REFLECTIONS OF WHITE WOMEN COMMITTED TO ANTIRACISM

By

Daune Marie Rensing

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ABSTRACT

Learning about antiracism can be an emotional and isolating process for white people. With most research focusing on the experiences of undergraduates (Schooley, Lee, & Spanierman, 2019), the experiences of adults committed to this lifestyle are often ignored. This study uses narrative inquiry to examine the experiences of four white women in higher education as they commit to antiracism. Participants were vetted as committed to antiracism by Black-led antiracist educators. Participants reflected on their life experiences with race, racism, and antiracism, and participated in a focus group and individual interview. Each participant's story is shared as well as several identified themes. The theme of being a betweener helped participants navigate the emotional process of living in between different worlds; one where they are often disappointed by ignorant comments of white friends and one where they will really never understand the racist world of their Black friends. The range of these emotions is evident in the subthemes which include isolation, lacking a sense of belonging, and needing/wanting a space to process some of the emotions involved without harming their friends and loved ones who are Black. Adults seemed to have more intense descriptions of lacking support, appeared more self-aware, and some even felt a sort of responsibility or pressure to teach other white people and defend Black people or other people of color. Another theme of becoming involves the continued process of evolving to a better self (Obama, 2021). Subthemes included the fact that everyone experienced imposter syndrome at all stages of this journey and the idea that practice makes progress (not practice makes perfect, but practice makes progress) in this lifelong commitment. Participants in this study appeared to show signs of more advanced stages of white identity where there is more peace, liberation, and a healthier way of life.

This dissertation is dedicated to Anna and Drew.
May you continue to break the cycle.
I love you. Always.

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INTRODUCTION

Being an ally has been a part of my identity since I could talk. Growing up with my brother had given me an inside look at the pain of oppression, and I wanted to do everything in my power to prevent that hurt. We were best friends, brother and sister, and it was our job to look out for one another. He provided me with some of my first lessons in empathy, having compassion for others, and the need for equity. I comforted him when he was bullied and empowered him to achieve when others doubted his success. I did not see him as lacking ability because he had Down Syndrome. With time and attention, he could do anything I could do. If anything, I saw other people as lacking his authenticity, heart, and kindness.

I was not always able to prevent his pain. We were living in a household where domestic violence, abuse, and racism were embedded in our everyday life. I remember trying to deflect and take the blame so I would be hit instead of my brother, and many times he did the same for me. I blocked out most of my childhood, but I remember confronting my father when I was about five years old, telling him that his racist comments were "not nice." I do not remember his reaction (other than hitting me and making me believe that I was bad because I disrespected my elder). However, I do remember feeling that his comments did not match the inclusive lessons I was learning about on Sesame Street.

Reflecting on this as a young adult, I tried to find the positive. I had rationalized that my experiences with abuse made me a fighter and a survivor who had overcome obstacles. I was determined to be different, to be a better person, and break the cycle of negativity and hate. I was embarrassed and angry about the abuse but felt stuck, like there was nothing I could do. What I could do was commit to change and commit to improving racism. Sports was where I saw the best avenue to do this. Athletics was the only arena where I heard my dad speak positively about

Black [1] people, and I threw myself into these spaces. Like most young people, I admired the best athletes, and many of those athletes were Black. It was sad to me that my dad did not see this hypocrisy. My friends and I am sure my dad's favorite athletes, were much more than all-stars who helped the team win. I was friends with my teammates, and as friends do, we watched the same tv shows, listened to the same music, and sometimes adopted each other's slang, dress, and mannerisms. I did not have the language back then, but I was attempting to humanize Black people (and probably participating in cultural appropriation). I remember admiring Black joy and felt that if they could persevere, then I could as well since I had an easy life by comparison (even though I did not recognize those depths at that time).

