nine black and White photos presented in a line across the center. Each photo portrays one of the historical elementary school buildings (the oldest dating back to 1855) that preceded CRCES Shawnee Campus. As you lean in to look at the photos, the final detail of the installation becomes apparent. The

black backdrop is not solid, but rather imprinted with thousands of names, in straight rows, one after the other. The effect is similar to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC, except the only sacrifice all these people made came from their bank accounts; as yet another plaque explains, they are the names of all the donors that made the building of the Shawnee Campus financially possible.

And, as if that were not enough of a tribute to all of the wealthy men and women who bankrolled the building, almost every single room in the school has a plaque installed next to the door inscribed with a donor's name and their favorite Bible verse.

As scholars point out, one of the primary ways that settlers secure indigenous land for themselves is by transforming land and resources (and sometimes people) into things that can be owned (Glenn, 2015; A. Smith, 2012; Hixson, 2013). A property regime, Glenn (2015) explains, “consists of such elements as mapping and marking boundaries to delimit an object that is to be owned, a system for recording ownership, and legal rules for ownership and sale of objects defined as property” (p. 55.) The prominence given to donors, both by plastering their names on plaques around the building as well as by prioritizing and proudly displaying their gifts – like the American flag posters – solidifies the Shawnee Campus' place in the American property regime. It also subtly enforces what Glenn (2015) calls “a hierarchy of humankind.” No doubt the vast majority of these donors whose names decorate the building are both wealthy and White. Their contributions are esteemed higher than any other piece of art or ephemera that might be taped or pinned up on the wall; their names are quite literally etched in stone.

The Light of Learning Window reflects the other critical component of settler colonialism, the eradication of indigenous peoples. Obviously, the powers that be at CRCES Shawnee are not responsible for the original extermination of the Native American tribes that

once lived where their school now stands; however, as mentioned previously, settler colonialism is an ongoing project. The Light of Learning Window displays a set of important historical dates, conspicuously missing anything that happened in between Jesus' birth and White people discovering America and founding the United States. Native American history is completely eradicated in the context of what is important to be learned in this educational institution. Various iterations of both the consumption and eradication of indigenous peoples and cultures are present throughout the rest of the building, to which we will turn now.

“settler colonialism obscures the conditions of its own production” (Veracini, 2010, p. 78)

Both the exterior and interior of the CRCES Shawnee Campus are embellished with salvaged remnants of the old Algonquian Hills High School structure, many of which have some reference to Native American art and motifs. There are large patterned tiles embedded into the brick around the exterior, tall marble scrolls that flanked the original building's exterior decorate the new lobby area, several carved Byzantine style pillars are installed along one hallway and a mosaic fishpond remains from the old Kindergarten room. The Native American carvings that decorated the pillars of the original entryway were apparently in too much disrepair to be salvaged, but they are nevertheless memorialized in a six-foot tall watercolor painting of the old entrance, created by a former Algonquian Hills High School student, that hangs proudly in the main stairwell leading to the second floor.

It was very common for White settler colonial societies to appropriate indigenous symbols, attributes and even skills while at the same time calling for and participating in the annihilation of indigenous peoples. For example, western cowboys wore buckskin and adopted Native American hunting and gathering techniques along with their weapons and fighting styles (Glenn, 2015; Hixson, 2013). Native appropriation continues relentlessly to

this day, of course, in various forms including fashion, design and architecture. (Think: feathers, turquoise, headdresses, moccasins, dream catchers and teepees.) Appropriation is just another form of annihilation, one that allows settlers to distort and deny our violent history. Settlers romanticize Native communities and culture in popular narratives and decorate street signs and sports teams with their names and faces. Doing this serves to absorb what remains of indigenous communities, after they were either murdered or marginalized, into the dominant culture. And this, Hixson (2013) argues, allows a “national mythology [to displace] the indigenous past” (p. 11). Essentially, it allows for White Americans to, “elide their actual historical role as invaders and conquerors of colonial space.” He explains,

Historical distortion and denial are endemic to settler colonies. In order for the settler colony to establish a collective usable past, legitimating stories must be created and persistently affirmed as a means of naturalizing a new historical narrative (p. 11).

In order to promulgate this historical distortion, settlers needed to conceive of indigenous peoples as lesser beings. And so a hierarchy of humanity was born, placing White settlers at the top of the totem pole (forgive me – I told you I liked puns) and allowing us to proudly imagine ourselves, “as the inheritors of a “New World” and cultivators of a “virgin land”” (Hixson, p. 12). Today, this “new historical narrative” is mostly transmitted through ignorance and erasure. As in the case of The Light of Learning Window, we simply skip over or do not acknowledge large chunks of our shameful history.

There is a large common area on the second floor of CRCES, Shawnee that upper elementary grades use for various communal purposes. One wall of the room is lined with small grey-blue plastic tubs filled with books on various topics that students can presumably borrow whenever they want. The topics are labeled crudely with marker and index cards and include

common elementary-age child interests such as volcanoes, sharks, the solar system and dogs.

There is a tub labeled *Our Country* and it is filled with books about US government and profiles of well-loved presidents. Two bins down, there is one labeled *Native Americans*. In this row of educational texts, indigenous peoples are not part of our country's past or our present. They are relegated to some mythic space and place, detached from a too-painful-to-admit reality.

“This logic holds that indigenous peoples must disappear; in fact, they must *always* be disappearing...” (A. Smith, 2012, p. 69)

So, what kind of public identity is CRCES Shawnee espousing as it erases the past and present realities of its namesake? Glenn (2015) explains, “what emerged out of the settler colonial project was a racialized and gendered national identity that normalized male Whiteness” (p. 58). As it turns out, the project of normalizing male Whiteness, and American Whiteness generally, is in full effect at Shawnee. Here are a few examples.

Like most Christian schools, indeed like the one previously profiled in this chapter, CRCES Shawnee features a stained-glass installation of Jesus. The stained glass portrays more than just Jesus himself, however; it also features several children. There is a Bible verse from Isaiah spelled out along the bottom border that reads, “and all thy children shall be taught of the Lord.” Jesus sits in the center of the glass, wearing red and white robes and sandals. His hair is brown and long and he has a beard, but his skin is slightly darker than the typical peachy-hued Jesus typically seen in such renderings. Maybe he got a tan from the rays of yellow sun bursting out from behind him. Anyway, out of the five children in the piece, the two children closest to Jesus have the palest skin. A White boy with blonde hair stands comfortably to his right side while he gently embraces a White girl with brown hair on his left. Standing in front of Jesus and the two White kids is a small Black girl, staring demurely

up at Jesus, holding a bouquet of flowers. The remaining two children are pictured entirely outside the interaction with Jesus, both in the grass on opposite sides of the picture. A boy with vaguely Asian features sits reading a book and looking down at a White bunny, while a girl with dark reddish-brown skin and black hair, parted in the middle, sits aimlessly next to a bush.

The next example involves one of the most perplexing things I observed in my time at Shawnee. On the second floor off in a corner near the end of the main hallway there is a large round pillar. The top half of the pillar is covered with small White square tiles each with a child's self-portrait painted on it. I found out from the administrative assistant that all of the children who came from the four elementary campuses that merged together to form Shawnee got to paint their own tile and that the pillar is supposed to symbolize unity in the school. All of that is fairly straightforward, but it was the bottom half of the pillar that I found particularly bewildering. The words "Jesus loves all of us" were wrapped around the very top of the pillar, nodding to the idea of unity. And all around the bottom were portraits (obviously also created by young students) of men and women in a variety of ethnic apparel and with varying shades of skin. The perplexing thing was how the character of the clothing the people were wearing, their facial features and their skin color seemed to have no relationship to each other. There was a light peachy-skinned man wearing a turban, a man with almond-shaped eyes wearing a Russian fur hat, and a brown-skinned woman with black hair wearing a dress that resembled a dirndl. It was also unclear exactly what all these ambiguously ethnic folks had to do with the message at the top of the pillar about school unity. Of course, its easy to chalk it up to the fact that it was probably made by a bunch of 8-year-olds, but the whole

thing looked so silly and bizarre that it had the ultimate effect of otherizing pretty much every ethnic identity that it attempted to portray.

Finally, one of the selling points at CRCES, Shawnee for prospective families is their Spanish Immersion program, which starts students in preschool in classrooms where only Spanish is spoken. Many White families have jumped on this bandwagon and language immersion programs are becoming increasingly common at both private and public schools in the area. Touring through the school, it was very obvious which classrooms were part of the Spanish immersion program as they all had bright and colorful Spanish-themed student art and projects on display outside. Each display had a very “food, fabric, festival” effect, reducing the study of the Spanish language to trite nods to multiculturalism. On one wall outside the second grade Spanish immersion classrooms there was a collection of student book reports. All of the books profiled were from well-known American children’s fiction series that had been translated into Spanish, but that were originally written in English by White authors

All three of these examples center Whiteness in both similar and distinct ways. They all employ and conflate the concepts of racial and ethnic diversity. Briefly, Omi and Winant (2015) explain how both race and ethnicity are social constructions that originated and continue to function as a way to distinguish and center Whiteness. In the early 20th century, biological conceptions of race that elevated White skin and White corporeal features as being genetically distinct and superior were losing coherence thanks to challenges by Black scholars, progressivists and sociologists. In addition, Whiteness as a social category in the United States had previously belonged exclusively to and had been deeply entwined with Puritanism, the religious affiliation of original settlers who belonged to an orthodox Protestant

(specifically, Calvinist) sect. But the early 1900s saw an influx of non-English and non-Protestant immigrants who presented the U.S. with new challenges of both living with and overcoming cultural differences. Ethnic theory evolved over the course of the past century in various ways. While it first began as a way to explain and assimilate various European cultural groups into Whiteness, it was eventually adopted into the neoconservative “colorblind” racial project. Most school’s attempts at “multicultural education” fall into this paradigm. As Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) explain, conservative multiculturalism privileges White Anglo-Saxon Protestant norms and uses them as an invisible measurement stick on which all other cultural norms are measured and examined. Whiteness is not included as an ethnicity; its cultural characteristics are presented as normal or neutral and are thus, invisible. In schools adopting this multicultural paradigm, the study of non-White ethnic cultures is almost always presented as an add-on to the traditional curriculum. As Omi and Winant (2015) explain,

the default to Whiteness has gradually been revealed as the true message of the ethnicity paradigm of racial theory. Being “ethnic” turns out to be about whether and how much an individual or group can assimilate into or hybridize with Whiteness. Being “racial” is about how much difference there is between an individual or a group and their White counterparts (p. 46).

There is a bulletin board outside the Preschool classrooms at Shawnee that serves as both an advertisement for and introduction to the early childhood program at CRCES. The bulletin board includes pictures and profiles of the Five Guiding Principles of the program, including: Teacher’s Role, Teaching and Learning, Image of the Child of God, Environment, and finally, Parents, Family and Community. On the paper detailing that last guiding

principle, it reads, “[CRCES Shawnee] is a Christian community that welcomes diversity and is surrounded by prayer.” At Shawnee, diversity, whether cultural, ethnic, racial, or some conflation of the three, is always something on the outside to be welcomed in. Its commitment to celebrating difference is mostly decorative, often ambiguous and even sometimes, confusing. But its commitment to Whiteness is as strong as the comforting arms of Jesus’ embrace.

“...no one colonizes innocently, no one colonizes with impunity either; a nation which colonizes, a civilization which justifies colonization... is already a sick civilization, a civilization that is morally diseased...” (Césaire, 1972)

The important role that Christians and Christianity played in various forms of violent colonialism all over the world is well-documented. In the case of the indigenous peoples of America, Rothenberg (2010) notes, “the intent to civilize the natives of this continent included a determined effort to Christianize them” (p. 501). In the 1800s, the U.S. Congress regularly appropriated funds to Christian missionaries for this exact purpose. Some of those funds would go to support boarding schools, many of which were run by Christian missionaries, to which Native American children would be sent with the explicit purpose of assimilating them to White Christian culture by suppressing and destroying their own rich cultural customs and practices.

While their methods have certainly evolved into more humanizing and culturally affirming practices, the impulse to convert is still an alive and well-funded endeavor in Reformed Christianity. Towards the end of my visit, I was wandering down a hallway admiring some student artwork and a bulletin board caught my eye. From a distance I could make out a map of the world decorated with colorful push-pins, each connecting a strand of

yarn to a little index card and a picture. I assumed this was evidence of the aforementioned “value of diversity” and a celebration of all the different parts of the world from which CRCES Shawnee students traced their heritage. Moving closer to the board, however, my assumptions were challenged. It was actually a bulletin board identifying and celebrating all of the different countries around the world to which the Christian Reformed Church sends missionaries. And while there were pins on almost every continent, almost all of the celebrated missionaries were White. A few steps down from this bulletin board was a student-created mural celebrating what Christians call, The Great Commission. The display featured a green paper hill in the center topped off with a brown paper cross. Written on the hill in black marker were the familiar words of Matthew 28: “Go make disciples of all nations...” Surrounding the hill were red and yellow paper rectangles, all decorated with cutouts of children. Smiley faces were crudely scribbled on the several shades of brown and peach construction paper used for their round faces. Red and yellow flames symbolizing the Holy Spirit were taped to the top of their heads. All of their clothes were cutout in the shape of angel’s robes.

The uncritical reverence for continued conversion of non-Christian peoples both here and abroad ensures the survival of the settler colonial project. Native American peoples were decidedly not Christians and so, regardless of how much Christians might repent for their role in Indigenous Genocide hundreds of years ago, they are still committed to the idea that their religion and beliefs are superior to all others today. In chapter five, I will look further at the public reverence for Christian conversion over and above any consideration for its racist and White supremacist implications.

Shepherd's Grove: Respectability Politics Reign

I am welcomed, not in the school, but across the street in a beautiful old brick home - perched up on a hill, renovated and well-appointed - out of place in the adjacent row of older wood-sided two-story homes, with their peeling paint and rickety porches. We sit in comfortable chairs separated by a carved wood coffee table in a formal sitting room with huge curtained bay windows looking down over the school building.

Politics of Respectability

As long as people of color have been struggling for equality in this White supremacist nation, they have been engaging in various forms of respectability politics. Lee & Hicken (2016) explain,

Engaging in behaviors that align with mainstream White, heterosexual, Judeo-Christian, middle class values has long been an adaptive strategy used by Black Americans in an attempt to avoid, or to at least to lessen discrimination and prejudice, ranging from the irritating to the life-threatening in a racialized and racially stratified society such as the United States (p. 421).

Often coded in the language of “racial uplift,” Black scholars, in particular, note that for Black citizens, engaging in respectability politics requires the disavowal of legitimate anger or rage over systems of inequality and injustice usually in exchange for minimal political representation and/or legislative action. Referring to respectability politics as, “the first resort of marginalized classes,” M. Smith (2014) expounds,

On the one hand, like all democratic politics, respectability politics seeks to realize collective aspirations whether grand (justice, equality, full participation) or pedestrian (balanced budget, community policing, bike paths). On the other, respectability

politics evince a distinct worldview: marginalized classes will receive their share of political influence and social standing not because democratic values and law require it but because they demonstrate their compatibility with the "mainstream" or non-marginalized class.

One major aspect of respectability politics involves the policing of marginalized communities' language. Boulton (2016), with the help of the original scholarship of Goffman (1981) and Gumperz (1982), explains this facet of respectability politics now commonly referred to as "code switching," which,

describes how speakers might modify their vocabulary and even shift their pitch, volume, rhythm, stress, or tonal quality to better accommodate the expectations of their listeners or conform to the context of perceived participant roles and relative power hierarchies of any given social interaction (p. 132).

In addition to alterations in language and speech, the concept of "code switching" can also refer to changes marginalized individuals make in their dress and appearance. Certainly the reader will recognize the familiar directive to young Black men to pull up their sagging pants or to stop wearing those suspicious-looking hoodies. Code-switching is in fact now such a well-acknowledged concept that there is a whole podcast named after it on NPR.

While many people today understand the pervasiveness of respectability politics (searching the term on Twitter, for example, will provide you with a plethora of opinions and rants on the topic), few are aware of where the concept and term originated. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham first conceptualized the politics of respectability in 1993 in her book, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. However, her treatment of the concept differs from the way it is typically understood today. Higginbotham had

written previously about the problematic ways in which people of color were expected to conform to White middle-class norms. She noted in a 1992 essay about the history of African American women and race,

Black women teachers, missionaries, and club members zealously promoted values of temperance, sexual repression, and polite manners among the poor. "Race work" or "racial uplift" equated normality with conformity to White middle-class models of gender roles and sexuality. Given the extremely limited educational and income opportunities during the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries, many black women linked mainstream domestic duties, codes of dress, sexual conduct, and public etiquette with both individual success and group progress. Black leaders argued that "proper" and "respectable" behavior proved blacks worthy of equal civil and political rights.

Conversely, nonconformity was equated with deviance and pathology and was often cited as a cause of racial inequality and injustice (p. 271).

Higginbotham, like most race scholars today, conceptualizes this type of respectability politics as part and parcel of systemic White supremacy. And unfortunately, many marginalized individuals buy into the value of respectability politics and chide members of their own racial groups as being to blame for society's discrimination against them (Bill Cosby's controversial 2004 address to the NAACP on the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court decision comes to mind). Higginbotham, however, draws a distinction between the toxic form of respectability politics that holds marginalized communities responsible for their own oppression for their failure to conform to the cultural standards of the majority and what she calls "the politics of respectability." Higginbotham's nuanced rendering of the concept is founded on her experience with lower-class Christian women in the American South. The politics have less

to do with the appearance of respectability and more to do with where one's notions of respectability originate. For the women in Higginbotham's study, their worth was inherent and God-given. It was not about what they owned or where they lived, but rather about who they knew themselves to be. In a 2015 interview with K. Foster on the news blog *For Harriet*, she explained,

The politics of respectability, and this is the key thing about it, gives you a moral authority to say to the outside world, "I am worthy of respect. You don't respect me, but I'm worthy of respect. You don't treat me like an equal person, but I know that I am an equal person, and because I am an equal person, I'm going to fight for my rights. I'm going to demand equality. I'm not going to let you treat me like a second-class citizen."

In that same interview, Higginbotham acknowledges that although complicated notions of respectability regarding things like dress and language are caught up in both understandings, she still wants to draw a line between performing respectably according to White middle class norms and actually possessing and living out respectable moral character.

Turns out that line – the one between Higginbotham's *politics of respectability* that affirm the inherent worth and dignity of its participants and conventional *respectability politics* that oblige participants to earn worth and dignity by the performance of mainstream social norms – is razor thin. In fact, it would be disingenuous to purport that scholars even agree where the line is or, indeed, whether such a line even exists. For the purposes of this project, we will assume there are some distinctions, however. In this section, I will examine how Shepherd's Grove, even as it might attempt to promote ideals more in line with Higginbotham's definition, more often than not reflects a problematic institutional adherence to conventional understandings of respectability politics that are rooted in White supremacy.

My experience of Shepherd's Grove was unique among the three schools that I visited because I was formally welcomed and shown around by the school's development associate, Neil Drake. Neil, a middle-aged White man, not only sat down with me for a brief interview in the school's hospitality house, but also gave me a personal tour of the entire school building before allowing me to wander around on my own. This section will therefore contain information acquired both from my conversation with Neil as well as from my own observations.