My life experiences set the stage for a career as a college advisor where my journey of allyship peaked. My students often mentioned that they felt free of judgment and safe to be their authentic selves regardless of race, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, or country of origin. For over twenty years, I have listened to their stories and advocated for these students as they struggled with experiencing microaggressions, coming out, homelessness, divorce, pregnancy, sexual assault, racism, abuse, becoming permanently disabled, or other instances of adversity. Like most white [2] educators, I saw myself as a good ally, but this was about to change. This transformative learning happened in four phases, and I think all white educators could learn from my experience and personal self-reflection.

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[1] The term Black is used to include those who do not affiliate with the term African American but still experience anti-Black racism in America and around the globe due to the color of their skin.

[2] Other than in the title of this dissertation, the word white is intentionally kept lowercase as a demonstration of solidarity in the decentering of whiteness. I have also altered the punctuation when citing other authors.

Phase One

I was three years into my Ph.D. program and was focused on improving the graduation rates of Black men. I had only witnessed the success of Black men, but the research provided grim statistics. I wanted to create a plan to promote the academic success of Black athletes to provide more positive messaging. I planned to model the more equitable academic services the athletes receive to show that leveling the playing field produced better results. Ideally, this would increase the confidence of all Black students and disprove negative stereotypes. The more I learned, the more I saw the disadvantages experienced before, during, and after college. I felt Black students, in particular, were experiencing more microaggressions than any other group and experiencing racial fatigue (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007) from being a Black student at a predominantly white institution (PWI). The work of Ladson-Billings (2006) was crucial in my understanding. She explained that our attempts to close the achievement gap have been unsuccessful because we educators focus on creating solutions to address the symptoms rather than investigating the root causes to heal the actual problem. I was beginning to see that the disadvantages I claimed Black students were experiencing were due to systemic racism, that this explained why Black men were not being put in positions to succeed, and that as an educator, I was helping to assimilate these Black men to white ways, rather than empowering them as I had thought. That hurt.

Phase Two

Studying deficit thinking and humanizing research exposed me to more ideas that confirmed that I needed to change my research topic. This became a moral issue. I would not contribute to the false assumptions that questioned the Black man's ability or the effort put forth to succeed. I would not cause added harm by interviewing Black students and making them

relive the trauma of vocalizing the racist microaggressions against them. I was inspired by humanizing research focusing on reducing harm and building relationships of mutual care and respect (Paris & Winn, 2013; Ventura & Wong, 2020). I loved that there was a moral duty to refuse participation in causing harm (Tuck, 2009; Ventura & Wong, 2020). I was inspired by Bettina Love (2019) and wanted to follow her recommendation for all white educators to undergo antiracist therapy, so they could truly help our Black and Brown students do more than just survive. I wanted to put pressure on more white educators to change the environment so our students could be their authentic selves. This plan would create a better environment for all our students, cause students less harm, work towards the root cause of systemic racism, and challenge myself and others to be a bit more honest about our roles as allies.

Phase Three

This challenge would intensify as I learned more about critical race theory (CRT) and critical whiteness. I quickly started realizing that my education had only shown me a limited view, the white view, of history. I had not been educated about the origins of race and racism, about the role of religion, education, and the courts in maintaining white feelings of superiority. I did not understand the depths of the government's involvement in segregation, housing, employment, education, the war on drugs, law and order, or the prison pipeline. I was doubting everything I knew and felt disappointed that I had never even considered these other viewpoints beforehand.

This level of awareness was primarily influenced by Kendi (2017), who helped me understand that I was intentionally shown this white view. He also helped me realize the extent of racism in higher education. His focus on comparing segregationists, assimilationists, and antiracists really helped me see that we educators are assimilating our Black students to white

ways of being and knowing. This implies a superiority of white ways, which makes it racist. He motivated me to reflect on the ways in which I am complicit in repeating these practices, especially within the research I was initially considering. He explained that white people need a multicultural lens to have a better picture; otherwise, "there's no such thing as objectivity, only an agreed-upon subjectivity" (p. 60). This made me question the white and European standards upon which our education system was founded. Especially at PWIs, white educators should be taking action to make our institutions more inviting and inclusive.