Within the first few minutes of our conversation, I already had clues as to which side of the line the politics of respectability at Shepherd's Grove might fall. We were making some slightly uncomfortable small talk and Neil mentioned a talent competition reality TV program he had caught the tail end of the previous night. In it, the mother of a contestant had been interviewed and told the story of how she and her daughter had been dealing with poverty for quite some time, struggling to make ends meet, and even at one point, living in their minivan. The mother tearfully recalled how she always put on a brave face for her daughter and tried to portray living in their car as a kind of adventure just to keep her spirits up. I quickly chimed in with a comment about how it was remarkable what parents will do to protect and care for their children. Neil agreed, but then admitted that, more than that, what he really admired was this mother's "attitude towards poverty." He mentioned that it was in line with how they view such things at Shepherd's Grove. Apparently not sensing my discomfort at what he was implying, he went on to explain how because of her attitude, she had gone from "victim to victorious." I paused for a second to contemplate a reply but decided instead just to change the subject. Let's learn about the history of Shepherd's Grove shall we?!

History

In the late 1970s some Christian Reformed missionaries were working with the ethnically diverse, low-income communities on the southwest side of Crown Ridge. They noticed that a consistent concern of their constituents was the lack of good educational opportunities in the area. So, they decided to pour all of their energy and funding into supporting the local neighborhood public schools. Wait, nope. They decided to start their own school, obviously. In 1981, two full-time teachers and 12 elementary students met in the basement of a church to form Shepherd's Grove School. Over the next ten years they grew, first purchasing and inhabiting their own school building, then expanding to offer middle school, and eventually a high school program as well. I toured the building that currently houses the preschool through eighth grade.

Shepherd's Grove elementary campus is located in an area of the city that was once largely populated by Dutch immigrants but is now predominantly Hispanic. The school is just up the road from a major commercial thoroughfare lined with Hispanic restaurants and markets. There is a large public elementary school just down the street named after Cesar E. Chavez. In line with its original mission to reach the diverse community on the southeast side, Shepherd's Grove currently boasts some pretty incredible racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity, with a large immigrant and refugee population, and students from over 35 different countries across grades K-12. They charge tuition based entirely on income and therefore rely heavily on outside donations to operate. They give admission preference to low income families and families who live in the immediate neighborhood of the school. If I applied to send my White upper-middle class daughter to the school, for example, we would very likely be put on a waitlist to give priority to the aforementioned demographic.

Shepherd's Grove is not a fancy school. The building is old and has not been updated for many years. There is very limited outdoor playground space for children to use. The hallways are dark and the classrooms are relatively small. But it is clear that Shepherd's Grove is proud of who they are and what they have accomplished. There are several installations in the elementary building that pay tribute to the school's history and mission. Along a hallway near the entrance there is a large collection of photographs that tell the history of the school, mostly through images of people. There are lots of photos of graduating classes, snapshots of various celebrations over the years, and club and sports team pictures. It is interesting to note that, although Shepherd's Grove relies much more heavily on donor money to operate (and they have some pretty high-profile donors, too, including a certain current Secretary of Education who shall not be named), unlike CRCES Shawnee, the school pays almost no visible tribute to donors inside the school building. The history/tribute wall at Shepherd's Grove does feature several pictures of the school's executive leaders, however, who, like Neil, are all middle-aged White men.

In addition to this yearbook-style memory wall, there is also a large painting installed along the main elementary hallway, which Neil explained serves as a kind of visual representation of the school's identity. It features and is dedicated to a beloved teacher who had recently passed away. On the left behind the portrait of this teacher are words from the Bible passage of Jeremiah 18. The rest of the painting depicts a group of young people, both boys and girls, with a variety of skin and hair colors, all working with clay or holding pottery of some kind. In the center of the image, working at a pottery wheel, is an older White man with a moustache, wearing a beret-like cap over his short blonde hair and a blousy green shirt under his high-necked apron. He looks out of place among the students who are all

similarly dressed in very nondescript t-shirts and pants in neutral colors. Jeremiah 18 enlists the metaphor of God as a potter who reworks a piece of damaged clay into something new and beautiful, similar to how God can work in and renew the lives of his followers. The mustached man in the painting is obviously meant to represent the potter, but, of course, unlike the potter in the Bible story who would have probably had tan skin, a dark beard and worn a tunic, this potter looks more like my mild-mannered Dutch uncle.

When Neil and I first entered the building, we stopped briefly in the school's main office where I shook hands with the White, middle-aged male Principal. Before we left, I noted that the entire support staff working in the office that day was comprised of women of color. Neil pointed me to a framed poster hanging just inside next to the main office. It looks old, most likely created, or at least colored in by former young students. Neil explained that they have had it proudly hanging there for so many years because it displays the school's core values. It features the acronym SERVE, which stands for Shine, Excel, Respect, Value, and Encourage.

Contrasting the diversity of the student body with the relative Whiteness of school leadership (their faculty is mostly White, too) the first evidence of respectability politics comes into view. Who determines the vision and mission of the school? Who defines the interpretation of these core values? In the case of Shepherd's Grove it appears to be mostly, if not entirely, the White, middle class, Christian men who run the place. But before officially jumping to conclusions, let's further examine the values that the school appears to promote.

Diversity

Shepherd's Grove is certainly proud of their cultural diversity, listing it as one of the chief components of their mission on their website. During our interview, Neil boasted that

when the school first started, the teachers wrote the entire curriculum themselves so as to best reach the needs of their “urban students.” He also told me about the rich variety of services that they offer to ESL students and students who may arrive to Shepherd’s Grove lagging behind academically. The current curriculum, he said, features “a strong focus on literacy” and teachers regularly design programs for individual students based around their particular linguistic needs. I have noted already how speech is heavily policed by respectability politics and this is related to literacy as well. Of course, literacy and racial justice have been entangled with each other since the time of slavery. What was once a defining characteristic of racial discrimination – preventing slaves from learning to read – became a symbol for its remedy as racial equality was often determined by access to literacy. Prendergast (2003) notes,

If literacy has become the site of the struggle for racial justice since the civil rights movement, it is because it has been for so many years the site of racial injustice in America. Throughout American history, literacy has been managed and controlled in myriad ways to rationalize and ensure White domination (p. 2).

While Pendergast notes, “A general belief in the value of literacy is not in and of itself a form of violence or oppression” (p. 8), research reveals that increasing attention to literacy programs in schools has not done anything to alleviate social inequality. The value of literacy education depends on whether the institution delivering it acknowledges the ways in which literacy is an ever evolving, context and culture-specific process that involves a variety of skills and therefore cannot be transmitted using a single normative or universal practice (Pendergast, 2003). While my analysis of Shepherd’s Grove was not detailed enough to account for the school’s entire literacy curriculum, the book reports, profiles of historical

figures and other student projects I observed taped to the wall certainly conform to normative literacy practices.

The representations of cultural diversity that Shepherd's Grove chooses to display might also tell us a little more about the types of literacies, or rather whose literacies, it values. Every hallway at Shepherd's Grove is covered with a smattering of art, both temporary (taped up student projects) and permanent (framed or painted on the wall), and often grouped with little to no rhyme or reason. To begin, though they are not explicitly related to diversity, two examples of permanent art caught my eye right from the start. The first was a group of student-created framed watercolors of the Statue of Liberty and the second was the now-famous painting of George Washington kneeling next to his horse called "Prayer at Valley Forge." The Statue of Liberty paintings evoke the "melting pot" ideology of America and the Washington painting reflects the willful ignorance many stubbornly cling to about the "Christian ideals" on which this country was supposedly founded. (The painting's subject matter has been debunked by several credible sources; there is no evidence that anyone saw Washington pray before the battle of Valley Forge; however, there is ample evidence that Washington was averse to kneeling.) Both the melting pot ideology and the belief that the United States is a Christian nation are steeped in White supremacist logic. Shepherd's Grove's decision to permanently display this artwork is suspect, particularly in combination with the rest of the images of diversity on display at the school.

Aside from the somewhat incomprehensible trophy case filled to the brim with an assortment of random ethnic dolls, the Shepherd's Grove's public commitment to diversity was fairly consistent in its focus on unity and togetherness. On the same wall as the Statues of Liberty and Prayer at Valley Forge, there is a framed painting of a dark-skinned Black boy

and a pale blonde-haired White boy embracing while holding a single stalk of wheat. And just down the hall from that, hangs Shepherd's Grove Peace Quilt, made by students during their annual MLK Day celebration, that features a variety of peace-related Biblical references and images, such as, "Blessed are the peacemakers," "Jesus is the Prince of Peace," and "the fruit of the Spirit is peace," along with plenty of doves and hand-holding stick figures.

In addition to the Peace Quilt, there were several MLK Day themed art projects displayed around the school, presumably exemplars and remnants from previous years of celebration. There are two in particular that I think illustrate the way Shepherd's Grove conceives of and celebrates the concept of diversity. In the main stairwell of the school, there is a large painted plywood sign. In the middle of the sign, there is an image of the globe with North America facing outward. Surrounding the globe are six stick figures in various poses. Their heads are decorated in different ways. Only one of them has a traditional smiley face, one had a completely blank face painted bright White, and one was filled with black and blue swirls. The other three featured a yin yang symbol, another globe, and a peace sign. Scrolled across the top and bottom of the sign was the phrase, "We all have the same insides." This sign was featured prominently on the wall of the stairwell; most children would pass by it at least once a day.

There was another MLK Day art installation that caught my eye while I was on my tour. But this one was tucked away in a corner of the middle school hallway, displayed high above a bank of lockers. The piece contained 3 long narrow panels, painted to look like a collection of small shards of stained glass, presumably reflecting the fragmentation of a society divided and broken by racism. Each glass shard was decorated differently, probably by individual students. Some were just painted, others had encouraging words like peace or

love written on them and some had images of MLK's name or face. Written in paint around each panel like a border were quotes by Martin Luther King, Jr. But they were not the famous ones that I would have expected. They were more controversial, containing some of his criticisms of economic inequality, for example. The very presence of this installation was encouraging in that it reflected some actual struggle with the reality of injustice and inequality. But its non-prominent placement had the effect of silencing it in favor of the art celebrating unity, peace and togetherness. Focusing on peace and reconciliation over justice and social equality is just another form of respectability politics, one that glosses over the hard and painful work necessary to combat structural White supremacy and jumps instead to a hand-holding colorblind utopia.

During our interview, after Neil had rattled off all of the statistics and information about the ethnic and racial diversity at Shepherd's Grove, I asked him how the school dealt with all those different kids once they were inside. How, I wondered, were all these different cultures celebrated and affirmed? Neil paused at my question for frankly a longer time than I would have expected. He eventually responded that what they were really trying to do at the school was cultivate a "Shepherd's Grove culture." He bristled at the idea that they would celebrate individual cultural groups in a way that would allow some kids to participate and some not. So, I asked him how he would characterize the "Shepherd's Grove culture" and he paused again before giving me three examples. The first example he came up with was how students stood in lines whenever they were in the hall or waiting to travel from classroom to classroom. He said this order created a "sense of peace" in the building. Along with that, he mentioned that students will voluntarily pick up trash or litter if they pass by it in the hallway or outside. And finally, he talked about how the students wore uniforms, which had the effect

of unifying students rather than highlighting differences. All three of these examples reek of identity politics. They all involve the ordering of individual behaviors toward a public presentation that aligns with dominant cultural norms and standards (Lee & Hicken, 2016). This leads to the next value that Shepherd's Grove appears to promote which reflects problematic identity politics, their emphasis on excellence.

Excellence

During our interview, Neil made a point to proudly note that while the racial and cultural demographics of Shepherd's Grove mirrored that of the Crown Ridge Public Schools generally, unlike GRPS, Shepherd's Grove boasted a 95% graduation rate. Indeed, my tour revealed that student academic accomplishments and aspirations are highlighted in various ways around the school. For example, there was a bulletin board just outside the Kindergarten room that featured a charming display of student self-portraits. In these portraits, each student was wearing a blue mortarboard graduation cap. And underneath the portraits were cards featuring each student's response to the prompt, "when I grow up I want to be..."

Upstairs in the middle school hallway there is an alumni bulletin board featuring the smiling faces of Shepherd's Grove graduates. Underneath each photo, there is a brief description of each alumni's post-graduation accomplishments. Also hanging in this hallway are several motivational posters, most featuring men of color. There is a Scholastic poster featuring an image of Jackie Robinson standing proudly in his uniform holding a baseball bat. The poster features "Jackie's Nine," the nine values apparently Mr. Robinson lives by. They are Courage, Determination, Teamwork, Persistence, Integrity, Citizenship, Justice, Commitment, and Excellence. Hanging up these types of posters and featuring pictures of accomplished alumni has the effect of suggesting that the children who attend Shepherd's

Grove are not inherently motivated to succeed or live out productive and *respectable* values. They need extra encouragement. There were no similar displays at Middelburg or Shawnee. The mostly White students who attend those Christian schools are seen as inherently motivated to succeed. They do not require external reminders to be respectable.

Hospitality

Neil informed me that another major value that Shepherd's Grove takes pride in is hospitality. The Principal, Neil beamed, knows the names of all 350 students and every day he stands outside while the students are arriving and shakes each of their hands. On our tour, Neil highlighted the sitting area filled with soft black leather couches near the entryway. This area, he explained, is intended to make visitors and families feel comfortable and welcome. Opposite the sitting area I noticed a bulletin board labeled, "Welcome to the Family" featuring the pictures of every new student at Shepherd's Grove for that school year. There is nothing inherently problematic about these examples of hospitality; in fact, I found them genuine and mostly benign. The next two examples, however, tell a different story. I mentioned in the vignette at the opening of this section that Shepherd's Grove owns a lovely brick home across the street from the school. According to Neil, they see this house as an extension of the school that reflects their focus on hospitality and they use it as a place to welcome prospective families and entertain donors. I could not help but notice that the house is a much more appealing public space than the actual school building. And not only that, but it stands in stark contrast to the run-down family homes that line the street next to it. Their use of this house to welcome visitors sends a subtle message about the respectable image Shepherd's Grove hopes to project. The area surrounding the school is marked by poverty, but the school's guesthouse stands as a beacon of middle-class hope.

Perhaps the most impactful thing that happened to me during my tour of Shepherd's Grove is also related to the school's value of hospitality. During our tour of the school, Neil took me into several classrooms to briefly observe what was going on inside. We stood in the back quietly each time so as not to disturb. But each time, within 30 second of our entering, 2 children rose calmly from their seats, walked over to me, shook my hand, and told me what they were working on in class that morning. After the second classroom this happened in, Neil leaned over and subtly communicated to me that the kids "know what to do" when they see him walking around the school with a guest. Indeed, even outside the classrooms, I received more greetings than I could count. The whole thing was both charming and disarming, with a kind of Stepford quality to it. It was performative respectability politics.

Spirituality

The final value that Shepherd's Grove reflects is a hyper commitment to faith and spirituality. Shepherd's Grove considers itself a "missional" school, meaning their goal is to evangelize. This means that, unlike other Reformed Christian schools in the area, they do not require families to be Christians in order to attend. There are various faith communities represented at Shepherd's Grove, including several Muslim families; when I visited I observed at least two middle school girls wearing the hijab. While the school allows students of different faiths to attend, Neil explains to me that the religious components of the school are compulsory. Students may not opt out of things like chapel or prayer or reading the Bible if a teacher assigns it.

Students at Shepherd's Grove attend two all-school chapels per week and the teachers begin every single day with 30 minutes of communal staff prayer time before the students arrive. The school features a Discipleship Room, which is decorated with a plethora of

different displays, murals, and bulletin boards conveying various spiritual themes, bible verses, and the like. Students use this room for gatherings, celebrations, prayer ceremonies, and other religious events throughout the year. In addition to the art I have already mentioned in this section, the rest of Shepherd's Grove school building is decorated with more religious paraphernalia than I could possibly describe. Briefly, there is a framed watercolor painting of angels positioned over a small table with a wooden cross over it. There is a huge mural covering both sides of a large corridor, which depicts a colorful nature scene filled with animals – lions and lambs, predators and prey – walking peacefully together with the phrase, “and the little children will lead them” painted in English and Spanish over the doorway. I chuckled as I passed a large poster with a close-up photograph of a bacon cheeseburger with the words “Hunger for God” typed up above it. And in the middle school hallway, there were no less than two religious themed displays featuring 4-foot tall wood crosses, one lit with twinkle lights and the other draped with a clean White cloth.

As with both Middelburg Christian and CRCES Shawnee, the Christian principles that were displayed in the school were unscrutinized, portrayed as a neutral good. Certainly, Shepherd's Grove would want to align themselves with the Southern Baptist Black women who Higginbotham profiled in her original explanation of the politics of respectability, promoting a moral worthiness that stems from a deep-rooted faith in Jesus. But my observations suggest that the public pedagogy of Shepherd's Grove is more often in line with the hegemonic respectability politics that conflates outward things like adherence to White middle-class notions of wholesome language and formal dress with morality and worthiness.

In the next chapter, I will examine how parents from each of these three schools conceptualize and rationalize their decisions to send their children there. I will weave in the

curricula of conservatism, settler colonialism, and respectability politics that I have outlined in this chapter and also consider new themes. In the final chapter, I will bring all these ideas together to examine how Reformed Christian theology and White supremacy intersect and suggest ways that Christian schools might move forward into the future.

CHAPTER 4

UNDERSTANDING COMMITMENTS TO CHRISTIAN SCHOOLING AS A FORM OF NARCISSISM AND MELANCHOLIA

The reader will recall from chapter two that all nine of the married couples I interviewed for this project were remarkably similar in character. There are several reasons why this ended up being the case, some circumstantial and some due to unavoidable social factors. Of course, I was pulling from a community with strong Dutch cultural roots, who are all invested in the Reformed Christian education project, and therefore share many things in common. Additionally, because I connected with my participants through my existing social relationships rather than randomly selecting them, I ended up mostly interviewing people whose social and political attitudes, with perhaps a couple exceptions, were not that different from mine. When reaching out to friends and acquaintances for people to contact for this project, I did attempt to look for people with disparate life situations, but I also found myself in a position where I had to “take what I could get” to some extent. I conducted my interviews in January, during a busy cold-and-flu season in the Midwest, and, as such, finding available and healthy participants proved a challenge. It also happened that, even in situations where I thought I had made a unique connection, I was proved wrong as soon as we sat down to talk. In one case that serves as perhaps the perfect anecdote to describe the unavoidable and somewhat incestuous culture of Crown Ridge Christians, I had thought I was meeting a couple to whom I had no prior connections and who might add some diversity to my participants’ backstories. I discovered instead, as I followed Siri’s directions to their house, that my participants lived across the street from my sister and her family. Once inside these participants’ home, I also learned that they attend the same church as some of my best friends and that I graduated from high school at the

same time as one of the participant's siblings. Residents of Crown Ridge refer to this game of making personal connections with strangers as "Dutch Bingo." It is a well-known phenomenon in the area that even newcomers catch on to very quickly. In fact, the one outlier couple I interviewed, Adam and Katie, who had recently moved to Crown Ridge having no prior personal connections to the area, made this observation about making friends in the city,

I would say it's been a little bit harder here. I hear Crown Ridge is harder for that anyway because everybody that lives here is from here... and they're related to everybody that is from here.... and they've known each other since birth, or prior, if possible! So, even in our neighborhood, I would say, I think there's 80 houses in our neighborhood, and I could probably tell you 10 of them that are related to each other... or went to Christian school together... or they've known each other for 40 years. And it's one of those, how do you break into a friend group of people that have known each other since kindergarten or that are related and have family functions? So, it's been difficult in that sense that there are a lot of... and it's not that they... they're not unfriendly, they're just... they're friendly, but not.

During that part of our conversation I had to personally own up to being part of this often-unwelcoming and impenetrable culture. I also had to resist inviting their entire family over for dinner the next night, partly out of guilt, but also because they really were delightful to talk to. I will write more about this cultural phenomenon and its racial implications in chapter five.

Rather than try to fight with the data I generated from interviewing so many likeminded families and attempt to parse out minute differences and disagreements between them, I have decided instead to lean in to the sameness that is clearly and unavoidably present in this community. According to Seidman (2006), there are two main ways that researchers can

approach the data they generate from qualitative interviews. First, they can create profiles of individual participants. And second, they can analyze themes that appear across participant interviews. The former option, which Seidman notes is not always possible depending on the quality and amount of your data, involves creating a first-person narrative entirely out of quotes from the participant. The narrative should have a beginning, middle and end and also contain some kind of conflict or drama. Seidman prefers this type of analysis whenever possible as he believes it is most consistent with the process of interviewing as research. He notes,

It allows us to present the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time, all central components of qualitative analysis. We interview in order to come to know the experience of the participants through their stories. We learn from hearing and studying what the participants say. Although the interviewer can never be absent from the process, by crafting a profile in the participant's own words, the interviewer allows those words to reflect the person's consciousness (p. 119).

While Seidman (2006) prefers this story-telling method of data analysis, he also acknowledges its difficulty and explains, therefore, that thematic organization is more common. To do thematic interview analysis, qualitative researchers organize interview excerpts into categories and then search for common themes that run across and through those categories to exemplify and explain.

One way to handle my interview data would be to code it according to the themes of conservatism, settler colonialism and respectability politics that I outlined in the previous chapter. However, one of the things I found so compelling about these parent interviews is that despite the differences in the character of each school, as evidenced in the previous chapter, the

parents' answers to my interview questions were all strikingly similar. I believe this similarity speaks volumes about the nature of Reformed Christian culture and their approach to education and so, in order to highlight this similarity I have chosen to combine Seidman's (2006) methods and use cross-interview themes to create one narrative mega-profile of all of my participants together.

Representing all of my participant interviews in one narrative profile is compelling for several reasons. It certainly serves as a fascinating thought exercise, for one. Can I create a captivating and honest single narrative by combining interviews I conducted with no fewer than 18 different people? I think I can! Approaching all nine interviews together as a monolith allows me to highlight representative ways of thinking and doing that I believe are prevalent in Reformed Christian circles. In addition, presenting the similarities between and across interviews allows me to contrast some of the themes I perceived with the purported values that these parents claimed to have. Finally, I think the narrative format will be more enjoyable to read than a straightforward thematic analysis.

I will use this single narrative to explore my participants' motivations through the psychoanalytic lens of narcissism. Then, I will draw some distinctions between the families from each school and their perspectives on diversity. To do this I will use the psychoanalytic lens of melancholia as well as the themes, or curricula, I generated in chapter three.

So how did I create this narrative mega-profile? Well, first, I analyzed each of my nine interview transcripts to find common themes. After establishing themes, I highlighted each interview with a different color for each theme. Then, I followed Seidman's (2006) instructions for crafting a narrative profile. I first copied all the excerpts that had the same color highlighting into one section. Then, I rearranged the excerpts to follow the narrative structure that matched

the interview. Finally, I cut out and put together participants' answers in order to form one continuous narrative. Unlike in Seidman's profiles, however, I did insert myself into the narrative by using direct quotes of myself from my interview transcriptions. As a result, the final product reads more like a conversation than a short story; I formatted it in a simple Q and A style. For citations, I used a footnote style rather than in-text method so as not to disrupt the flow of the narrative. Rather than going in order and repeating participant citations, I have instead assigned each participant a number which I superscripted. Each superscript number denotes the quote that precedes it reaching back to the previous superscript number; this system allowed me to quote multiple participants in a short space, even sometimes in the same sentence! The reader can refer back to chapter two for details about each participant's history and experience with Christian education. There is a key immediately following the profile denoting each participant with their assigned numbers.

Before we get to the profile, I will briefly explain my approach to both creating and analyzing this participant narrative. I approached my analysis for this chapter by borrowing themes from psychoanalytic theory. I am not a psychoanalyst and I have no formal training in psychotherapy or general psychology (I relied heavily on Britzman's work in my preparation for this chapter), but I found many of my interviews did take on a kind of therapeutic quality (for both my participants and myself). During my conversations with these parents about their past experiences and values, I also had realizations about my own journey through Christian education, many of which I include in this chapter. Furthermore, there were several cases in which, as our conversations progressed and my participants opened up and became more vulnerable, many of them admitted to or shared things with me that they had never before shared with their spouse or, in some cases, even said out loud. Britzman (2009) notes,

Psychology, after all, is talking about us. And if we find in its language our paranoia, our obsessionality, our perversions, and our neurosis, it is only because we are already psychological beings. In Pera Aulagnier's (2001) view, it takes a psychology to make a psychology and our sounding begins the moment our first other draws us into "the pleasure of hearing, the desire to hear, [and] the demand for meaning" (p. 61-62).

Several of my participants, after our interviews were completed, noted that they enjoyed talking to me about these things. They felt pleasure in the process of being heard. Using Foucault's theories of power, ethics and pleasure, Britzman (2009) posits,

The pleasure domain, from whatever side, lends to these procedures of knowledge the erotic charge of mastery and identity tied to the desire to look, to examine, to auscultate, and to be seen, examined, and heard (p. 62).

I, too, experienced pleasure from these back-and-forth exchanges in which I had to walk the tenuous line of being both a participant and observer of this strange little intimate community. Many of my conversations with these parents continued long after I stopped my recording device. And several of them reached out to me in the days following our interviews to connect as friends on social media.

In order to make some sense of these highly personal interactions, I chose to analyze more than just the discourse that our interviews produced; I approached both my participants and myself as psychological subjects. Britzman (2009) explains, "the psychological subject must take itself as its own object of knowledge, moving deeper into its own psychology, but in that process incurs self-alienation through turning against the self" (p. 63). That I would turn against my participants in order to analyze their language, values, motivations and desires was inevitable in this research process. However, this project has also been an experience of turning against

myself. As outlined in the researcher positionality section in chapter one, I have been in the process of separating myself (psychologically, if not physically) from the Reformed Christian community for some time now. While nothing I said during the interviews was untrue, there were times during these conversations where I felt a bit like an actor, putting on an identity that I still share with my participants, but also feel increasingly alienated from. This critical distance was useful in many ways, however. The problematic Reformed Christian education identity markers and values that I have become conscious – and thus critical – of still remain mostly in my participants' unconscious but were nevertheless present all throughout our interviews. My participation and separation from this community allowed me to both be fully present during interviews in order to draw out difficult truths from my participants as well as float above the interviews in some respect in order to analyze them as I was experiencing them. I feel confident approaching these 18 participants as one single psychological subject because of my intimate connections with the community as well as because of the process of self-alienation I have already gone through over the past few years.

Many people in Reformed Christian circles, including many of my participants, are beginning to ask the same difficult questions that I have been asking about the nature of our traditions and beliefs. In fact, several of my participants mentioned feeling disenchantment with Christian schooling as they were going through it themselves. Emily mentioned a break happening for her parents and thus impacting her,

I was in Crown Ridge Christian Schools for Kindergarten and 1st grade and my parents pulled me out. They both grew up in Christian education in Crown Ridge Christian Schools and did not have very positive experiences and did not want that for me, even though everyone in their families did Christian ed, I mean all my cousins, everyone, so it

was a big deal... my mom, I mean, my mom did not do well in high school... she just, I mean she still will talk about how awful it was and just didn't feel accepted, insecure, and... so I think it was more a response to some of those feelings, those residual feelings...

Both Elizabeth and Zach revealed that they had some hesitations about putting their children in the Crown Ridge Christian School system because of negative experiences or feelings that they had while attending themselves. Elizabeth explained,

I also was a very serious Christian from an early age, and so there was just some negative things, that I don't think affected me in a negative way, but just a lot of hypocrisy that I noticed when I was a student there... um... that I felt like was detrimental...

And Zach admitted,

Well I definitely had strong biases... cuz high school left a bad taste in my mouth... and it was kind of the elitism thing that... and I think some of that I project on Crown Ridge Christian Schools... but I think it's not... I don't know, it's somewhat fair, but I sort of looked at the brand-new building and like... all the talk of academic excellence and, you know, it kinda turned me off. So I was really reluctant to [send our kids] there, even though it's two blocks from my house.

Despite these experiences of past disenfranchisement or disenchantment, all of these parents are now very happy with their choice to send their children to Christian schools. So, what is it that compels this generation – my generation – to continue the Reformed Christian education tradition in spite of potential misgivings at both the conscious and unconscious level? To answer this question, I will turn to psychoanalytic theories of narcissism and identity formation as well as theories of institutional melancholia.

The majority of my analysis will take place after the profile, but I would like to briefly return to Britzman (2009) before we get into the narrative. She says,

Anthropologists have taught us that, for cultures to persist, they must be capable of extreme, radical change at the level of their most intimate symbolization. Humans must, if they are to live, meet this same demand. But this demand for symbolizing that which does not exist can be felt as persecution and then be symbolically equated with loss of unity, purpose, and reason (p. 78-9).

The Christian Reformed church, like most religious organizations, has gone through many critical periods of introspection and questioning to arrive at its current iteration. But also like most religious organizations, change has rarely come easily. This is because religious institutional evolution always happens at the personal psychological level first. Institutional change cannot be separated from individual identity. Questioning ways of thinking and doing in the Reformed Christian community is often experienced as a personal attack. Squeaky wheels are accused of sowing disunity among disciples. Interrogating problematic theological commitments is akin to disavowing our essential purposes as Bible believers. And, as the Reformed Christian tradition has deeply intellectual roots, those who dare to challenge it are almost always met with appeals to reason over emotion. I could fill a book with all of the personal examples I have of this.

One of the themes that I noticed during my interviews was a tendency of my participants to justify their decision to send their kids to Christian school by arguing that “things have changed” since they were students there themselves. But the exact nature of this change turns out to be pretty hard to pin own. A couple participants noted an openness to different ideas and challenging questions that they did not feel was present when they were students. But most of the

arguments I heard were related to issues of spirituality. Nick said, “I mean they focus on so many amazing heart... there was a lot of head when I was going to school and there is a lot more heart now.” During my last interview, after hearing this same refrain repeated in so many conversations, I decided to really press the issue with one of my participants, Paul. He was articulating the difference as relational, meaning that the Christian schools when he went there were more legalistic and now they are more focused on building relationships. “Are you sure things have really changed,” I asked him, “or is it just that you have grown up and have a different perspective now? Maybe things were always this way and you just didn’t realize it while you were there because your values were different then?” Paul’s reaction was emphatic. “No no, it’s completely completely completely different,” he insisted. That the character of Christian education has changed over the past twenty years since my generation attended is surely possible and likely true to some extent. But I will argue that these surface changes mask a deeper anxiety in the Christian Reformed church and its members, and that anxiety can be understood through psychoanalytic theories of both narcissism and melancholia. For now, here is the profile.

The Profile

Q: Tell me about why you chose a Christian school for your children?

A: I don’t know where to start... I think a lot of it had to do with that we both attended Christian school growing up.² We both spent our entire lives in Christian schools.¹⁰ We met at a Christian college.⁸ We started talking about it before we were even married¹⁷ and yep, we both have always wanted to send our kids to the Christian school.⁵ I went to Christian schools from elementary all the way through undergrad and it’s not to say that it was inertia, but¹⁵ it’s actually a family history, like my grandparents went to Christian

schools, my parents worked in Christian Ed.¹⁴ My great grandparents helped start Northside Christian.² I come from a family of teachers, my mom and my aunts, my uncles, my brother, my brother-in-law, they all teach at Christian schools and so, I think that maybe it was a little bit of a foregone conclusion that that was most likely what we would do.¹⁰ We didn't even pray about it, we just, this is what they did, this is what we're gonna do, same as our upbringing.⁴ We never actually sat down and hashed out our core reasons or anything, I think we kind of both assumed it;¹² we really didn't even look at any other options.¹¹ More of our discussion was where do we want to live and which Christian school are we picking?⁶

Q: So, I come from a similar trajectory. I went to Christian schools my whole life; in fact, I went to the same Christian school that my dad went to when he was a kid and now my mom is the principal at that school, so I feel that inertia you mentioned. There is a legacy there for sure. What does that legacy look like in your family?

A: My parents were HUGE believers in Christian education.¹⁴ I know that for my folks, a big piece of it was just tradition and that's what you do³ because I think it definitely came from the culture and there was just kind of, "this is the right thing to do."¹⁵ On my mom's side of the family, she had four siblings and all of those siblings sent their kids to Christian schools, but now there's only one of those sibling's kids that send their kids to Christian schools and I know that was a hard thing on my grandma.¹¹ I have a brother who doesn't send his kids to Christian school and I think he feels bad slash guilty about it cuz I think he knows that it means a lot to my folks.³ Both my sisters send their kids to public school and my parents are very upset.² We were a really close family, so I'm sure that had some sway to it, but I think it was kind of protection, like at least my mom

would feel kind of in a safe zone if we went to a Christian school.¹⁷ I don't know how I would ever explain to my parents that we're not doing it, we're not sending them.¹¹ As a kid I didn't even think about it. It was one of those things where going to the public school, it wasn't even an option. It wasn't even spoken about. I think I can count on maybe one hand the number of kids I remember who went to public school.¹⁵

Q: OK, so as I have been conducting these interviews, this subject has come up a lot and I have to say this thing about barely even conceiving of the public school or not knowing any public-school kids mirrors my experience totally. How did you perceive public school kids growing up?

A: I honestly thought public schools were scary growing up... because that's how it was painted! Like I thought kids that went to public schools were scary.² My parents were very, "public school kids are bad, Christian school kids are good." We were the good kids cuz we went to Christian schools. I remember my parents wanting me to sit in a certain spot on the bus to be away from the public-school kids.⁴ I think my parents were less comfortable with, um, they wanted to protect us.¹⁴ I think it's cuz they're not doing the right things. The right thing is to go to church on Sunday, whether your heart is in it or not, you wear a dress not pants, you don't swim on Sunday, you talk to these people, you go to a Christian school, you do not mow your lawn on Sunday, you do not play with friends on Sunday. And if you check all these boxes then you're still in the good group, but if you uncheck a couple of them, you were in danger of going to the bad group.⁴ And, it's hard because the older I get the more I think lots of the things I guess we see as tradition seem a little bit sillier to me and I stick with them because they're comfortable, but I can't necessarily defend it. Like, I don't mow my lawn on Sunday cuz it seems

wrong,⁵ and we don't go grocery shopping on Sundays and we don't go out to eat on Sundays.⁶ That's the way we grew up and these are our traditions, but I can't really defend them all.⁵ I like that Christian school is grounded in Reformed doctrine. There is a place for tradition; you don't need to reinvent the wheel right?¹⁵ I think tradition can be good, but there's gotta be a good reason for it, too.¹⁷

Q: So what do you think about public schools now?

A. Um, I think our perception of them is all just sort of hearsay... it's just sort of like "Oh yah CR Public schools are terrible, you don't want to send your kids there."⁹ You know from what I know about the public schools in this area, if we chose that route, I haven't heard great things about them.¹⁵ I've never really told [anyone] this but I always thought like in the back of my mind I thought if I send them to public schools they're gonna get involved in gangs and violence and they're gonna just be... like they're just gonna go down like the worst path.¹⁷ Or, if they run into a teacher that believes something completely different, whether it's one of the three monotheistic religions or something completely different, nihilism, whatever, and then my child would say, "well my dad said, but this guy says..." and I don't know that I want that coming from my kid's teacher.¹² But we never visited [the public schools], we didn't really, it wasn't really on our radar even.¹⁰

Q. What do your kids think about them?

A. Our kids ask every now and then, like, "why did you choose not to send us there? It's free to go there, mom." Yah, but that's not our priority.⁶ We don't say anything negative about people who choose the public school. We are always careful to say, "well it's just as good, but we wanted a Christian education for you guys." Cuz we don't want our kids

to be like, “my school’s better than your school.”⁵ We want our kids to have a good Christian education. It’s not that we want them to feel superior.⁹ They’ve definitely brought it up, though, and they’ve tried to play the game about “good kid, bad kid” which we don’t play.⁴ My oldest thinks he’s better because he goes to Christian school. He’s told me. He’s like, “kids who go to public school are bad.” He thinks, like, because they can’t talk about God and they can’t pray that equals bad. Cuz God equals better.² But that’s not what we believe at all. So we’ve had to talk about that, that things are very different in public schools, how you can’t pray and teachers can’t talk about God and they are like blown away! They’re like, “there’s no Christians who go there?” Cuz that’s what Christians do! And it’s just their cute little minds that they think things like that.⁴ But I would not put up with my kids if I ever heard them saying anything that sounded like they thought they were better. I think we’ve done a good job of saying, “those schools are fantastic, this is just our choice,” and that’s easy for us because academically the schools around here are really good. It might be harder if we were in an area where Christian schools’ test scores were a lot higher than the public school; I think that would be harder.⁵

Q. Alright, so let’s talk more about what you value about Christian education? What is it that your children are getting there that makes you want to choose it despite potentially being able to get an excellent education elsewhere?