I began to see that my allyship, advocacy, and advising were all rooted in assimilating students to the white way of being. I started seeing how I was unknowingly reproducing racist ideas and the ideals of white supremacy. My identity as an ally was definitely shaken, and it did not feel good to realize that I was a participant in reproducing racist ideas and white supremacy. I started to question if all of us white people in helping fields were guilty of white saviorism. I wanted to do everything I could to create a better environment for my students and be a better person. I realized that *this* was probably the type of antiracist therapy that Love (2019, 2020) recommended every white educator complete in order to better serve their Black students.

Phase Four

As I was living in a time of self-reflection and doubting everything I knew, the murder of George Floyd made issues of race a priority in the United States. I was learning about why race was such an emotional topic for white people as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was at its peak. There was tension across the United States that support for BLM meant you did not support all lives or blue lives (police officers who wore blue uniforms). This tension will be discussed in the next chapter.

It is important to point out that just when I was doubting everything I thought, Matias

(2016) reminded me of the values that made me start the work in the first place. She writes about emotion and the importance of love as a way of bettering humanity. I share her belief that students will not feel they belong if they are not allowed to be their authentic self. She states that there is a basic lack of love for humanity. This really spoke to my ideals on inclusion; however, she points out that if we educators are not taking action to change the system, then we are only "performing" care. I adore her work, especially the comparisons to a mother's unconditional love and mutually benefitting from relationships with her students. I really felt that it related to my work and my story. It reminded me of how I used to say my goal was to give each student as much patience as I showed my brother. As I got older, I started noticing that I would tell my students that if they were my child, I would want them to consider x, y, or z in their decision. This seemed to help students understand that I was really wanting the best for them. In addition, I still feel I learn a lot from working with students, whether that is the newest slang or different outlooks on life, I genuinely enjoy speaking with these students and getting to know them.

As I reflect on my experiences, I am seeing a lifetime of work and a commitment to continuing that work. While I am sure there is some guilt and rationalizing that my work will make up for my father's racism (and what I am learning is my own), my real motivation is even more selfish. I love my children more than anything in this world, and I want to give them a better life than what I had. I want to become a social justice ally and raise social justice allies. I want my children to understand the injustice of white privilege and how we, as white people, may never truly understand the depth of the Black experience. I have to believe that by taking these small actions and teaching my children to value diversity, I am helping in some way.

Note: My research focuses on anti-Black racism because it is what I have been exposed to the

most and have witnessed the most. The level of hate and fear seems to lead to an intense form of oppression. My intent is not to exclude the other groups who have faced oppression or racism. However, I see working towards curing anti-Black racism as creating a better environment for everyone.

CHAPTER 1: REFLECTIONS OF WHITE WOMEN COMMITTED TO ANTIRACISM

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered the way we live on a global scale. People all over the world were, and still are, making adjustments and secluding themselves from others to avoid contamination and assist health professionals as they fight to improve the odds of survival from this deadly disease. As the years progressed, so did racial and political tension in the United States. This tension would peak in mid-summer 2020 when images of the murder of George Floyd flooded social media and sparked worldwide protests. People were outraged at the unethical treatment of yet another innocent Black man, the casual demeanor of the white policeman who knelt on Floyd's neck, and the willingness of the other officers to stand by and watch. The BLM movement, which was formed to fight against police brutality, was growing in support and visibility, drawing comparisons to the Civil Rights movement.

Perhaps the extra visibility of racial injustices made it so white people could no longer look away, or maybe the isolation of the pandemic caused more authentic levels of self-reflection, but many white people were experiencing what scholars call transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978). More than ever, white people were recognizing racial inequities and asking questions. They expressed a strong desire to learn, take action, and show their support; however, many white people also expressed uncertainty about what to do or how to best proceed. The range of white responses seemed drastic.

On the one hand, many white people were showing support on social media, following hashtags to #SayTheirNames in remembrance of the many victims of police brutality or #AmplifyBlackVoices to recognize that this was a time for white people to promote Black voices and decenter their own. white people were reading books about antiracism, forming white accountability/affinity groups, signing petitions for change, attending protests, supporting Black

businesses, donating to BLM or similar causes, and even putting their lives at risk to shield Black bodies from police as they protested.