A. You know faith and our belief is the most important thing in our day-to-day lives, right?³ If I believe and accept that Jesus is my Lord and Savior then I believe that it’s our duty to create more Christians in the world and that’s either through witnessing and spreading the gospel or making them biologically, right?¹² And for us, it was kind of a

very simple decision that we wanted our kids raised in that way, not only at home, but on a daily basis at school as well.³ We want our kids to be Christians. We want them to have good Christian instruction.¹⁰ We want Christ to be the focus of our kid's education.¹ And if we're not always as intentional about doing that at home as we should be¹⁰ ... when you're not on your game, you know that the basics are being taken care of, if you know what I mean. It's really nice to have your kids at a Christian school because these like, kinda challenging theological questions, I feel like, someone else is also addressing and trying to answer.¹⁴ Where do they spend the majority of their waking hours? At school. And if we send them to a place where that's the foundation, like where Christianity, knowing that all your teachers are Christians, your parents' friends, like that to me is something that's really important.¹⁰ What do we want rubbing off on them for 8 hours a day?² I like that they're getting a Biblical basis at this level when it's very important. I mean I've seen statistics before where, you know, if kids don't become Christians by a certain age, they are less likely ... and I know they can learn that at home, I mean that's basically our job, but I like that it's kind of reinforced in school.⁸ Cuz it's really important to me that my kids know Christ.⁵ My kids knowing Christ's love, my kids knowing they belong to God is, that's my biggest priority, so I'm willing to sacrifice pretty much whatever for my kids to know that.⁶ And what can I do to help facilitate that? [Christian school] is a big way.⁵

You know of all the things you want your kids to learn, it would be good to have the spiritual aspect be #1.¹⁴ If your kids go to a Christian school like they get that base, the foundation, Christianity, and realize life is so much more than what they are in that school and how big the world is and how big God is.¹⁷ It's like where Jesus is. It's like

he's the center, from the worship in the morning to, he comes into every aspect of the kids' classes, and it's a place where the ideas of Jesus, the sacrifice, the justice, the peace, the reconciliation... like, the truth, but also the excellence... and where all those things are kind of taught and lived out and modeled from the lowest level to the highest.¹⁶ I want my kids to have a faith-based interaction in everything. I want them to learn about God in everything, so whether that's math or science or social studies, I just want them to have that background in everything they're learning.⁶ It just gives you so much knowledge and you can build so much on that and it really makes them disciplined to get that wisdom at a young age, and it forms a foundation for later¹⁸ just to be surrounded by that all the time, to kind of get them ready.³ We [also] like the family atmosphere of the school, the support of the teachers, other students, other families¹ We just really appreciate the school partnering with us to nurture our kids in the thing we value the most, our faith.⁴ I guess it's a trust issue for me. I guess if I know the people that my kids are confiding in go to a gospel-believing church vs. somebody that's just, um, you know, um really doesn't believe in God or doesn't go to church or, you know, doesn't have a religious background.¹⁷ I think in a non-Christian school environment it's not as much a safe petri dish for that gospel to get in there and mingle and kind of grow and thrive and that's where that's happening is in a Christian school and that's safe.¹² In a world with such a cacophony of voices and competing ideas and arguments, in a world full of noise, one thing I love about Christian education is how it grounds it in a particular lens, everything is centered around the person of Jesus and a freedom in that to pursue the truth. I think that, like, true excellent Christian education is kind of laser-focused on the truth in the light of the cross.¹⁵

Q. OK, so I gotta say that's a lot of jargon you just used and, you know, I'm an insider so I get it, I understand all the things you just said cuz I speak the language, but for the sake of this project, I'm really trying to get outside of this bubble and figure out what all this jargon really means to people. So help me understand, what does it mean for kids to have a Christ-centered education? How would you explain that to someone who wasn't me, who didn't 'get it'?

A. It's a hard question because you can't always put your finger on it; it's kind of a culture thing.¹¹ Um... Christianity teaches certain values and when you know that the whole staff and the other, the student body, like, live their lives by those values⁹ [your kids] have good examples to look up to and that are modeling the Christian life.¹⁸ Then when you throw them off into the world and whether they go to college or the workplace it's good for them to have a good background, core values.¹⁷

Q. What are those values though? Where do you see those 'Christian values' at school?

A. So I think about things like weekly chapel. What a great thing that our kids can gather in a gym with 500 other kiddos and like blow the roof off the place because they're singing in worship.¹¹ Like it's such a gift that they have and they're there and they're praising God and they see God in everything and they can talk about their faith.⁶ The school has taught our kids how to pray and the importance of prayer. Um, they are memorizing scripture, which is something that as a Christian parent I know is important for my kids to know the Bible.¹⁴ We want them to know the songs, we want them to know all the stories.¹⁰ Everything is covered in prayer and the teachers will have kids gather around a child and put their hands on them and pray for them; it's just kind of a spiritually alive place.¹⁶ I love that my daughter regularly says, "I read the Bible more

than you, I know it better.” I love that they pray in school. And that she talks about prayer groups and just works through problems like... well... not like “what would Jesus do?” but just sort of like “how would a Christian approach this?” But like still approaching real world problems but just with a Christian perspective at this age.⁸ I think in a good Christian school the teachers can model that thing where you can have lots of different ideas and be open to different approaches to all kinds of different things, but at the end of the day we are brothers and sisters in Christ. I think there’s something about those common values, those common beliefs that root the culture of a Christian school that ideally can be really, really healthy.¹⁵ Each year at school they have like a theme verse for the year and it’s just something that they, like, make sure that all the kids know and it’s something that’s important to them and last year the theme verse was just about like loving each other and showing like kindness and friendship toward each other.¹⁰ You know, how do we love our neighbor better? How do we help fix problems around us? What’s our role in creation care? How do we treat our siblings? How do we help a friend in need? You know... how do we serve?¹¹ I think doing things like service opportunities to help, you know help other people, like giving of your time or of the things that you have, I think that is something that is important.¹⁰

Q. I hear you talking about these spiritual and religious values and elements of school, but what about your point about it Christ being infused in every school subject. What does that look like on a practical, day-to-day level?

A. So our kids come home with a lot of subjects and they say, “isn’t it cool how God made the cheetah to run fast so he doesn’t fall over because he gave it a tail that can balance him?” And they don’t say, “this is what the cheetah does,” they say “this is how

God made the cheetah.” Our youngest will say it in ways that don’t really make sense, and I think it’s because she hears it so much at school like, “oh this is how God did this and this is how God did this.” So sometimes she’ll say it in a weird... I’m trying to think of a good example... like the way God made the mailbox or God made the stool and God made the chair.⁵ I guess in the most basic way, everything is taught under the umbrella that there is a creator who is in charge of everything and controls everything. So from the sciences, like, you know, like God is in charge and, you know, we have the creation story, but, you know, how else could things, like how else could God be at work in the world, you know in the mathematics and like the patterns and like, you know look at the way things are put together and how numbers work and structure like... (sigh)... like I don’t know how to best describe how... you know...¹ Well if there’s like a fight, if some kids get into a fight or whatever, they might talk about, um, well why, you know, like they would talk about why did you do this and what would be the, you know, what would God want you to do and um, you know, I know what I’m trying to say but I can’t get it out. Like they would bring it back to Christian values, like they would correct in a Christ-like way and driving them towards being more like Christ.¹⁸ But I think that just the basic gospel story permeates in a lot of ways... I’m trying to think of other specific examples... just like God’s sovereignty and his beauty in creation and how he upholds the earth and even like, I would say the negative things are addressed through the lens of like, this is brokenness in the world.¹¹ Like the conversations they’re having in class about learning from mistakes and like fine line ethical things, you know, that might be really hard places and you’d be tempted to just say, well you know lying is protecting this person so maybe I should, you know those kind of like lessons that we appreciate.⁴ I

don't think it's like jammed down their throats, I think it's more like, ask the question, how do we see God in what we're learning?²

Q. Thanks for sharing all that. Anything else you want to add?

A. In the end, what's important to me is, are we upholding the truth of the gospel¹¹ and are we teaching the kids that? You know, we put Jesus as our Lord and Savior first and foremost in our lives and we are raising healthy kids and families, so we're doing something right!¹

Participant Profile Key

1. Jim	7. Adam	13. Frank
2. Ann	8. Katie	14. Elizabeth
3. Paul	9. Zach	15. Eric
4. Kelly	10. Jane	16. Emily
5. Joshua	11. Theresa	17. Dan
6. Betsy	12. Nick	18. Jill

Narcissism

Psychoanalysts like Freud and Lacan are largely responsible for our understandings of the human process of attachment and separation. According to Freud (1914), narcissism is a process all humans go through. He distinguishes between primary and secondary narcissism. Primary narcissism is present in all humans at birth. When a child is born, they direct love and esteem towards themselves. They also experience continuity between themselves and their parent. But as they grow, they become aware of their separation. This awareness leads to a crisis of uncertainty over whether their needs – both for practical survival objects like food and shelter as well as for narcissistic desires like love, acceptance and belonging – will be met. Humans experience this crisis of identification in both fear and love. The child fears they will lose their parents' affection at the same time they come to feel genuine affection for their parents. It is at this point that a second crisis occurs, one that Freud (1916) called *the reality principal* and Lacan (1977) referred

to as *the Nom de Pere* (the Law of the Father). During this crisis, the child realizes they cannot get the satisfaction they want and need solely from their parents' affection. So, they begin to search outside their parents for loving and fulfilling relationships that will satisfy both their physical and narcissistic desires. Freud (1914) explains this as object-libido, or the directing of desire outward toward an object. This is the stage in which my participants and their children find themselves. And Christian schooling is one object to which both parents and children have directed and are directing their narcissistic energy.

As poststructural theorists like Judith Butler explicate, children's process of identification puts them in a precarious position. Butler (1997) says, "the desire to survive, 'to be' is a pervasively exploitable desire" (p. 7). As children begin to look for meaning and belonging outside their relationship to their parents, they form social attachments to groups. They become subjects, vulnerable to all sorts of discursive forms of power, as they learn to perform normative identities (Butler, 1997; Boldt, 2006). In this way, we might think of primary narcissism as a little bit like the public pedagogy of the self. Freud (1914) explains this as the developing of the "ideal ego." The ideal ego is shaped by all of the cultural norms and rules that we internalize. This ideal ego develops in tension with the ego that formed the original object of primary narcissism, or ego-libido. As humans develop, they attach their love to objects and groups (object-libido). Securing acceptance from groups requires a performance of identity that adheres to the social norms of that group, norms like language, customs and behavior.

As shown in the first question and answer in the above profile, the majority of my participants have a long history with Christian education. For many of them, the legacy goes back multiple generations. As a result, they admitted to being on a particular trajectory, in which choosing Christian education for their children was almost inevitable. They never even thought

twice about it. It was a foregone conclusion, an assumption they had made long before they even had children. As children struggle with detachment from their parents they develop attachments to groups that include attachments to social and political identities. And this often happens when children are too young to know any better. My participant profile is an example of this type of identity formation in action. Parents who were raised in Christian education learned at a very young age to connect their identity, or their object-libido, to Christian schooling and, as such, their commitment to it remains firm into adulthood, often in spite of themselves. They simply cannot imagine any other way.

Identity formation, or the development of the “ideal ego,” is not just about the people you choose to identify with, but also who you choose not to. To secure these types of group connections, members heavily police each other as well as themselves to act according to group norms (Foucault, 1977; 1988). This reality is clearly demonstrated in my participant profile in how they talk about their perceptions of public schools and the children who attend them. Christian school kids are made to feel superior or set apart from their public-school counterparts in various ways. For some, it is simply an act of insulation. It is easy to feel superior to those with whom you have almost no interaction. And in the cases where a child cannot remain ignorant of public school families, parents can police those interactions by painting a picture of public school as an undesirable place. Here is an extended interaction I had on this topic with one of my participants that did not make it into the profile.

Ann: My mom used to say, “if you're not gonna study and you're not gonna try to get good grades, we'll just send you to public school”... as a threat!

Me: Oh wow, I'm actually getting flashbacks from my own childhood!

Ann: Right? But I knew they'd never do it because, you don't go to public school. So, I used to laugh cuz I was like, they'll never pull me out of Christian school. My grandparents would never stand for it, number one. And number two, it's just an empty threat. Like, I could fail out of Christian school and they'd still pay tuition. Because that's what you do, you send your kids to Christian school cuz public school is bad, Christian school is good.

What I found particularly interesting was how insistent my participants were that those bad ideas they had about public schools were not passed down to their own children. This certainly could be reflective of changing attitudes and increasing open-mindedness, but I am dubious. Even for my participants who did not feel that their parents intentionally painted public schools in a bad light, they still developed negative ideas about them simply due to the fact that they were aware their parents were paying money to avoid sending them there. Their parents' choice had the effect of interpellating them into the culture of Christian schooling before they could really understand it and certainly at an age where they could not opt out. This interpellation cemented their identifications with the culture of Christian schooling in such a way that their choice to continue that legacy became automatic. In fact, for the parents in my study, encouraging their children's attachment to Christianity at an early age before they were mature enough to make a choice in the matter seemed to be their explicit goal! All of my participants insisted that ensuring their children grow up to become Christians or to "know the Lord" was their number one priority as parents. They spoke of giving them a "solid Christian foundation" at an early age and about the importance of surrounding them with Christian adults on whom they could depend and trust. In fact, many of them expressed fear or nervousness about the prospect of their children interacting with adults who they could not guarantee had their same values and priorities. And

this sentiment appears to be in direct contrast to their insistence that public schools are not bad. They may attempt to correct their children for expressing disdain for public schools, but actions speak louder than words.

It is important to note here that, like primary narcissism, from a psychoanalytic perspective, interpellation as Althusser (1971) conceived it is not an inherently negative or pathological thing. Poststructural scholars argue that interpellation is a necessary process as it allows us to participate as a human in society (Butler, 1997; Eng, 2001). A person who cannot be interpellated into society is denied the social pleasures and possibilities that societal membership guarantees. We cannot opt out of society, or, we do so at our own psychological peril (Ball, 1990).

Children willingly (and often unconsciously) assimilate into group identities because in doing so, they experience acceptance and approval from the adults on whom they depend. Boldt (2006) explains, “we accept our submission to the reality principle in order to survive, and in our passion to survive, we develop passionate attachments – love – to those objects in our environment that feed our narcissistic and anaclitic needs” (p. 147). In speaking about what they value about the Christian education their children are receiving, my participants often gushed about the spiritual things their children were learning. As noted in the profile, these parents want their children to know the songs and the stories of their religion. They take pride in their children reading and memorizing the Bible. Their faces lit up as they described all the ways their children were able to demonstrate and perform their faith. None of this was surprising to me. In fact, this issue of religious performance is one of the things that drove me to do this dissertation in the first place. I started to notice how friends who would engage with me in the most profound and critical conversations about problematic aspects of our faith and religious upbringing, would in

the very same breath beam with pride as they shared with me that their 4-year-old had recently memorized The Lord's Prayer or that their first graders were playing Mary and Joseph in the Christmas nativity play. This subtle incongruity nagged at me, but it was not until I had children of my own that I began to understand where those inconsistencies originated. Narcissism, as it turns out, is mutually constitutive. Children assimilate into group identities to satisfy their own narcissistic needs, but in doing so, they satisfy their parents' narcissistic needs as well (Freud, 1914; Ornstein & Ornstein, 1985).

One way of reading this participant profile is to say that Christian school parents are caught up in a cycle of religious narcissism. Consider the responses I received when I asked my participants to articulate what their kids were learning in a Christian school that they felt they could not learn elsewhere. What exactly were these "Christian values" they spoke of? Why did a Christian education matter when it came to their kids learning about science and math? I could fill an entire page with the long pauses, ellipses, um's and like's I transcribed while listening to their replies to this question. As they gave lip service to virtues like caring, kindness and empathy, many of my participants would stop, pause, and admit that they were sure kids in public schools were learning those things, too. They did the same backpedaling when talking about how they valued how much the teachers at their children schools loved and cared for their children. Of course, public school teachers value their students, too, they sheepishly conceded. As they tried to put their finger on the difference they kept coming back to their kids "knowing Jesus" and believing in "The Gospel." Kelly articulated the difference this way,

I kinda had that conversation sort of with my sister [who sends her kids to public school] and she didn't really follow how I saw it. But um, cuz when she switched to public, she was like, well we have the "value of the week," so, like, honesty, integrity, being nice.... I

mean you say, “be nice”... why are you being nice? Ok, so it needs to go to the heart of it: We're nice to show the love of Jesus. The grace that He's poured into us we get to pour out on others, so that they cannot applaud us, but they can applaud Him. We can be in a [gifted and talented] program not to brag and be awesome and develop our academics and be a successful person, but to use the talents that God has given us. So like, they take it to that heart level, whereas, many people would say like, well they're getting integrity, they're learning to be nice... like but if it's still all about you then none of that glory is going to God and it's wasted. So like, our Kindergartners learn to be nice because we get to bestow on others, show others the heart of Jesus. We get to be His friend by being a friend to others, that's where they take it. It's not behavioral modification; it takes it to a heart transformation.

Kelly literally raised her hands and shouted, “Amen!” after she finished that answer. And no doubt, most Christians who read that would do the same. It appears to articulate a clear distinction between Christian and public education. But poking and prodding at it even a little bit, reveals that distinction to be mostly surface deep. This participant acknowledges that all people can learn to do good things. But her argument is that unless those good things are attributed to faith in or dedication to Jesus, they do not matter. This anemic understanding of The Gospel reduces Christianity to a performance – it is simply something you say you believe about a thing. God gave the cheetah its tail! Being a friend to others is like being a friend to God! If you get in a fight you should forgive each other just like Jesus did! But these pithy attributions are mostly just for the benefit of the inside community. They make Christian parents feel good because they affirm core qualities of their own identity – qualities they adopted when they were children because they affirmed core qualities of their parents identity, and so on and so forth.

Cheng (2001) notes that many scholars have observed that there is very little in Freud's writing that distinguishes identifying with a group from falling in love with a person. And indeed, Freud (1914) explains that the extreme end of object-libido is being in love, fully pouring affection and desire into another person and away from oneself. Both being in love and identifying with a group are simply attempts to fill an innate human desire to find wholeness and authenticity. These Christian parents long ago fell in love with the idea of Christian education. Their continued commitment and desire is bolstered by their children's performance of religion, which feels authentic not in spite of, but because it conforms to well-established group language and social norms.

While group socialization is inevitable and even in many ways, a psychological necessity, the various ways in which children are socialized into group identities carry with them problematic political realities. Socialization into any group includes socialization into the realities of privilege and inequity associated with that group. As such, while group identification is felt "first and foremost as a personal experience," it is also "identification with power" (Boldt, 2006, p. 148). My participants do not recognize their commitment to Christian schooling as having anything to do with race or Whiteness. However, as Boldt (2006) contends, "the desires and demands that most parents express toward their children articulate racial identifications, whether they are so blatantly visible or not" (p. 153). The preceding chapter contains multitudes of examples of how Whiteness is normed and privileged in the public identities of the Christian schools my participants' children attend. And many of these public displays are directly related to issues of narcissism and Christian identity formation. The same comfort and pride my participants feel when their children perform religious customs is no doubt also felt when they

walk down the hallways of their children's school and see images of [White] Jesus and quotes from scripture plastered all over the walls.

Race clearly plays a significant role in human's identity development. But it is difficult to see that which is so tightly woven into the fabric of who we are. Boldt (2006) suggests one way to maintain a healthy relationship with narcissism is to be critical of it. She says,

the understanding that we place unseemly, impossible demands upon one another through love, hate, identification, and ideology can be a starting point for reflecting on ethics and responsibilities (p. 157).

A good place to start this critical reflection in this case would be on the final statement in my participant profile.

In the end, what's important to me is, are we upholding the truth of the gospel and are we teaching the kids that? You know, we put Jesus as our Lord and Savior first and foremost in our lives and we are raising healthy kids and families, so we're doing something right! It is worth asking what our metric is for measuring what counts as a healthy child or family. Are we defining healthy according to hegemonic notions of respectability? Do our understandings of the truth of the gospel have anything to say about Christianity's role in the violent history of settler colonialism? Does putting Jesus as our Lord and Savior first and foremost take into consideration Christianity's problematic ties to American conservatism? One way to begin to examine these questions is by turning to another psychoanalytic theory, melancholia.

Melancholia

In psychoanalysis, melancholia refers to the grieving of a loss a person cannot fully comprehend and which happens in the unconscious mind. In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud (1917) explained two different human responses to loss. Mourning persons deal with the loss of a

specific person or object in their conscious mind. Melancholia refers to the grieving of a loss a person cannot fully comprehend and which happens in the unconscious mind. While mourning is a healthy and natural process of grieving, melancholia, according to Freud, is pathological. In a state that is both impoverishing and nurturing, a melancholic person consumes the object of its mourning. Jimenez and Walkerdine (2011) explain it this way, “unresolved grief [is] caused by the survivor’s internalized image of the deceased becoming fused with that of the survivor, and then the survivor shifting unacceptable anger toward the deceased on to a new complex self-image” (p. 188). Cheng (2001) notes, the grieving subject, unable to release the lost object, must both consume it as well as pretend it does not exist.

Many scholars have taken up the psychoanalytic framework of melancholia to analyze complex issues like race, gender, and sexuality. Anne Anlin Cheng is one such scholar who uses melancholia as a structure for understanding race, and more specifically Whiteness. In her book, *The Melancholy of Race*, Cheng (2001) thoughtfully explains issues of nostalgia and resentment, denial and exclusion that are woven into the American psyche as we attempt to process our foundational grief. Simply put, this country that was founded on the ideals of liberty and independence for some (White European male settlers), required the denial of liberty and independence for others (Native Americans, Black Africans, and women). In this country, Whiteness requires the existence of racial others to maintain its superiority. At the same time, White America attempts to define itself according to ideals of freedom and equality. She explains, “racialization in America may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, White national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others.” Furthermore, she says, “the racial other is in fact quite “assimilated” into – or, more accurately, most uneasily digested by – American nationality” (p.

10). This reality leaves America with a vexing problem, how do we “go on” while at the same time remembering and acknowledging our past transgressions? Cheng argues that racial melancholia catches White people up in an elaborate schema of consumption and denial.

Vaught (2012) borrows the scaffolding of melancholia and builds on Cheng’s ideas to explore the concept of institutional racist melancholia, specifically in relation to education. The denial of liberty and independence for the racial other at the founding of this nation, according to Vaught (2012), creates an unresolvable contradiction that is present not only in our social, cultural and political realities, but also in the very fabric of our institutions. She says, “Institutional racist melancholia cements the relationship between loss and the ongoing creation of loss. Unresolved grief is created and recreated in order to evade the irreconcilable foundational grief of Whiteness” (p. 73). Institutions, she argues, are plagued by, “an incessant process of discursively creating sense out of nonsense, reconciling the irreconcilable: only some humans are human, people are inherently free and people can be owned, freedom *and* slavery are fundamental to the nation; and so on” (p. 61). Applying these observations to education, both Cheng and Vaught point to the *Brown v. Board* court decision as an embodiment of the pathology and denial of melancholia. Vaught (2012) explains,

In the realm of education, this melancholia is reflected in the dominant narrative that characterized pre-*Brown v Board* Black society as “separate but equal” rather than subordinate and disenfranchised, vis-à-vis White society, schools, and other institutions. The White legal and systemic correction of this melancholic narrative was equally melancholic, as it borrowed from other ideologies situated in grievous irreconcilability: meritocracy and the American Dream, among others (p. 62)

Laws let Black children into White schools but did not actually alter anything about schooling to accommodate them. Then, they held Black children meritocratically responsible for their own success and failure once inside. This allows Whiteness to maintain superiority as it can blame blackness for deficiencies and its own failure to attain justice and freedom.

Not only do these melancholic racial dynamics play out in Christian schools, but Christian institutions themselves can also be analyzed according to this institutional melancholia framework. Most of evangelical Christianity, including Reformed Christianity, is predicated on the “some are in and some are out” version of the Gospel. That is, some kind of formal profession or acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord and Savior is required in order to be considered a believer and to receive the benefits of that belief, namely eternal life in heaven. In our interview, Nick exclaimed, “Well, because what is being a Christian? If you firmly believe that this is the only way that you can have salvation, this is life or death, right!?” This understanding of Christianity requires the existence of non-believers who will be damned to hell in order to add meaning and credibility to a believer’s profession of faith. At the same time, however, one of the chief characteristics of evangelical Christianity is, obviously, to evangelize. Christians, specifically those who espouse the substitutionary atonement theory of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, follow the Biblical command to go out and tell the world of God’s great love and mercy as demonstrated in the sacrifice of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. The non-Christian other is both a requirement for and an unacceptable reality of this religious paradigm. In this case, the melancholic object is actually the religion itself.

Institutional racist melancholia is a useful tool to analyze both the public pedagogy of the school buildings as well as the parent interviews. In order to link these two data sets, I will use the curricula I established in chapter three to analyze my participant interviews. Institutional

racist melancholia, or the consumption and denial of the racial and ethnic other, was apparent in all nine interviews in both subtle and obvious ways. As outlined in chapter two, I used the word “diversity” to enter into these conversations with my participants, rather than ask explicitly about race or Whiteness. In each interview, I brought up the topic by first asking what the word “diversity” meant to them and then I typically asked them two main questions. First, do you think your school is diverse? And second, what role did diversity play in your decision to send your children to Christian school? Though we did veer into conversations about socioeconomic/class diversity and diversity of ability, all eighteen participants acknowledged that when they heard the word, the first thing they thought of was racial and ethnic diversity. In the following quotes, therefore, the reader can assume that is the type of diversity they are referring to.

From these conversations with my participants, I constructed three models or approaches to racial and ethnic diversity, all of which reflect the melancholic cycle of consumption and denial of the racial and ethnic other. As both Cheng (2001) and Vaught (2012) note, institutional racist melancholia obscures our nation’s racist history and precludes an honest reckoning with our past that would help us move forward into a less racist future. For my participants, this takes the form of ignoring diversity, overcoming diversity and objectifying diversity. Rather than combine all of my interviews into one profile like I did above, I will instead highlight interviews from each school individually.

Middelburg Christian

First, I characterized my participants whose children attend Middelburg Christian school as *ignoring diversity*. Though it was not true of any of my participants, I am sure that there are many families who live in Middelburg and send their kids to Middelburg Christian to explicitly

flee from or avoid racial and ethnic diversity. It is certainly possible that my participants' parents or grandparents originally moved to the area for that very reason. But, that type of blatant racism, while disturbing, is not particularly interesting to me. I am much more fascinated by the kind of subtle ignorance that the three families I spoke to displayed. All three couples wrote off the lack of diversity at Middelburg Christian as circumstantial, due to the lack of diversity in Middelburg, generally. For Joshua and Betsy, diversity was simply not even on their radar; it did not even occur to them to consider it one way or another.

Me: Do you consider Middelburg to be a diverse place?

Joshua: No

Betsy: I would say, no.

Me: OK, does that bother you?

Betsy: No.

Me: How come?

Betsy: I guess to be totally honest, it's just not something that I've even thought that much about.

Joshua: Yah, I guess it doesn't bother me either way. I mean, we didn't move here thinking, "Ah we're gonna get away from diversity!"

Betsy: Right, right.

Joshua: And we didn't move here thinking, "Oh no, there's no diversity!" I guess for us that wasn't something we were shooting for. If we wanted more diversity we would have gone somewhere else. But diversity was not a reason we moved here. I guess it wasn't on our list at all.

Betsy: And I feel like if it was a diverse school, that would have been ok, too... like we were just gonna send them there.

Paul and Kelly, on the other hand, acknowledged the lack of diversity at Middelburg Christian, but were unbothered by it. They argued that God can create a love for diverse people in their children's hearts regardless of how much diversity surrounds them.

Me: So would you consider Middelburg Christian a diverse place?

Kelly: (laughing) No. Have you been there?

Me: OK, so how come?

Kelly: Well there's not very many kids from other than a Caucasian place there.

Paul: I think a function of it is just this side of CR is just not very diverse. So, the school is a function of the greater community.

Me: So would you say...

Paul: ...if you went to Middelburg Public you'd probably see....

Me: ...is it a little more diverse?

Kelly: Not a ton.... I mean even just watching the basketball games, I mean there's no African Americans or any other race on the team.

Me: So does that bother you ever? Or was it a factor in your decision? Was it something you talked about? Is it something that makes a difference for you when you think about your kids' educational experience?

Kelly: Not me, no

Paul: I don't think it was, no, it wasn't a factor.

Kelly: I guess for us our goal is to raise disciples of Jesus in the place that God has us and right now that is Middelburg. My goal is not to make them into diverse-accepting,

because that would come from Jesus, they will get that from the Bible and their relationship with Him. They will be able to see everyone as a child of God and be able to interact that way. So, you would have to change my goal. If my goal is gonna be like, expose them to diversity, then let's move cuz that's my goal. Let's not even pray about it; let's not seek the Lord and let's go make 'em diverse! Moving downtown! Shepherd's Grove! You know, which is wonderful if that's the place God has you, but right now we're in Middelburg and we know that the Lord will honor his word and when they get out into that wide big world and travel the world like Paul does, they'll be able to hopefully see. I mean that's not what, exposing them isn't what changes their hearts; it's Jesus that changes their hearts to see the world through the lens of the Gospel. So, I think people who intentionally do that, are trying to be Jesus. In short, like trying to create diverse kids, create that big world, it's like, you know what, that will come, so I am not gonna cave into the fear of that. I mean, yes, I want my kids to be socially accepting and diverse – accepting of all ethnicities and, you know, and I trust that will happen at Middelburg Christian because it's founded in the word.

Ann and Jim were bothered by the lack of diversity in their children's lives but abdicated their responsibility for it by claiming they would have to move far away from Crown Ridge to experience real diversity anyway.

Ann: I do not think Middelburg Christian is diverse. And it bothers me.

Jim: Yah, it's not.

Ann: It bothers both of us.

Jim: Middelburg itself is not diverse.

Ann: But we're stuck between a rock and a hard place on that one cuz we love the school a lot. But, I strive not to raise spoiled, conceited, narrow-minded children... and so, yah, sometimes private school – Christian school – feels that way and I don't want that for them at all. Like... at all. We try our very best to explain it and to do different things that would expose them, but even that, I'm like... does it feel authentic then? Let's go serve at the mission once a year? Let's go... like... to some degree you do have to immerse yourself in differences to really get the point across, so... yah... my kids... I don't know...

Me: Do you feel like in some ways you're sacrificing diversity a little bit for what you... for the other benefits?

Ann: Yah... yah... I do.... That's a hard choice to make.

Jim: We're sacrificing diversity by where we live.

Ann: Right.

Jim: We would have to leave Crown Ridge.

Ann: Right, we totally would. And we've talked about that before. Like if we really wanted them to be exposed to a totally different... it is... there's a church on every street corner! If we wanted them totally to be exposed to something outside of this community, yah, we'd have to move far away.

All three of these perspectives reflect a kind of willful ignorance about the realities of how race and Whiteness operate in the world. Not only that, but Ann and Jim seem to be oblivious to the racial and ethnic diversity that does in fact exist in Crown Ridge, even if it is beyond their backyard. This ignorance is related both to conservatism and melancholia. Scholars in both fields point to the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision as a critical event in both galvanizing the conservative [racist] movement in America (R. C. Smith, 2010) as well as in

contributing to our nation's unresolved discursive grief (Vaught, 2012). Vaught writes, "dismantling the melancholic structures and narratives of "separate but equal" did nothing to dismantle inequity in schooling and society. Nor did it challenge dominant narratives around Blackness" (p. 62). The decision did however, according to R. C. Smith (2010) have, "an immediate and consequential impact on the conservative intellectual movement and its subsequent manifestation as a powerful political movement" (p. 84). *Brown* showed that racists and White supremacists could be easily galvanized and mobilized to serve the conservative political cause. It also allowed even well-meaning White people to wash their hands of issues of school inequality. As outlined in chapter one, desegregation, White flight, and the very concept of "separate but equal" haunts the Christian schooling movement. Christian institutions like Middelburg maintain low levels of racial and cultural diversity under the guise that, "everyone is welcome, they just don't choose to come here." This absolves the school and the families who attend from any responsibility to critically evaluate the Whiteness of their institution. Families who choose to live in the mostly White suburb of Middelburg and send their children to the mostly White Middelburg Christian school release any feelings of melancholic guilt that might arise by either throwing up their hands and saying, "what are you gonna do?" or hiding behind the power of a supposedly omnipotent God.

CRCES, Shawnee

Next, I characterized my participants whose children attend Crown Ridge Christian Elementary, Shawnee as *overcoming diversity*. The three families I interviewed who send their children to CRCES, Shawnee were arguably the least homogeneous in terms of their backgrounds and motivations. Still, they presented some similarities in how they approached the

subject of racial and ethnic diversity in the school. And, even in their differences, they still reflected elements of settler colonialism and melancholia.

Scholars of race and melancholia tend to focus predominantly on the American history of slavery and current Black/White relations. Cheng (2001) takes up the issue as it relates to Asian American identity. But arguably our nation's original melancholic object is the Native or Indigenous American. Quoting Veracini (2010), Hixson (2013) points out,

The contradictions inherent within settler colonial societies combine “perpetrator trauma” with “stubborn and lingering anxieties over settler legitimacy.” These anxieties produce “long lasting psychic conflicts and a number of associated psychopathologies (p. 20).

These anxieties are particularly relevant to White Christians, as one of the dominant narratives used to justify Indigenous genocide was Manifest Destiny, that God had ordained the colonization of the American landscape for his people. Now, realistically, as mentioned in the previous chapter, most White folks, including the White families that send their kids to Shawnee, have little to no daily awareness or acknowledgement of settler colonial violence. Unlike civil rights struggles for Black Americans, many of which took place within the reach of current collective and individual memory, Native American genocide took place so long ago and has been so thoroughly erased from our cultural identity, it hardly registers. But this erasure has nevertheless involved and continues to involve significant psychosocial repression. Hixson (2013) notes,

Considerable psychic gymnastics arise from the contradictions involved in cleansing the land of the indigenes while appropriating their desirable characteristics within the maw of the dominant culture, all the while eliding the genocidal past (p. 22).

Arguably, one of the most successful and prevalent of these gymnastic moves is the ongoing discourse of color-blindness, which all three couples alluded to in their interview (actually, which all nine couples alluded to in their interviews – it is indeed a ubiquitous and insidious discourse). I chose the phrase *overcoming diversity* because I think it reflects a tendency of parents at Shawnee (and elsewhere, obviously) to consider diversity as either a tool or a roadblock. Consider this vignette from my conversation with Adam and Katie,

Adam: So, like a month into school [our daughter] met this kid on the playground. I asked her his name. She didn't know. She's like, "I had so much fun playing with him I want you to meet him!" And I was like, "well, ok, but you don't know his name. Can you tell me something about him so, like, when I drop you off at school later this week maybe we can find him on the playground?"

Katie: "He has dark hair," she said.

Adam: "He's got dark curly hair." Like, alright... that's not very useful but... um...

Katie: She's like, "oh, he's really friendly." Like just telling us all these nice things about him.

Adam: So, we were there maybe a week later, and we were dropping them off and we were near the playground and she was like, "there he is!" And... he's Black and in a wheelchair.

Katie: But neither one of those things did she tell us!

Adam: Like, it didn't dawn on her that he's Black and in a wheelchair. She's like, "he's got curly hair!" That's pretty awesome!

Katie: What she knew about him was that he was fun, he was a lot of fun to play with and that he was really nice. So, all these great characteristics without looking at the outside of

him, you know. And so it was one of those things, maybe my daughter is just awesome, but I just I loved that she didn't describe him as having brown skin or having, like... that that wasn't what she noticed first. What she noticed first was like the personality characteristics about him, so... yah...

Color-blindness refers to the practice of White folks, like Adam and Katie, who ascribe virtue to *not* seeing color. In modern discourse, this often involves a misread of Martin Luther King Jr.'s politics: All people are the same under their skin; what matters is the "content of their character!" In the account above, Adam and Katie beamed about their child's focus on her mystery playmate's admirable personal characteristics, "without looking at the outside of him." Doing this positions outward characteristics like skin color as being problematic. Widely debunked by scholars as naïve and racist, color-blind discourses persist and continue to dominate our national narrative around race. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2018), who literally wrote the book on this topic, explains,

Compared to Jim Crow racism, the ideology of color blindness seems like "racism lite." Instead of relying on name calling (n----rs, sp--cs, ch--ks), color-blind racism otherizes softly ("these people are human, too"); instead of proclaiming God placed minorities in the world in a servile position, it suggests they are behind because they do not work hard enough... Yet this new ideology has become a formidable political tool for the maintenance of the racial order. Much as Jim Crow racism served as the glue for defending a brutal and overt system of racial oppression in the pre-civil rights era, color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-civil rights era. And the beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in

the maintenance of White privilege without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those who it rewards (p. 3-4).

Here, Bonilla-Silva stumbles on what Cheng (2001) refers to as, “one of the deepest sources of anxiety in the American psyche.” In order to deny the existence of inequality, the racial/cultural/ethnic/religious other must be consumed or assimilated into dominant White culture. But this process of assimilation requires constant denial of the realities of privilege, power, domination and the persistent inequality of non-White peoples. We romanticize the Native American relationship to the lands we forced them to live on. We champion Black American success while obscuring the rampant structural inequality that precludes it. We hold up Asians as a monolithic “model minority” and overlook that many are stuck in undesirable jobs and unsafe working conditions. Cheng (2001) says, “segregation and colonialism are internally fraught institutions not because they have eliminated the other but because they need the very thing they hate or fear” (p. 12). This tension between trying to overcome diversity through color-blindness while also acknowledging the value of diversity is present in this conversation I had with Nick and Theresa,

Nick: As far as our perspective on [diversity], I don't think we ever looked at it as something that was like positive or negative.

Theresa: I think our kids have a really rich education there because it's a lot more diverse than, um, what we, what I experienced growing up anyway.

Nick: See, for me growing up it was never a thing. I mean, I grew up with international adoption, I grew up with Native American, and it's just, it was all just in our family. And some of that may have been my parents' influence and whether it was shielding me from any sort of like negative stuff, but it was just “people were just people.” And I don't know

that I've ever even been like, I really need to, you know, look into the ethnic makeup of our school.

Theresa: Well, I think our kids have always been in classes where there's been multiple students of color in their classrooms, so I don't know for us it just seems like it's part of the school.

Me: But you mentioned it's better than what you feel you had, what's the value there?

Theresa: I just think it... just everything is just more natural, I don't know like, I'm trying to think of a good way to put it, like... I think...

Nick: I don't think you would say it's *better*, I think you would just say it's just more diverse.

Theresa: It's more diverse, so better in a sense that, um, people who don't look exactly like they do in the mirror, it's demystified kind of. It's a natural thing. "This is my friend so-and-so." Like I feel like it helps them, um, I don't like the word, I don't want to use the word colorblind, cuz that's wrong and not right, but they just see their classmates as their classmates. And I think people in older generations because of, I don't know how the country has evolved or whatever, like I feel like sometimes we tend to make it more of a thing than kids even experience.

Nick: We project it. I think it's really, I like the diversity at our school and I think it's an important piece of what makes Shawnee what it is, but I think what gets tricky is when it almost feels unnatural the way they want to create it ... Your vision should stand alone and your vision at that school should be that we're making disciples, right. I mean I don't think the Bible has an asterisk that says *I need 12 disciples that are this ethnic makeup.

It's, "I need 12 people that choose to believe me." Because you choose to do this, that makes you the strongest advocate.