On the other hand, the inaction of white people and white silence brought more frustration and tension because it was another example of white people prioritizing their own comfort over the right or just thing to do. white authenticity was being challenged because white people said they wanted to help but then just went back to living their everyday lives. Most white people recognized that their Black friends and coworkers were hurting at this time and followed advice to keep their conversations about race in their own white circles so as to avoid harm. In these white circles, in white moments of comfort, I would hear some white people justify their lack of action. They did not feel educated to discuss race or racism, it was too taboo, and they were afraid of making a mistake and ruining their image or reputation. Some white people felt that just having those conversations was action, and it *was* a start. *However*, there was danger in that some would fall back into the status quo, use familiar ways of thinking, make excuses, or minimize racism by praising the progress they had made.

My Experience

While I associate with the group that was learning and taking action, I was surrounded by those frozen by fear or those whose actions seemed more performative or less authentic. This was troubling on many levels. For one, inaction was inexcusable, in my opinion. People had just made all these adjustments for COVID, and racism was just as, if not more, detrimental (at least there was a focus on finding a cure for COVID). In my mind, some people were choosing inaction. Second, Black people were in pain; my Black friends were in pain, their children were in pain, and I could not understand how some people would not help. This could be their friend, their children, their grandchildren. Also, how could people say they did not know what to do?

There was more material being promoted on the subject than ever: books, articles, webinars, tv shows, movies, social media, etc. I recommended these options and answered their questions. I loved that we were having these conversations, but I would see their eyes bulge when I spoke about learning about whiteness and how I thought we were all conditioned to follow the values of white supremacy. Many of my white friends and family would close off and look at me as if I was a conspiracy theorist.

For the first time, I was feeling really judgmental about my friends and family. I was questioning my relationships' authenticity because they were people I loved and considered good people who would want to fight for change if they knew what I knew. I struggled at times because there seemed to be different levels of openness and not everybody was ready for these conversations or willing to be challenged. I had to introduce topics gently because if I pushed too hard, I would get the look like I was a conspiracy theorist again, and they would get defensive or shut down. I was happy to cause good trouble, as activist John Lewis would say, but sometimes I had to let people process things on their own or vent and only interrupt when I heard something completely inaccurate or offensive. These moments sometimes made me feel elitist because I was judging who was ready to hear my new understandings or not. Who was I to be judging others? I did not consider myself an expert at all; I was learning and questioning everything I thought I knew since it all seemed drastically different from what I learned in school.

Unfortunately, as time progressed, the discussions on race and social justice dwindled, and white people seemed to disappear from the conversations drastically. white support for BLM was at an all-time low (Thomas & Horowitz, 2020), and several states are now banning Critical Race Theory and books that discuss racism or teach the true history of our country (Alfonseca, 2021). There are theories about why this occurred (like white comfort, politics, etc.), but it is

such a missed opportunity for white people to make a change.

The Problem

Many white people want to help in the fight against racism but are uncertain about what to do or how best to help. Similarly, many white educators consider themselves allies to their students but are unaware of the harm they cause. Learning about whiteness and antiracism can create awareness and change in both cases. Whiteness, in this sense, involves the tendencies for white people to center white people (or white ways) as the norm, downplay racism or the depths of racism (Leonardo, 2009), and respond with emotionality when racism is discussed (Matias, 2016). This white fragility entails the strong emotional reaction or denial of admitting one has racist ideas, typically because it goes against our ideology that we are good, but racists are bad (DiAngelo, 2018). I see whiteness as informing the journey towards antiracism; whiteness is the problem, and antiracism is one action that can be taken to help better ourselves and stop the cycle of violence and hate. Kendi (2019) describes antiracism as a lifelong journey of learning and taking action and says it is rooted in being "aggressively against racism" (p. 9). I am interested in how white people in higher education experience the commitment to antiracism. I am specifically interested in those who work in student-facing positions in higher education and are committed to antiracism. I am unsure if advancing through antiracism is different during a pandemic, but I did not feel the literature represented the depths of my experience.