The most interesting thing about this account is how Theresa actually acknowledges that she knows color-blindness is a problematic discourse, but she proceeds to espouse a color-blind mentality anyway! Both of these Shawnee couples demonstrated some critical awareness about issues of diversity and the value of social interaction with people who are different from them. I think it is also important here to mention that Adam and Katie, inspired by their experience raising their son, are fervent actors for disability inclusion and social justice. They volunteer their time to help parents of children with disabilities get services, they attend meetings with school districts advocating for appropriate educational inclusion and they petition local businesses to comply with ADA laws and regulations. They would certainly never consciously argue that 'seeing disability' is a problem, but in their account, they noted that the young child their daughter had been playing with was black *and in a wheelchair*. One of the symptoms of our nation's melancholy of race is that people, especially White people, are not presented with very many life-giving approaches to engaging with diversity and reckoning with our problematic past and present. As a result, people like Adam and Katie and Theresa and Nick might understand that color-blindness is an undesirable discourse, but they do not have any healthy alternatives with which to replace it. So for my Shawnee parents, despite good intentions and even some critical awareness, diversity was still presented as something to be overcome, whether by learning to ignore external differences in favor of internal virtues as both Adam and Katie's and Theresa and Nick's stories demonstrated; or by forcing exposure to the other to the extent that differences become normalized, as in the case of this account from Zach and Jane,

Zach: So, [diversity is important because], like, if a kid has one Black friend at his school and that Black person is an a--hole, then he might assume that Black people are a--holes. Whereas if there's four of them and, you know, they play on the playground and one of them is super nice and another is an a--hole and then you say, oh they're just people. Just like, this White person is nice and this White person is an a--hole. Uh, and it becomes, they just become people.

Jane: Also, I was a Spanish Major in college, Spanish is something that's pretty important to me, and so the Spanish immersion program at Shawnee was high on our list. We ultimately chose Shawnee because of the Spanish Immersion program [even though it's not as diverse as we would have liked].

Zach: I think that for the most part the families that choose Spanish immersion are ones that are excited about diversity and like, giving their kid a unique experience.

Me: Why Spanish Immersion? Why does that feel like a valuable thing that you want your kids to have?

Jane: Well I mean, like, Spanish is one of the growing languages of the US. And I've lived abroad; I've lived in Honduras and I've lived in Spain. And we, um, like Zach visited me there, we've traveled to Spanish speaking countries. It is our ultimate hope, and we kind of had this hope all along, that we want to show our kids that the world is bigger than Crown Ridge. And so, it's our goal in the next 2-3 years, to move abroad. Like we would love to move to Central America, specifically Costa Rica is where we would love to move to for a couple years because we want them to see that, like, this is not it.

Zach and Jane admitted to me in their interview that they had originally really wanted to choose a more racially diverse Christian school for their children. Zach grew up in a very diverse Christian elementary school in the area – one of the schools that closed and merged in order to form the Shawnee Campus – and highly valued his experience. They settled for CRCES Shawnee but were eventually won over by their Spanish Immersion program as evidenced above. Zach's explanation for why he feels diversity is important for his children reflects a color-blind ideology. In addition, their commitment to Spanish Immersion and their desire to expose their children to life outside of White, Dutch Crown Ridge also has the effect of objectifying diversity, which is the theme for the parents at Shepherd's Grove.

Shepherd's Grove

Finally, I characterized my participants whose children attend Shepherd's Grove as *objectifying diversity*. All three of my Shepherd's Grove families cited the school's impressive racial and ethnic diversity as one of the top reasons why they chose the school for their children. Despite the fact that they were some of the most liberal-minded folks that I spoke to, these three family's objectification of diversity made me more uncomfortable in the end than the ignorance or colorblindness demonstrated by my other twelve participants. Diversity was something these parents chose to essentially purchase for their children. Emily and Eric articulate this desire,

Me: What do you appreciate about the diversity at Shepherd's Grove?

Eric: I like giving my kids an experience with other cultures, people from around the world, people from different life experiences as kind of part of the education. It was something that my schooling I did not have and so I value that as well. And so, I think in some ways I think Shepherd's Grove represents, for me, it's kind of a, maybe

compromise isn't the right word, but it's the Christian education coupled with a kind of public school social experience. So, it's a *third* way, in a kind of way.

Emily: I think one of the things that is so powerful is hearing and listening to the stories of other people and knowing that your way and your world is very, very different than all these different kids who sit around you, but at the same time, you can still, you can be in a class together, you can be in a reading group together and you can still connect with each other. I taught at a suburban Christian school for 7 years, and there was no... everyone's story was so similar... and that becomes your reality... and I don't think that's always, that's not an accurate picture of reality.

Me: So there's an element of authenticity? Why do you want that? How does that make your world better?

Emily: I think it changes how you deal with people, how you interact with people in your job, different SES... it changes everything. Um, if you see someone as an individual with a story as opposed to "that person." Um, you know, I feel like even teaching in a school where I had that much diversity just opened... I learned so much. There are things you can say; there are things you can't say. This is offensive; this is not offensive. I had none of that knowledge. And I wouldn't have gotten that knowledge in a school that was not as diverse. So, I feel like it gives them that cultural competency and that ability to just, they're able to love people and all different kinds of people. My boys aren't afraid of anyone. They'll talk to anybody, they don't, I mean they see color, they do, um, but there's no value attachment to it.

Eric: Yah I would echo that. I think one of the cool things that with my boys, it's so clear that when I see them interacting with their classmates, and even just kids they run into

around the neighborhood, it's like race and color are just not a big deal. They've been soaked in this environment that...

Emily: ...this is normal.

Eric: This is just normal.

Emily: Yes.

Jill and Dan articulated a similar desire. Note their description of the diversity at Shepherd's Grove. They heavily romanticize it, but at the same time they associate it with a lamentable lifestyle of poverty and brokenness. In their rendering, racial and ethnic diversity go hand in hand with social and economic struggles.

Me: So let's go back now to Shepherd's Grove; what impressed you so much about it?

Jill: Um, the diversity. Cuz I went to a diverse school and I think that was really good, being exposed to so many different kinds of people, so many different kinds of income levels, it was good. Like I didn't want them [to go to school] in a sea of White.

Dan: Yah let me quick interject, the diversity [at Shepherd's Grove] is ridiculous, oh my word. You've got Black, Hispanic, Asian, White, I mean it is ridiculous. I mean how many countries did he say were represented? It's something just insane.

Me: So that was big for you?

Dan: That was big. I think it was more for me because I came from such a closed background.

Me: So why is that important to you? What is the value there? What does diversity offer your kids that you think is important?

Jill: Knowledge.

Dan: Yah, I would think that, too. And I would think, like, I don't want my kids to think like, well, you know even if they went to a [rich, White school], it's kind of like health and wealth, you know. God's gonna bless all those people who are healthy and wealthy, and that's diversity. No it's not. It's a single mom raising 3 kids all by herself and, who knows if she had a deadbeat dad, and I want them to see that, too. I want them to ask me questions about like, how come Suzie only has a... how come her dad's not around? ...or something like that, you know. And I guess to see that side of it, too, if that makes sense.

Jill: It just came to me: empathy for other people. If you're going, if you just see the same people every day, day in and day out, you're not gonna know people's struggles. You're not gonna know what they have to deal with on a daily basis. It gives them empathy, um, for the way other people live and think and how they, how they live, and not even their decision... like... it's um, it's out of their control.

Dan: Right they could have lost their job for some reason, you know, or I don't, you kinda look at homeless people and you think, why don't you just get a job? But you don't know their background; you don't know what happened. Did they lose their house? Maybe they didn't have insurance?

Jill: It really opens your eyes.

Dan: Yah did somebody have cancer and they couldn't pay their medical bills? I mean you just don't know. And I kinda want my kids to see that when they go to school and maybe become friends with somebody in the inner city and where they don't have the same background or maybe same privileges. And I think that's a good eye opener, cuz you know you can stereotype and judge so fast. I know I can, oh man. And it's good if you can kinda get the whole spectrum, you know, that God made us all different.

Jill: They can see for themselves and not from what maybe other people's judgment being told to them or judgment overhearing. They can see the realness in other people and they can be empathetic for their life struggles.

Objectifying diversity in this way allows Shepherd's Grove parents to expose their children to the racial/ethnic/cultural/religious other in a controlled environment, one that is dominated by White hegemonic values of respectability. Cheng (2001) notes,

Dominant White identity in America operates melancholically – as an elaborate identificatory system based on psychical and social consumption-and-denial. This diligent system of melancholic retention appears in different guises. Both racist and White liberal discourses participate in this dynamic, albeit out of different motivations. The racists need to develop elaborate ideologies in order to accommodate their actions with official American ideals, while White liberals need to keep burying the racial others in order to memorialize them (p. 11).

Whether they are conscious of it or not (and I would say most of my participants are not, at least not fully), White liberals who send their children to Shepherd's Grove because it offers their children a safe diverse environment participate in the ritual of burying and memorializing the racial other. The school celebrates diversity on the surface, but individual diverse identities are subsumed and consumed by the dominant Christian identity of the school, which – as discussed in chapter three – is characterized by a commitment to respectability and adherence to White Christian social norms. This process was most evident in my conversation with Frank and Elizabeth,

Me: So why did you want your kids to attend a diverse school like Shepherd's Grove?

Frank: One of the things that I'll say about Christian Ed that is nice that... not all of... a lot of the kids are coming from homes where they're not eating at home and... often... not... this is... I don't believe that... um... I'm gonna say a bunch of stereotypes that I don't completely believe... but often in the public school, right, the teachers are underpaid or they're transient, or the kids aren't always getting good support at school... um... and can often then get into more trouble at home and that sort of thing, so to be able to have um... not... uh... I don't want my kids just to grow up with rich White guys, right, but you also want to protect your kids some, too.

Elizabeth: Absolutely. And Shepherd's Grove does that. I mean they hand pick their classes. So, I had to interview the superintendent and he said they really make sure that it's a class that the teacher can handle. So that's kind of what you're talking about.

Whereas, if you're at the public school, you know, they have to take everybody. That's what they have to do and so, if you get a rough year there's basically nothing you can do. So, we felt like the Christian school gave us more control over who's teaching our kids and, kind of what you're saying is who's in the classroom, too... like who would be with our kids...

Frank: But you also probably have to say, and again this is not fair, because the public school is a bigger entity and all that, but the teachers also really want to be there, right. And that makes a big difference in their ability to handle it in the middle of February when everything's going wrong.

Elizabeth: Yah, the parents, too. Well, the other thing that's so interesting about Shepherd's Grove is that everyone is paying something. So, that creates a very different, um, parent dynamic.

Frank: ...that ownership of the education...

Elizabeth: Yah... so... not all the parents have the same values as we do.

Frank: That's true.

Elizabeth: I mean I think a third of the student body doesn't go to Church. You know, so some people wouldn't choose... they would choose CR Christian or Middelburg Christian over Shepherd's Grove because they want to protect their kids from kids who are not 'churched'. We don't feel that way. We want our kids to know people that aren't churched, but we want them to know them in a safe environment. And mostly we want the teacher that's in charge of that classroom to have the same values that we do so that when they're dealing with issues of race, theology, whatever, they're like dealing with them in a healthy way.

While seeming aware of the ways in which they were generalizing in potentially problematic ways, Frank and Elizabeth express a similar denigration of the poor/diverse other in this account. They also articulate plainly that while they value exposing their children to diversity, they also want to be fully in control of the values and norms in which that exposure takes place. At one point during our interview, after I pressed the issue of why she thinks that Shepherd's Grove's evangelical mission is important, Elizabeth gave me a cheeky smile and said, "Well, Sara, everybody needs Jesus." At Shepherd's Grove, the objectification goes two ways. White liberal parents package up diversity to expose it to their children while the school packages up Christianity to expose it to the needy and deficient diverse other.

Arguably, all eighteen of my participants are operating at some level of melancholic ignorance about issues of race and White supremacy. Much of this ignorance is a symptom they share with every other White person in this country. For example, the level of denial it takes for

White parents to send their children every day to a school that is named after the Native tribes that had to be murdered in order for it to exist is really no different than the level of denial it takes for a stadium full of Cleveland Indians fans to cheer on a team bearing a blatantly racist mascot. However, when operating in conjunction with narcissism, this melancholy specifically obscures the realities of White supremacy in Christian schooling. I believe that Christian school parents are caught up in a narcissistic commitment to a Christian identity that, in their mind, supersedes any and all other identity concerns. But that is only because they see it as operating neutrally, above any structural or political reality. They are mistaken in this, however. And this mistaken commitment will be the subject of my fifth and final chapter. After all, as Cheng (2001) notes,

Those who do not see the racial problem or those who call themselves nonideological are the most melancholic of all because in today's political climate, as Toni Morrison exclaims in *Playing in the Dark*, "it requires hard work *not* to see (p. 11).

This dissertation is my attempt to make visible that which the Christian Reformed community – my community – is working so hard not to see.

CHAPTER 5

REVISITING MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS, CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter I revisit my research questions, both as a means to review where we have been as well as to offer a way to look forward. I will make connections between the three schools as well as between my analysis of the school buildings and the parent interviews. I will conclude with a brief, but necessary, look at White Supremacy in Christian Reformed theology and suggest possibilities for the future.

How do Reformed Christian schools communicate Whiteness as norm/default through their structure, organization and public identities?

In chapter three, I theorized the public identity of each school as a curriculum of Whiteness. I examined the structure and organization of the school buildings as well as took a careful look at the art and other ephemera that they hang up, both temporarily and permanently, on their walls and in their hallways. In doing this, I discovered how White supremacy permeates these school identities in both subtle and obvious (to me, at least!) ways. As mentioned in chapter three, all three of the curricula I identified could be seen in each of the schools to some degree.

First, I explained how the core tenets of American conservatism were evidenced at Middelburg Christian Elementary. I explored how the public identity elements of the school esteemed traditional values, promoted the ordering of worldly impulses, and resisted social change. I tied these identity elements to issues of racism and White supremacy using R. C. Smith's (2010) argument that American conservatism and racism are inextricably linked. In addition, in chapter four, I also noted how conservative philosophies were threaded into the

parents' motivations for sending their children to Middelburg, and their perspectives on issues of racial and ethnic diversity.

Given how tightly woven it is with American Evangelical Christianity in general, conservatism is perhaps the easiest curricula to observe in the other two Christian schools that I studied. Christian schools are arguably in the business of preserving traditional values. The question that most Christian school supporters seem to be ignoring, however, is whose values are they? At Shawnee, it is pretty clear to see whose values have the most power, that of the rich White donors whose names and contributions are plastered all over the building in various displays of honor and tribute. At Shepherd's Grove, the folks who founded the school and continue to run it several decades later are almost exclusively White men. While their power operates much less conspicuously than their counterparts at Shawnee, White men still maintain the power to define Shepherd's Grove "culture" of which they are so proud. And in all three schools, the Bible is presented as the most fundamental core value to be preserved and esteemed, but rarely questioned. At every school, Bible verses were displayed on almost every available surface with little to no consideration for context or potential controversy. In chapter four, I used the word ignorance to characterize Middelburg Christian parents' perspective on diversity. This ignorance extends beyond just their consideration of non-White Christian people to their awareness and acknowledgement of non-White Christian ideas. Whose values are we preserving? Whose Biblical interpretations? The answer is almost always White Western European Christian men.

White Christians, like all White people, of course, have the privilege of ignoring all kinds of diversity if they want to. That is one of the core features of White supremacy. And ignorance may be bliss; but it is also dangerous. This nation has found itself in an incredibly perilous

moment in the election of Donald Trump. Most troubling are the polls, which suggest that over 80% of White Christians cast their ballot for him and consequently for his racist, White nationalist agenda (Smith & Martinez, 2016). Complicating the matter is, of course, his appointment of Reformed Christian school supporter, Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education. Betsy is from my hometown. I went to school with her children. The Christian schools in my city would not be what they are without her family's generational monetary support. Her identity and core values are extremely similar to all of the parents in this study, even if their politics might differ. Secretary DeVos' position on freedom of choice in schooling is insidious enough on its own as it relates to issues of racial diversity and equality. For example, according to a study by the Southern Education Foundation,

In 2012, 12 states had enrollment rates where Whites were at least three times more likely that African American students to be enrolled in private schools. The six "freedom of choice" states constituted half of the 12.

However, it is her uncritical perspective on the inherent value of Christian schooling in general that troubles me the most, and this is something I believe she shares with all of the participants in this study, regardless of how critical they might be of her methods or qualifications for her government position. As long as conservative principles of stability and tradition supersede any efforts to critically question our Christian heritage and beliefs, White supremacy will continue to permeate our institutional identities.

Secondly, I attached the public identity at CRCES, Shawnee to settler colonialism. This curriculum of Whiteness is perhaps the most obscure of the curricula that I identified, but it nevertheless appeared in various iterations at all three schools. One of the core features of settler colonialism is its construction of a property regime, in which everything under the sun is

perceived as a product, or something to be owned, including land and resources. In the case of Shawnee, this took the form of the aforementioned tributes to all of the rich White donors who bankrolled the building. In addition, Shawnee, much more than the other two schools, is fully enmeshed in a capitalist paradigm of commodification and competition. Both Middelburg and Shepherd's Grove participate in some form of promotion to attract families to their school. The reader will recall Principal Bill's insistence on the importance of his staff staying "on message" as a way to promote Middelburg Christian to perspective families. Shepherd's Grove employs Neil to sell their school experience to the outsider, and furnished a beautiful brick home for him to do it in. However, even given these examples, due to its particular location in the city and the particular constituents they are serving, Shawnee is caught up in competing with rich public school districts for students and families in ways the other two schools are not. As such, Shawnee is the most visibly affluent of the three schools in this study. My participants noted the pressures they felt in regards to fitting in at Shawnee from a socioeconomic perspective. Here is an example from Nick,

If I didn't know anything about the school, if I drove up, I'd say, a. I can't afford it and b.

I cannot keep up with these people. Because the people that drop their kids off in the morning, they are dressed to kill, even if they have nowhere to go, and it's like...

uuuhhh... I think my van might be worth what you're wearing!

Zach and Jane actually mentioned that this kind of economic elitism was something that made them originally hesitant to send their kids to Shawnee. As mentioned previously, Zach said,

I sort of looked at the brand-new building and like, all the talk of academic excellence and, you know, it kinda turned me off. So, I was really reluctant to go there, even though it's two blocks from our house.

After I asked them to unpack that comment a little, they had the following exchange,

Zach: So, at like the open house that we went to there were certain parents who were asking questions about where the school ranks and how do they use these certain testing standards and this, that and the other thing, and you can just see what they're driving at you know. "I want my kid to be the future CEO of something," you know. And that's fine and that's, you know, that's part of what private schools are about, but that's not why we chose the Christian school, you know.

Jane: And sometimes I get worried – well, we get worried – when all the kids are wearing North Face and Under Armour and, "if I don't have Nikes then my shoes aren't going to be cool like everybody else's shoes." That's just worrisome to me.

Zach: I felt that way in high school and I don't want that for our kids.

Jane: That's what we don't.... like we don't want that to be the focus, what does the brand say on your shirt...

Zach: ...or they're embarrassed cuz mom's car is rusty...