Why Study This Problem?

It is essential to study this process first and foremost because the majority of Black people are being harmed and experiencing pain and exhaustion. Racism in all forms, whether overt or covert, causes trauma and can be permanent and passed down from each generation (Love, 2019; Matias, 2016). Research points to the anxiety that builds as many Black people live

on the edge just waiting for the next microaggression to occur (Oluo, 2019). Most white people are unaware of the ways in which we contribute to this harm. white people, myself included, need to educate ourselves and be more aware so we can recognize the instances in which we, and those around us, are causing harm so we can end it. Scholars debate our intentionality but do not debate that we continue to repeat behaviors and patterns that reinforce racist ideology, white supremacy, and deficit thinking of people of color (DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2019; Leonardo, 2009; Matias, 2016). Leonardo (2009) and Matias (2016) refer to this as the hidden curriculum of whiteness. Love (2019) and Matias (2016) acknowledge that the continuation of these behaviors and patterns is similar to torture or abuse of our students of color. William Smith calls the attempt to survive this abuse and the resulting exhaustion 'racial battle fatigue' (Smith et al., 2007). Degruy-Leary (1994) describes this as even more intense than post-traumatic stress disorder because the trauma is constantly reoccurring.

This implies a call to action for white educators, who make up most of the teaching force. Lack of awareness cannot be an excuse, and it does not make us good role models to live out of alignment with the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion that we (and our institutions) claim. The number of diverse students is growing, and institutions cannot reach their goals of inclusivity or close the achievement/opportunity gap without naming and addressing their whiteness (DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2019; Matias, 2016). Institutions of higher education are especially at risk as their faculty are typically only trained in their one specific subject matter and are not trained on how to teach, let alone on how to teach diverse groups of students (DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2019). Addressing whiteness in higher education could be the first step to improving faculty and staff development, fostering better student experiences, better campus climates, better retention of students and faculty of color, and improving the achievement/

opportunity gap. Ladson-Billings (2006) says educators have failed to address this gap because we keep addressing symptoms rather than the fundamental problem of systemic racism. Understanding whiteness, our role in perpetuating racism, and moving forward in antiracism seems like a great way to finally address the root cause of the problem.

Another reason to study this problem is that most research on the topic tends to be on either undergraduate students who are studying to be teachers, adults attending mandatory diversity trainings, or the instructor's experiences and reflections from teaching these two groups (DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenberg, 1993; Gillborn, 2006; Leonardo, 2009; Marx, 2004; Matias, 2016; Obear & Martinez, 2013; Patton & Haynes, 2020; Tatum, 1992; Tauriac, Kim, Lambe Sariñana, Tawa, & Kahn, 2013). Schooley, Lee, and Spanierman (2019) evaluated 50 years of literature on whiteness and reported the most "noticeable trend across validation studies of the reviewed measures was an overreliance on undergraduate students as research participants" (p. 553). This excludes adults who are actively antiracist, do this on their own without it being mandated, and are committed for more than one semester/training session. The participants in my study are committed to the antiracist journey for life, and their experiences are not represented in the research.

In addition, when white identity models (Helms, 1990; Okun, 2006; Tatum, 1992) are explained, they tend to be brief overviews of each stage. Scholars can do more to highlight the experiences of committed antiracists and what challenges they may face in the more advanced stages of these models. I am especially interested in the emotionality of this process because I did not see the depths of my experience represented in the literature. I would like to add more thorough explanations that would normalize the experience. Perhaps these narratives could help others who feel/felt similarly. The literature review speaks to what is known, and I am interested

in the unknown or bringing more attention to what is not reported.

The Research Question

This study will use the lens of critical whiteness to analyze the experiences of four white women who work in student-facing positions in higher education and are deeply committed to antiracism. Many white people were going through transformative learning as they committed to antiracism, and I found solace in those antiracism spaces. Without those supportive groups, I would have felt even more alone, more of a conspiracy theorist to my friends and family, and I may have been more likely to reduce my commitment. I have always been curious if others felt similarly or if the experience was unique. Because of these interests, my research focused on the question:

What do white women in higher education experience as they commit to antiracism?

I was specifically interested in what these committed antiracists experienced and the emotions involved. The hope is that my research will provide antiracists with stories of what others have experienced to encourage, inspire, comfort, or normalize specific challenges one might face as one commits to this lifestyle. The goal is to help continue participation in antiracist lifestyles.

I am interested in the specific experiences of white women committed to antiracism and working in higher education because there is a lack of teacher training in higher education. Many of these white women educators need to do this learning on their own time since it is not required for their career. The vulnerability of exposing this process should help the everyday white person looking to do this work as they will have access to our successes and failures and will hopefully learn from that as they prepare for their journey. Ideally, these journeys would inspire greater grassroots efforts of white people getting more involved in the fight against racism. After all,

"large numbers of people motivated for social change have the power to alter social practice and perception" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 63).

Throughout this paper, I will reference white people, and that white people need to do more to create a truly inclusive community for our students of color. As a white woman, I also include myself in this group. I make this statement because it may sound like I am excluding myself from that group or that I think I am better than other white people because I have done some work. This is not true. I recognize that white women in diversity spaces can be problematic because we can get comfortable or lose our humility. This is best represented by a quote from Dr. Beverly Tatum who spoke with a white woman who said, "you're preaching to the choir." She responded, "but even the choir needs rehearsal" (American Council on Education, 2019). It is important to point out that Dr. Tatum referenced everyone working towards antiracism, but I think this is especially relevant for white women.

It is also important to name that by focusing on the experiences of white women, I am centering whiteness (which I am supposed to be working against). In this case, I am attempting to encourage white participation for the more significant cause of liberation. This will be discussed further in the methods section (chapter 3).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will focus on the question: What do white women in higher education experience as they commit to antiracism? I will demonstrate what is already known about white peoples' journey toward antiracism by highlighting literature on four primary areas of antiracism, critical whiteness, the emotionality of whiteness, and white identity. The first section on antiracism will explain the term, the relationship to abolition and discuss some comments from the critics. Then I will cover a variety of information regarding critical whiteness, including how it developed from CRT, whiteness as a social construct, and how whiteness reproduces racism and white supremacist ideals. Next is an examination of the emotionality of whiteness, including common reactions, how that may change in the presence of different groups, challenges of the work, the role of power, and the adult learning experience as it relates to transformative learning. Finally, I will discuss white identity models and stages that can inform the commitment to antiracism.

Antiracism

It is important to understand what antiracism is so one understands what one should strive toward. Therefore, this section will describe antiracism, explain the connection to abolition, and expose some criticisms of antiracism that justify additional research.

Kendi (2019) provides a simple explanation of the term antiracist. He compares the term to the terms racist and non-racist and explains that it is logical to view racist and non-racist as opposites but argues that non-racist is too neutral for the sensitive topic of racism. Non-racist does not signify the lifelong commitment to action or being "aggressively against racism" (p. 9) like antiracist does. In determining if something is racist or antiracist, he says, "the defining question is whether the discrimination is creating equality or inequality. If discrimination is

creating equality, then it is antiracist. If the discrimination is creating inequality, then it is racist" (p. 19). This description focuses on the result of equality which shows how antiracism fights more than just racism; antiracists also fight for equality of race, gender, sexuality, and more.

Love (2019) adds that the work of antiracism began with abolitionists, and she challenges white educators to follow in the footsteps of white abolitionists who were "co-conspirators" to free Black bodies. She is focused on bringing abolition to the teaching profession to prevent what she calls the "spirit-murdering" of our Black and Brown students.

> Being an abolitionist means you are ready to lose something, you are ready to let go of your privilege, you are ready to be in solidarity with dark people by recognizing your whiteness in dark spaces, recognizing how it can take up space if unchecked, using your whiteness in white spaces to advocate for and with dark people. And you understand that your white privilege allows you to take risks that dark people cannot take in the fight for educational justice (p. 159).