As I mentioned in chapter four, Zach and Jane eventually chose Shawnee despite their hesitations about the elitism of the school because they were so impressed with the Spanish immersion program. However, in my estimation, Shawnee' Spanish immersion program is yet another example of their participation in the capitalist property regime. Based on the student projects and academic materials on display in the hallways (reducing Spanish culture to food, fabric and festival; favoring translated English texts over texts written by Spanish-speaking authors), Shawnee' Spanish immersion program seems to be just another marketing tool, one that makes White families feel good for exposing their children to "diversity," and offers students a head start on fulfilling academic requirements in the future. Nick and Theresa mentioned that

they did not understand the “value” in having their children learn Spanish in terms of their future prospects but did say that if Shawnee offered a Mandarin immersion program, they might have considered it, as learning Chinese probably would, “open more doors career-wise.” Whether Spanish or Mandarin, a language becomes just another product for the school to sell and for White Christian families to consume.

Further complicating this capitalist discourse of commodification, scholars note that one of the major elements that evolved from the settler colonial property regime was the conception of Whiteness as property. Cheryl Harris (1993) traces the history of race from color to status to property, which she says is a “progression historically rooted in White supremacy and economic hegemony over Black and Native American peoples.” Her argument is that Whiteness and property share the common premise of the “right to exclude” (p. 1714). This premise has been cemented over time through official laws as well as norms and social codes. As a social construct, Whiteness carries with it power and domination, and as property, White status can be both awarded and taken away from individual persons based on whether they can conform to White identity markers. A. Smith (2012) notes, however, that these accounts of Whiteness as property fail to fully account for the ways White supremacy interacts with settler colonialism in terms of Native peoples. She says,

In this intersection, Whiteness may operate as a weapon of genocide used against Native peoples in which White people demonstrate their possessive investment not simply in Whiteness, but also in Nativeness. The weapon of Whiteness as a “scene of engulfment” (da Silva) ensures that Native peoples disappear into Whiteness so that White people in turn become the worthy inheritors of all that is indigenous (p. 74).

At Shawnee, the evidence of this engulfment is literally written above the entryway door. But the consumption and erasure of Nativeness goes beyond issues of naming and appropriation. And all three schools participate in this engulfment to some extent, regardless of whether Native peoples are explicitly referenced or not. Recall the brief example from the Shawnee profile of the book bins in the upper elementary hallway. There was a bin containing books about Native Americans. And then a few bins down, there was a bin labeled Our Country. It was not labeled USA or The United States or even America. It was labeled, *Our* Country. I can hear the Woody Guthrie tune playing in my head, “This land is your land. This land is my land...” except my version has a more accurate resolution to that phrase, sing it with me, “except it’s not really, because we stole it!”

One of the features of a settler colonial society is an obsession with cultivating a national identity, one that erases the indigenous genocide and land theft that led to its existence and elevates Whiteness as the pinnacle of national belonging (J. Smith, 2011; Hixson, 2013). All three schools in this study conflated their identity with a national identity by displaying various patriotic paraphernalia around the building. I characterized the parents at Shawnee as overcoming diversity through colorblind attitudes, and this conflation of a Christian school identity with a national identity is right in line with that theme. Shawnee’s school building also featured the most public displays of patriotism. In addition to the American Flag posters hanging in the entryway, they also fly the flag on a tall pole outside the entrance, and many teachers have their students say the pledge of allegiance in class. Middelburg also flies the American flag on a tall pole outside the school and I am told many teachers ask their children to say the pledge every morning. While Shepherd’s Grove has fewer outward displays of U.S. patriotism (they do not fly the US flag outside the entrance, though, you will remember the Statue of Liberty paintings and

the image of George Washington praying before battle), they also participate in this process by working hard to cultivate a Shepherd's Grove identity, which as I will review in a moment, is steeped in ideas of White middle-class respectability. But briefly first, and to conclude, I really love J. Smith's (2011) rendering in this quote,

Like a technique of power or a mode of thought, a recurring obsession with national identity as well as an accompanying affect of unease are two such symptoms of what I have called a settler colonial disorder: a form of governmentality (as a mode of conduct) that constantly diverts attention and energy away from building or expressing more affirmative affinities and transformative modes of social organization (p. 128).

Not only is the settler colonial obsession with cultivating and maintaining a White national identity racist and violent, it is also deeply unimaginative. And when coupled with the curricula of respectability politics, it precludes a more honest, authentic and justice-oriented identity from taking hold in Christian schools.

I classified the prominent curriculum of Whiteness at work at Shepherd's Grove as one of respectability politics, and like the other two curricula, it is at work in the other schools as well. Shepherd's Grove values of diversity, excellence, hospitality, and spirituality are all steeped in White norms and social codes. Excellence is defined according to hegemonic White middle-class standards – getting good grades, going to college, getting a good job, and forming a stable (heterosexual, two-parent) family. While they are proud of their racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity, Shepherd's Grove promotes a school-wide culture that is characterized by an emphasis on unity and performative hospitality. Shepherd's Grove, moreso than the other two schools, is also characterized by a kind of hyper-spirituality – the building is chock-full of religious ephemera. As Neil and all three of the couples I spoke to informed me, the school places

tremendous emphasis on prayer and other communal religious rituals. Displaying religious paraphernalia and emphasizing religious rituals is not necessarily inherently problematic, of course, and it is certainly to be expected at a Christian institution. What troubles me is the lack of consideration for the problematic history behind the religious values and spiritual customs that are most esteemed.

Consider, for example, the history of the school itself, which is proudly commemorated in displays around the building. It is a history of White male missionaries working in the neighborhood and deciding that it was lacking something that only they could provide. This is a familiar missions paradigm, still very alive and well in the Reformed Christian tradition today. It is worth noting that none of the parents I interviewed who send their children to Shepherd's Grove live near the school. And I would imagine that is true for most of the White families who send their children there. I noted in chapter four that my Shepherd's Grove participants could be characterized as objectifying diversity. They value the diverse other, but mostly as a spectacle. And what they have to offer the other – Jesus – is weighted far more heavily than anything the other could possibly offer them. And this is where the curriculum of Whiteness at Shepherd's Grove intersects with the other two school buildings. Certainly hegemonic White middle-class norms are esteemed at both Middelburg and Shawnee, that much goes without saying, as they are schools that are predominantly run and attended by White middle-class people. But in the end, at all three schools, publicly demonstrating your love for Jesus and belief in the Bible is *the most respectable* thing you could possibly do. And who is the Jesus of the Bible, according to the public pedagogy of all three school buildings? Jesus is a White guy, of course.

How is Whiteness privileged or normed in parents' motivations and rationales for sending their kids to Reformed Christian schools?

In chapter four, I used the psychoanalytic concept of narcissism to unpack the interviews I conducted with Christian school parents. I used Freud's (1914) concepts of primary narcissism, object-libido and ideal ego to explain how children become interpellated into group identities as a way to fulfill their narcissistic desires for love, belonging and acceptance. Thinking about narcissism in this way helped me understand my participants' commitment to the, often generations-old, tradition of choosing Christian schooling for their children. And exploring how psychoanalytic evaluations of identity formation intersect with a poststructural analysis of power and domination helped me see how an uncritical commitment to Christian schooling was woven into my participants' identities from a very young and vulnerable age – a commitment that they are now uncritically passing on to their own children as well.

While this commitment to Christian education is not directly related to race – at least in my participants' minds, adopting a White racial identity functions in almost exactly the same way as adopting a Christian schooling identity. I can therefore use narcissism to explore how Whiteness is privileged or normed in my participants' motivations for sending their children to Christian schools. From a psychoanalytic perspective, "Whiteness is not a natural attribute but an identity and a group membership taken on to compensate for the fear and incompleteness of human existence" (Boldt, 2006, p. 154). In my estimation, based on my participant interviews, Christian schooling fulfills this exact same need. In addition, I have argued that the White supremacist curricula of conservatism, settler colonialism and respectability politics are operating at a pedagogical level in the public personas of the school. I have also articulated how those curricula are connected to my participants' perspectives on racial and ethnic diversity as it

relates to choosing Christian education. I used psychoanalytic theory to analyze my participants' interviews because I believe most racialization and socialization into Whiteness specifically, happens without our knowing. That is, Christian school parents are not conscious of the ways Whiteness and White supremacy are embedded in the choices they make for themselves and their children. The parents I spoke to did not give any indication that their motivation for sending their kids to Christian school was to get away from non-White people or to explicitly avoid the diverse other. As mentioned previously, I am not compelled by that kind of blatant racism, anyway. And in fact many of the families I interviewed are doing the exact opposite, specifically choosing particular Christian schools for their racially diverse populations or at least lamenting the lack of racial and ethnic diversity the homogenous Christian school environment provides their children. What I hoped to understand better through this study is why and how this ignorance about racial identity formation and White supremacy operates and persists. And to do that, I coupled my analysis of narcissism with melancholia.

The melancholia of race operates at various levels in society as well as in individual minds and hearts. It involves the consumption and denial by White people of the racial other in order to overcome the grief of White supremacist violence and exclusion in the past and present. White parents at Middelburg adopt postures of ignorance to justify their lack of proximity to the diverse other or their affinity for conservative Christian traditions and values. White parents at Shawnee demonstrate a colorblind mentality that allows them to consume or overcome the diverse other in ways that make them feel virtuous. And White parents at Shepherd's Grove pride themselves on exposing their kids to the diverse other; they objectify diversity while overlooking the fact that a fundamental mission of the school is to make everyone the same. From an institutional perspective, the melancholy of race operates beyond parents' motivations

for sending their children to Christian schools. And I believe that Christian institutional racist melancholia is its own particular phenomenon worthy of consideration.

Though he does not use the specific terminology, Stephen Haynes (2012) writes about an example of the institutional racist melancholia of the Christian church in his book on the history of the Memphis kneel-ins and the campaign for Southern church desegregation in the 1960s. He argues that institutional memory often functions “to soothe decades-old institutional trauma” (p. 5). In the case of the kneel-ins, White Southern churchgoers attempted to cover up their racist behavior by claiming (and continuing to claim!) that their aversion to church integration was not about race but rather just about the objectionable behavior of civil rights activists, who they claim(ed) were not “true worshippers.” Haynes writes,

These official memories persist because they conceal wounds inflicted in intuitions that claim a moral identity. Since most modern organizations do not claim such identities, they are rarely compelled to deny or justify their racist histories (p. 5).

It is difficult for an institution that has perpetrated immoral acts to claim moral authority. So it makes sense that the Christian church would struggle to come to terms with racism and White supremacy in both its past and present. Christopher Meehan tells a similar tale of a Reformed Christian school on the south side of Chicago that resisted racial integration in the 1960s.

White Christian parents whose children attended the school at the time cited all kinds of reasons for why they were opposed to racial integration, most related to issues of safety and fear. The neighborhood in which the city was located was known for the virulent racism of its residents and business owners. In addition to a significant mob presence, there were very real threats of violence (and a history of race riots) from racist Whites (many of whom were, of

course, also Christians) who wanted to keep their neighborhoods pure. As Meehan (2017) writes,

There were critics who said residents of Cicero, and particularly those who ran Timothy Christian School, were narrow minded and reactionary. But the truth is, many Timothy supporters had thought seriously about what they did, and they did not take their position lightly. Their struggle was multifaceted, taking into consideration the teachings of their Christian faith and the realities of the city in which they lived (p. 70).

The perceived reality of these White Christian school parents was that they themselves were not the real racists. The real racists were the people in the neighborhood who would have a problem if they let Black kids into their school. Since those real racists would put everyone's livelihoods in danger, the safest and therefore most logical choice was for the school to resist integration. This was not an uncommon way for White people to view school integration, and surely similar scenarios were playing out all over the country at both public and private institutions. But this type of rationalization and denial has very particular melancholic characteristics that are still operating in Christian school structures and parents' motivations today. In a White supremacy paradigm, being racist or doing racist things often makes logical sense. In this case of racial integration at Timothy Christian School, the logical choice was the one that benefited White Christians the most. Meehan (2017) wants to give credit to these White Christians for being stuck between a rock and a hard place, but I think there are critical issues that remain unconsidered, and that can be interpreted through the lenses of narcissism and institutional racist melancholia.

One of the core tenets of Reformed theology, as outlined in chapter one, is the doctrine of original sin. Many Reformed Christians speak about this concept using the discourse of brokenness. Reformed theology posits that God's creation was originally perfect until the first people, Adam and Eve, sinned. Because of their original sin, the whole world fell, or became broken. This brokenness has characterized the world ever since and will continue to characterize it until Christ returns to earth to restore his perfect creation. Thandeka (2005) argues that, thanks in large part to the interpretation of Augustine and John Calvin, this understanding of original sin has led Christians to over-emphasize the evils of human nature, resulting in a theology of shame, which, she argues, "makes the victim solely responsible for his or her own brokenness" (p. 121). In this theology, individuals are positioned as doomed and desperate for a savior. I believe this theological positioning results in two things. First, it paves the way for a narcissistic commitment to "belief in Christ as Lord and Savior" as superseding all other identity concerns. Second, it facilitates the melancholic posture of denial because any evil act or structural problem can be attributed to a fundamental brokenness that cannot be solved. If you look at the case of racial integration at Timothy Christian school, White parents were able to justify resisting integration by deferring to the larger issue of brokenness in society as well as because they were committed to Christian education as an inherent good apart from any larger societal concern.

Positioning belief in Jesus Christ as the most important of all identity concerns allows both Christian individuals and institutions to justify, perpetrate and subsequently deny all kinds of racist ideas, behaviors and structural realities in the name of that higher calling. Specifically in this study, Middelburg parents can overlook the lack of racial and ethnic diversity at their school and in their communities; Shawnee parents can overlook the history

of indigenous genocide that led to the existence of their school in the first place; and Shepherd's Grove parents can overlook their complacency in fostering a group adherence to problematic respectability politics.

What are the mechanisms that both obscure and uphold White supremacy in both Reformed Christian education institutions and family commitments to those institutions and how might those mechanisms be dismantled?

This brings me to a consideration of my final research question, which I believe has already been partially addressed by my discussion of the two questions above. However, there are some additional issues worth exploring. One of the most notable features of this Reformed Christian school community is its insularity. Mark Mulder (2015) writes about this characteristic in his book *Shades of White Flight*,

Because the CRC families found almost all social fulfillment within the institutional rubric of the church and school, they had few bridging ties to the wider community and, subsequently, a very narrow conception of place. The CRC became so isolated that it nurtured a closed network. Out of necessity, CRC members could conduct business with persons not belonging to the denomination. However, for all other social activities the members of the CRC generally only endured limited interaction with the non-CRC population. To ascertain the level of social seclusion, one has only to note the CRC idea that matrimony with individuals from the RCA should be labeled as “intermarriage” (p. 144).

The CRC refers to the Christian Reformed Church and the RCA is the Reformed Church in America. These two denominations are so close in character and theological commitments that they would be almost indistinguishable from each other to the outside world; however, I have

heard this quip about “intermarriage” between denominations several times over the course of my life. Principal Bill’s comment about diversity in Middelburg being “which CRC church do you go to” can hardly even qualify as a joke in this incredibly closed community. Adam and Katie noticed it as soon as they moved here. And very few days go by in which I am unable to play a rousing game of Dutch Bingo with a stranger at the grocery store or preschool parking lot. One of the key differences between the CRC and RCA, and what caused their original denominational split, is their approach to Christian schooling. And though attitudes are evolving, several of my participants recalled members of their CRC churches growing up being ostracized for choosing not to send their children to Christian schools. As Theresa and Nick pointed out, in the past, not sending your children to Christian schools would often signal a concerned visit from the CRC church leadership. “The elders would come to your house!” they exclaimed.

Coupling this fierce institutional commitment to Christian schooling with a resistance to criticality that Adam and Katie labeled “Crown Ridge Nice” one can see how easy it is for the mechanisms that perpetuate White supremacy to go overlooked or unconsidered in both individual and structural Christian school identities. And while their intentions might feel pure, Reformed Christian parents’ adherence to creating and maintaining safe and comfortable Christian communities for their children to grow up in requires overlooking problematic realities. There is a vignette from the Meehan book that I think illustrates this point well. It was at the height of the integration controversy and while the school leadership remained firm, members of the school staff and faculty were starting to protest. One day, they staged a walkout in support of racial integration at their school. The walkout got enough attention to warrant the presence of the news media and, when asked to comment on the resignation of the teachers, the chairman of the Timothy school board gave the following quote to the *Chicago Sun Times*, “I’m so busy finding

replacement teachers that I don't have time for it. I'm making sure our children get a good Christian education" (in Meehan, 2017, p. 123). In this chairperson's mind, racial justice and Christian education are disparate concerns, and the latter is of much higher importance than the former. It is my contention (and I am certainly not alone) that beyond issues of public and personal identities, the chief mechanism which is both obscuring and upholding White supremacy in Reformed Christian schools is Reformed Christian theology itself.

Reformed Christian Theology and White Supremacy

Several of the parents that I interviewed alluded to the idea that Christian schools are more open to critical conversations about theological issues than they had been in previous generations. Jim, for example, had this to say about his experience at Middelburg Christian,

I think the focus now for the kids is much more open to asking questions. They want to challenge the kids and make them think for themselves in regards to their faith. So, you know when I was a kid it was, you were taught the Bible stories and you were taught this and this and this and it was just kind of the way it was, you know. And now, like, they're asking much more open questions and they're like inviting the kids to think and to be like, "oh I'm not quite so sure I understand this" or "why is it like this?" And to think about their faith and be intentional like, "why do I believe this?" Not like, "this is what it is" or "this is what we believe."

At this point, Jim paused and it was clear he had just said something he was not totally sure of. He quickly corrected himself to clarify what he meant,

This is what we believe, but why? Or, like, if you don't believe that, why? Like, what kinds of questions do you have?

Jim was very effusive about how open and willing he perceived Middelburg to be about critical questioning, but he stopped when he found himself accidentally suggesting that Middelburg was ambiguous about *what* they believed. From his account, it is unclear exactly which ideas or beliefs are open to questions and which are not. But based on the insistence of all my participants that teaching their children to be Christians and “know the Lord/Jesus/Christ” was their top priority as parents, there do seem to be some theological beliefs that are not up for debate.

So, how does an uncritical commitment to Reformed Christian theology preclude a full and honest reckoning with White supremacy? Well, the answer to that would easily fill another dissertation, or ten, so for the purposes of concluding this project, I will offer the briefest of insights here. Two key theologians I will reference who have taken up this work are Willie James Jennings and J. Kameron Carter. Both scholars locate the genesis of modern White supremacy in imperialism and trace how Christianity adopted hierarchies of humanity according to colonial paradigms. Jennings (2010), who was raised and schooled in the same city as this dissertation research took place, notes how when he was young, his Black family became the target of Reformed Christian neighborhood missionaries despite the fact that they were already part of a robust community of Christian believers of color. This interaction started him on the path to exploring the ways in which Whiteness and Christianity have coalesced in problematic ways over time. In addition to exploring colonial narratives of White (Christian) European subjugation of Black and brown bodies around the globe, he points to literacy development as a primary method in which Western White translations of the Bible took precedence over other interpretations and understandings. Consequently, predominant theological writing over the past several centuries has conflated human-being-in-the-world with White male bourgeois European being-in-the-world (Copeland, 2010). Apropos of my

study, Jennings (channeling Audre Lorde) takes up the metaphor of architecture to elucidate the ways in which White Western theology impedes a vision for racial justice. He writes,

Any house can be filled with new people and new practices, but the very shape of the house and where things are positioned exert a deep and abiding influence on those who live in the house (p. 243).