Love (2019, 2020) believes all white educators need antiracist therapy before working with Black and Brown children and asks racist educators to do the hard emotional work or leave the profession. This is what white educators need to do to allow Black students to thrive, rather than just survive. In the current racial climate, it is becoming evident that some Black people do not even get the chance to survive.

Explaining antiracism and its connection to abolition is helpful, but one can also learn about antiracism by analyzing some of its critiques. Criticisms largely stem from the confusion of how the meanings of terms can change throughout time. This confusion can lead some to believe that there are contradictions being made. Some claim that making mistakes indicates that antiracism does not work. This section will focus on these critiques.

New students to antiracism can find some messages confusing because definitions or how one thinks of race and racism change over time (Omi & Winant, 2005). This appears inconsistent but explains why this is lifelong work; if the terms change, then so does our understanding. For example, specific actions taken in 1960 are likely to be considered racist now, but they were not described that way at the time. There was a period where it was seen as a positive gesture to say you did not recognize color (or that you were color blind) because it assumed everyone was treated the same regardless of skin color. Today, this phrase would be offensive because we recognize that white and Black people are not treated the same, and we experience the world differently due to our very different histories.

While some experience confusion about terms changing, others need clarification when mistakes occur (and we all make mistakes). This can lead critics to believe that antiracism does not work, but antiracism is more of a lifestyle than a program. Antiracism is continually working to benefit equality. While some contradictions relate to the ever-changing nature of race and racism, as mentioned above, antiracists are humans, trained in the same white supremacist society as we all are, so even our role models sometimes make mistakes. Several antiracist scholars have contradicted themselves. DiAngelo (2018) tries to get white people to focus on the impact of their actions and criticizes them when they bring up their good intentions; however, she also claims her own good intentions in several parts of her book. Kendi (2017; 2019) seems to change his mind in his two books when discussing the (in)ability of Black people to be racist. While some would see these contradictions as criticism, I see it as additional evidence that we are all conditioned to white supremacist values, and all have room to learn.

Antiracism accepts that mistakes happen as we learn, and we should focus on expressing humility, repairing the pain, and improving going forward. Unfortunately, some critics of

antiracism treat any error as evidence that antiracism does not work. Former President Trump has criticized CRT and efforts like antiracism saying they are un-American and cause division (Ray, 2020). This has sparked an entire movement of anti-CRT politics, and some states are now banning CRT and any books associated with race (Alfonseca, 2021). Given our history of supporting white supremacist ideals, anything focused on *stopping* racism would be un-American. Perhaps a stronger argument against antiracism comes from April Dawn Harter (Harter, 2020). She is a licensed clinical social worker and founder of the former Racism Recovery Center (the name has since changed to the Narcissism Recovery Center). She claims that antiracism is performative and that white people only act antiracist until they address their narcissism in therapy. Without that work, antiracists will keep slipping up, causing harm, and being racist. To me, this sounds very similar to Love's (2019) call to action to do the hard work and attend antiracist therapy.

The final critique surrounds the apparent contradiction of claiming to value the tenets of CRT but providing messaging that caters to white readers. Racism is so embedded in our culture that many critical scholars feel that only drastic changes will solve the problem (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Antiracist educators call for drastic changes but also use gentle messages to entice their white readers to keep listening. They inevitably cater to the white audience by presenting their message in a safer or less offensive tone. Kendi (2017; 2019) uses the gentler idea that we all have racist ideas rather than saying we are all racist. DiAngelo (2018) writes about her experiences calling attention to people's racism but also mentions letting things slide. Frankenberg (1993) mentions protecting the feelings of the interviewees and trying to make them not feel bad because of their lack of Black friends or acquaintances. Antiracist authors want to get their message across, so it is effective and helps to create change, but these actions center

white feelings that antiracism tries to avoid. It is important to bring up these critiques because critical scholars see maintaining of the status quo as a continuation of the way things are and less likely to inspire real change.