Both Jennings and Carter argue that Christians wishing to purge the structures of White supremacy from their theology must return to the beginning, to a theology of creation – a Biblical account of space and place and people. Carter’s (2008) work stresses the importance of reconnecting Christianity with its Jewish roots. He explains,

at the genealogical taproot of modern racial reasoning is the process by which Christ was abstracted from Jesus, and thus from his Jewish body... Jewish flesh in this moment underwent a religious conversion: it was converted into racial flesh, positioned within a hierarchy of racial-anthropological essences, and lodged within a now racialized chain of being... In making Christ non-Jewish in this moment... he became White, even if Jesus as a historical figure remained Jewish or racially a figure of the Orient. Theology’s participation in this process is what makes it modern.

Indeed, theology assisted in bringing about modernity precisely in aiding and abetting this process (p. 6-7).

The White Jesus phenomenon, as articulated at several points in my study, is about more than just representation; it is an entire way of (mis)understanding of the Gospel story. According to Carter (2008), displacing Jesus from his Jewish roots transformed Christianity into the cultural property of the West. Christian civilization became conflated with Western civilization, and vice versa. In Carter’s estimation, modern colonialism is a direct result of an

ideological rendering of Jesus, one that fully abstracts him from the Biblical account of His place and people.

This ideological rendering of Jesus is on full display in my study, even though my participants appear completely ignorant of it. Revisiting the components of developing a Reformed Christian worldview, as highlighted on the Christian Schools International (CSI) website, helps illustrate how White supremacy has woven its way so fully into Reformed Christian identities. The top precept of this worldview development is the acknowledgment that, “God and his Word are the source of all truth.” CSI further articulates,

A biblically informed curriculum points to God as the source of all truth, leads students toward biblical wisdom and a response to God’s call to discipleship, and nurtures all students toward Christlike living. God’s truth permeates every academic subject and educational initiative. Faith is imbedded in curriculum, and faith and learning are inseparably linked.

This statement can be understood in Jennings’ (2010) terms as the “architecture” of Reformed Christian schooling. Following both Jennings’ and Carter’s analysis, a Reformed Christian perspective on “biblical wisdom” is inseparable from White European wisdom. A Reformed Christian school’s “biblically informed curriculum” can therefore never accomplish the work of breaking down White supremacy.

Theologians like Jennings and Carter acknowledge that we need not completely abandon all precepts and tenets of modern theology in order to deconstruct White supremacy. All theology, including Reformed theology, has the potential to teach and illuminate. However, White Christians must work to prioritize the theology of Black and brown peoples from around the world in order to, as Carter (2008) contends, “rend theology from the hands of Whiteness

rather than concede theology to Whiteness” (p. 379). Along with that, the principles (and perhaps even the very existence) of Reformed Christian schooling must be heavily scrutinized in order to purge White supremacist discourses.

In my journey to this place of criticality and even rejection of many previously held Reformed Christian understandings, I have been left with a giant hole where these commitments once lived. Freud’s (1914) rendering of secondary narcissism, which I have not utilized in this dissertation, now comes aching to mind. Secondary narcissism is pathological. It occurs when the libidinal object disappears or becomes untenable (or perhaps never develops in the first place) and object-love turns inward or back to the self. This more well-known version of narcissism, according to Freud (1914), leads to all kinds of harmful pathologies, mental illnesses, and psychoses. Resisting criticality in favor of lightheartedness and congeniality is certainly not an exclusively Reformed Christian phenomenon. What do we do when the core objects of our identity crumble? If not this, then what? These are painful and complicated questions that most individuals and institutions (including myself at various points in my journey) understandably resist. But they must be engaged if we are to fully reckon with White supremacy in our individual and institutional identities. Much of what I have written in this dissertation might be perceived by members of my community as harsh. But I am committed to drawing out these painful truths in order that we all might be able to live more gracious and justice-filled lives.

Future Possibilities

There are several possibilities for engaging with the data I generated for this dissertation in the future that would help me to think more about this process of detaching White supremacy from Reformed Christian schooling. First, I would love to explore my data through the lens of affect theory. Affect theory would allow me to build on the subject of identity formation in terms

of both the institutional as well the individual and explore how Christian schooling makes us *feel*. As a parent myself, I am compelled by (and have felt myself!) the emotional pull of Christian schooling. Additionally, Leonardo & Zembylas (2013) suggest that using critical affect theory can help researchers understand Whiteness as a “technology of affect.” They explain,

Affective technologies include the mechanisms through which affects and emotions come to be instrumentalized, containing certain social norms and dynamics of inclusion/exclusion with respect to one’s self and an Other. In theorizing Whiteness as a technology of affect, we hope to capture the mental, emotional, and bodily dimensions of Whiteness in the context of racial dialogue (p. 151).

Analyzing Reformed Christian institutional and individual conceptions of Whiteness as a technology of affect would allow me to explore further the emotional connections and commitments to Whiteness in the discourse of Christian schooling that I have begun to touch on in this project. In addition, as scholars like Jennings and Carter advocate, part of wrestling theology from the hands of Whiteness involves acknowledging the ways in which Black and brown peoples around the world (many of whom have been left out of modern literacy paradigms and have therefore been unable to render their theology in written form) live and embody their faith and their understandings of Jesus and Christianity. Affect theory, perhaps coupled with phenomenology, could provide a critical window into those lived and embodied understandings.

Another possibility worth exploring is to borrow the methodology from Avner Segall’s (2002) book *Disturbing Practice*. I could present the profile I constructed back to my participants (and/or perhaps even add more participants and potentially broaden my understandings and the profile’s implications), allow them to annotate it and then analyze the

discourse their annotations produced. I could also do something similar with the curricula I developed from each of the three buildings. It would be very interesting to see how the parents perceived the curriculum of Whiteness I Identified at their children's school – where they wanted to affirm it and how they attempted to challenge it.

Both of those frameworks would be compelling and illuminating and certainly enjoyable for me to investigate. However, realistically, any further academic analysis I produced would be unlikely to accomplish anything more than “preaching to the choir” in terms of engendering meaningful reform in my community. There is nothing inherently wrong with preaching to the choir, of course. In fact, a wise advisor and mentor once told me that whenever we read something that speaks to us in a powerful or particular way, it is because it articulates *something that we already knew*. There are plenty of Reformed Christians that I know who I believe would benefit from and enjoy reading this project (and perhaps even the future projects suggested above). However, I mentioned in my introduction that my positionality as a participant objectifier had the potential to make me an “outlaw” in my community. And I would be lying if I did not admit that writing this dissertation was both satisfying and a little painful for me. I have enjoyed thinking deeply and critically about this community that raised me and continues to support me. But I have also felt a twinge of betrayal. My experience with critical studies as well as my growing disenchantment with some of the commitments and traditions of my community primed me for this kind of work, but it did not happen overnight. Not to mention, I am able to approach critical analysis in a Foucauldian spirit of playfulness and possibility, and as evidenced in this dissertation, I also tend to also approach it with a bit of sardonic humor. I mentioned the tendency of my community to react negatively to criticism in chapter four. Given this tendency, I fear that most of my participants, and indeed most people in the Reformed Christian community

generally, would be unable to process the critique in this dissertation as anything other than an attack. Nevertheless, my commitment to this work remains undaunted. Around the time I was finishing this dissertation, the new memorial to the victims of post-Civil War lynching in America had just opened in Montgomery, AL. It was receiving quite a bit of media attention, primarily because of the ways in which the brutal and graphic images it portrayed triggered White people's fragility. In one article I read on the topic, a Black journalist made this important and relevant observation,

I'm glad [they] showed the images because I learned a long time ago that the only way to get people to make change is to make people uncomfortable. If you let people stay comfy in the spaces they occupy, they'll never do the work to think about whether change is needed (Jackson, 2018).

White supremacy is evil. Its presence in our institutions and even our own hearts *should* make us uncomfortable. My journey to this place of critical awareness has been extremely difficult and painful. Growth and change often are. But, I am eternally grateful for friends and family members who help me process my critical, and often overly pessimistic, ideas and imagine ways to work for change in my community from a position of love, respect and hope. For example, while I would be hesitant to hand this dissertation over to my participants to read in solitude (this dissertation is more for me than them), I feel confident that there are ways I can engage with the content and contentions of this dissertation with my participants that can move us all forward in healthy and productive ways.

In that spirit, I will conclude by suggesting a third possibility for future engagement with the data in this study. A conversation. It begins like this:

Dear fellow White Christian parents. We have work to do. Deconstructing our faith traditions is hard. I know. I've been there. *I'm still there*. We can do this together.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. B. Brewster (Trans.). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Anderson, G. L. (1989). Critical ethnography in education: Origins, current status, and new directions. *Review of Educational Research*, 59(3), 249-270.
- Ansley, F. L. (1997). White supremacy (And what we should do about it). In R. Delgado & J. Stefancic (Eds.), *Critical White studies: Looking behind the mirror* (pp. 592-595) Temple University Press.
- Austin, S. (2012). Lounge space: the home, the city and the service area. In A. Sharr (Ed.), *Reading architecture and culture: Researching buildings, spaces and documents* (pp. 106-120). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Baldwin, J. (1993). *The fire next time*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Ball, S. (1990). *Foucault and education: Discipline and knowledge*. New York: Routledge.
- Boldt, G. M. (2006). Parenting and the narcissistic demands of Whiteness. In G. M. Boldt & P. M. Salvio (Eds.), *Love's return: Psychoanalytic essays on childhood, teaching, and learning* (pp. 143-160). New York: Routledge.
- Boldt, G. M., Salvio P. M. & Taubman P. M. (2006). Introduction. In G. M. Boldt & P. M. Salvio (Eds.), *Love's return: Psychoanalytic essays on childhood, teaching, and learning* (pp. 1-8). New York: Routledge.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2018). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America*, 5th ed. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L. J. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Boulton, C. (2016). Black identities inside advertising: Race inequality, code switching, and stereotype threat. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 27(2), 130-144.
- Bratt, J.D. (ed.) (1998). *Abraham Kuyper, A centennial reader*. Crown Ridge, MI: Eerdmans.
- Britzman, D. P. (2009). *The very thought of education: Psychoanalysis and the impossible professions*. Albany, NY: Suny.
- Bronson, P. & Merryman, A. (2009). *Nurture shock: New thinking about children*. New York: Hachette Book Group.

- Brown, E. M. (1997). The tower of babel. In R. Delgado & J. Stefancic (Eds.), *Critical White studies: Looking behind the mirror* (pp. 112-116). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Buck, P. D. (2010). Constructing race, creating White privilege. In P. S. Rothenberg (Ed.), *Race, class and gender in the United States* (pp. 32-37). New York: Worth Publishers.
- Burdick, J. & Sandlin, J. A. (2010). Educational inquiry and the pedagogical other: On the politics and ethics of researching critical public pedagogies. In J. A. Sandlin, B. D. Schultz & J. Burdick (Eds.), *Handbook of public pedagogy* (pp. 116-124). New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power*. New York: Routledge.
- Calvin, J. (1921/1536). *Institutes of the Christian religion*. Allen, J. (Trans.). Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work.
- Carter, J. K. (2008). *Race: A theological account*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cheng, A. A. (2001). *The melancholy of race: Psychoanalysis, assimilation, and hidden grief*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Christian Schools International (n.d.). *Biblical worldview*. Retrieved on April 16, 2018 from <http://www.csionline.org/biblical-worldview>
- Copeland, M. S. (2010). *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Deglado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(3), 280-298.
- Denzin, N. K. (1997). *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21st century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dewey. (1842). One of the doctrines of Calvinism--native total depravity. *Christian Register and Boston Observer (1835-1843)*, 21(30).
- DiAngelo, R. (2012). *What does it mean to be White? Developing White racial literacy*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of black folk: Essays and sketches*. Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg and Co.

- Eisner, E. W. (1994). *The educational imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Ellsworth, E. (2005). *Places of learning: Media, architecture, pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.
- Emmerson, R., Fretz, R., & Shaw, L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Eng, D. (2001). *Racial castration: Managing masculinity in Asian America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Erikson, R. S., Luttbeg, N. R., & Tedin, K. L. (1988). *American public opinion* (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan.
- Fendler, L. (2010). *Michel Foucault*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Fiske, J. (1989). *Reading the popular*. New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1988). *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foster, K. (2015). Wrestling with respectability in the age of #blacklivesmatter: A dialogue. *For Harriet*. Retrieved from <http://www.forharriet.com/2015/10/wrestling-with-respectability-in-age-of.html>
- Freud, S. (1914). On narcissism: An introduction. In Strachey, J. (Ed.). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916)*. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Freud, S. (1917). Mourning and melancholia. In Strachey, J. (Ed.). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916)*. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Gaines, K. K. (1996). *Uplifting the race: Black leadership, politics, and culture in the twentieth century*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.
- Giroux, H. A. (2008). Education and the crisis of youth: Schooling and the promise of democracy. *The Educational Forum*, 73(1).
- Giroux, H. A. (2011). *On critical pedagogy*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Glenn, E. N. (2015). Settler colonialism as structure: A framework for comparative studies of U.S. race and gender formation. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 1(1), 52-72.

- Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. (4th ed.) Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Goffman, E. (1981). *Forms of talk*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Gumperz, J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Hall, S. (1986). Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 10(5), 5-27.
- Harris, C.I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8), 1707-1791.
- Higginbotham, E. B. (1992). African-American women's history and the metalanguage of race. *Signs*, 17(2), 251-274.
- Hixson, W. L. (2013). *American settler colonialism: A history*. New York: Palgrave-MacMillan.
- Hollway, W. (2009). Applying the 'experience-near' principle to research: Psychoanalytically informed methods. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 23(4), 461-474.
- Horsman, R. (1997). Race and manifest destiny: The origins of American racial Anglo-Saxonism. In R. Delgado & J. Stefancic (Eds). *Critical White studies: Looking behind the mirror* (pp. 139-144). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Jackson, P. (2018, April 10). Dear White people: If a memorial dedicated to lynchings of black people makes you uncomfortable, good. *The Root*. Retrieved from <https://verysmartbrothas.theroot.com/dear-White-people-if-a-memorial-dedicated-to-lynchings-1825117175>
- Jennings, W. J. (2010). *The Christian imagination: Theology and the origins of race*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Jimenez, L. & Walkerdine, V. (2011). A psychosocial approach to shame, embarrassment and melancholia amongst unemployed young men and their fathers. *Gender and Education*, 23(2), 185-199.
- Jost, J. T., Glaser, J., Kruglanski, A. W., & Sulloway, F. (2003). Political conservatism as motivated social cognition. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129, 339–375.
- Ketcham, R. L. (1955). The revival of tradition and conservatism in America. *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*, 41 (3), 425-443.
- Kincheloe, J. L. & Steinberg, S. R. (1997). *Changing multiculturalism*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
- Lacan, J. (1977). *Ecrits: A selection*. New York: Norton.

- La Grand (1969). The Christian school movement under judgment. *Christian Home and School*, 47(4), 4-6.
- Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. *Interchange*, 17(4), 63-84.
- Leonardo, Z. (2009). *Race, Whiteness, and education*. New York: Routledge.
- Leonardo, Z., & Zembylas, M. (2013). Whiteness as technology of affect: Implications for educational praxis. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 46(1), 150-165.
- Lofland, J. & Lofland, L. (1995). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*, 3rd. ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Malave, I. & Giordani, E. (2015). *Latino stats: American Hispanics by the numbers*. New York: The New Press.
- McClosky, H., & Zaller, J. (1984). *The American ethos: Public attitudes toward capitalism and democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McIntosh, P. (2010). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. In P. S. Rothenberg (Ed.), *Race, class and gender in the United States* (8th ed.) (pp. 172-176). New York: Worth.
- Meehan, C. H. (2017). *Growing pains: How racial struggles changed a church and school*. Crown Ridge, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Morris, M. W. (2014). *Black stats: African Americans by the numbers in the twenty-first century*. New York: The New Press.
- Morris, M. W. (2016). *Push out: The criminalization of black girls in schools*. New York: The New Press.
- Mulder, M. T. (2015). *Shades of White flight: Evangelical congregations and urban departure*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Myrdal, G. (1944). *An American dilemma: The negro problem and modern democracy*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Omi, M. & Winant, H. (2015). *Racial formation in the United States* (3rd Ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Oppewal, D. (1963). *The roots of the Calvinistic day school movement*. Crown Ridge, MI: Calvin College.

- Ornstein, A. & Ornstein, P. (1985). Parenting as a function of the adult self: A psychoanalytic developmental perspective. In E. Anderson & G. Pollock (Eds.), *Parental influences in health and disease*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Phillips, K. (1969). *The emerging republican majority*. New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House.
- Prendergast, C. (2003). *Literacy and racial justice: The politics of learning after Brown v. board of education*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Reardon, S. F. & Yun, J. T. (2002). *Private school racial enrollments and segregation*. The Civil Rights Project: Harvard University.
- Religious composition of conservatives. (2014). *Religious landscape study*. Washington DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved April 16, 2018 from <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/political-ideology/conservative/>
- Roediger, D. R. (2007). *The wages of whiteness: Race and the making of the American working class* (revised ed.). New York: Verso.
- Sandlin, J. A., O'Malley, M. P. & Burdick, J. (2011). Mapping the complexity of public pedagogy scholarship: 1894-2010. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(3), 338-375.
- Savage, G. C. (2010). Problematizing "public pedagogy" in educational research. In J. A. Sandlin, B. D. Schultz & J. Burdick (Eds.), *Handbook of public pedagogy* (pp. 103-115). New York: Routledge.
- Segall, A. (2002). *Disturbing practice: Reading teacher education as text*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Shim, J. M. (2011). Structuralism's relevance in a post-structural era: Re-visiting research on multicultural curricular studies. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 43(6), 739-758.
- Smith, A. (2012). Indigeneity, settler colonialism, white supremacy. In HoSang, D. M., LaBennett O., Pulido, L. (Eds.), *Racial formation in the twenty first century* (pp. 66-90). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Smith, G. A. & Martinez, J. (2016, November 9). How the faithful voted: A preliminary 2016 analysis. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>
- Smith, J. (2011). Aotearoa/New Zealand: An unsettled state in a sea of islands. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 1, 111-131.

- Smith, M. (2014). Affect and respectability politics. *Theory & Event*, 17(3), Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from Project MUSE database.
- Smith, R. C. (2010). *Conservatism and racism, and why in America they are the same*. New York: SUNY.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Suits, S. (2016). *Race and ethnicity in a new era of public funding of private schools: Private school enrollment in the south and the nation*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Education Foundation.
- Thandeka. (2000). *Learning to be White: Money, race, and god in America*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing critical ethnography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Van Ausdale, D., & Feagin, J. R. (2001). *The first r: How children learn race and racism*. Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Vaught, S. E. (2012). Institutional racist melancholia: A structural understanding of grief and power in schooling. *Harvard Educational Review*, 82(1), 52-77.
- Veracini, L. (2010). *Settler colonialism: A theoretical overview*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Weber, M. (1930). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. New York: Routledge.