This section explained antiracism and how it is different from being "not racist" due to the added commitment to actively fighting racism. This commitment is similar to that of the abolitionist movement, and there is a call for white people to model those contributions today. Criticisms of antiracism help clarify what it means to be antiracist by pointing out that terms and meaning change. We all make mistakes, but what matters is how we respond to our mistakes, and antiracist educators want drastic change, but even they struggle to always follow that guide. These criticisms support the need for additional research due to the changing nature of the terms and the advancements in learning as change is made. Now that there is a better understanding of antiracism, I will focus on critical whiteness.

Critical whiteness

Critical whiteness, also known as critical white studies, is influenced by various fields, each with its own influential scholars. This embedded history helps explain the important stance of critical whiteness. In this section, I will share the highlights of that history and review the literature from the most prominent authors. I have organized the material in three areas explaining the connection to CRT, how whiteness is a social construct, and how white people, myself included, need to work to address our whiteness to create change.

Critical Race Theory

To understand critical whiteness, one must first address that it is rooted in CRT. CRT explains the foundation and ideals of critical whiteness, so it is essential to describe what it is, who the notable figures are, the fields of influence, and the common themes that contribute to the

movement that informs critical whiteness.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) offer one of the most cited descriptions of the CRT movement. They describe it as "a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (p.2). They imply that CRT was developed out of frustration with the plateau of the Civil Rights Movement, and scholars strategized to critique the more subtle forms of racism in the United States (US) to create even more change. CRT aims to highlight historical wrongs to advance community and group empowerment because "large numbers of people motivated for social change have the power to alter social practice and perception" (p. 63). They explain the importance of radical change, as opposed to incremental, due to the overpowering structure of race and racism. They claim small improvements run a greater risk of returning to our previous ways of the status quo.

While the authors honor contributing thinkers, leaders, and activists like "Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault… Jacques Derrida…Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Power and Chicano movements" (p. 4), they credit the beginning of CRT to a select few. Derrick Bell (1980) is considered one of the founding fathers of CRT, and his most popular contribution is his theory of interest convergence that states "racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523). Essentially, white people hold power in determining if and when racial equality will be addressed. For example, Bell (1980) claims that *Brown v. Board of Education* was only enacted because the US had such a poor global image at the time that we had to make some concessions to improve our status. Allen Freeman (1977) is another influential scholar, and his focus on racism in the Supreme Court led the way for other prominent scholars interrogating the law including Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), Angela Harris (1990), Cheryl Harris

(1993), David Gillborn (2006) and Carol Anderson (2017).

CRT scholars recognize key contributions from critical legal studies and radical feminism. From critical legal studies, CRT borrowed the concept of legal indeterminacy, which acknowledges the multiple truths and outcomes that legal cases can have depending on how the facts are presented and interpreted (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Legal indeterminacy is instrumental in helping us understand oppression from the viewpoint of the oppressed. CRT is also "built on feminism's insights into the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 5). Acknowledging the invisible aspects of domination is crucial to critically analyzing those subtle forms of racism that CRT aims to expose. Understanding oppression from the viewpoint of the oppressed and acknowledging the invisible aspects of domination are important precursors to the fundamental values of CRT.

CRT has at least six basic tenets that inform essential aspects of critical whiteness: 1. Racism is a common everyday occurrence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The introduction of this dissertation provided some insight into the prevalence of, and the harmful effects of, daily microaggressions, which are just one example of experienced racism. 2. Racism benefits white people as the dominant group (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). 3. Race is a social construct, meaning that society created the idea and value of race even though people of different races are not biologically different (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Kendi, 2017). 4. Race and racism have meanings that shift with time (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2017). What is considered racist today may not have been considered racist 50 years ago. 5. We all have intersecting identities, meaning that we are more than just one of our single identities

(Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). For instance, our gender and race may intersect to form a specific opinion or value that may differ from someone even with the same gender or race. 6. The stories of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), often called counterstories, have value. Their stories can aid the white person's empathy but will not likely result in a true understanding of racism from the BIPOC's point of view (DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2017).

To summarize, critical whiteness is informed by CRT, which is influenced by critical legal studies, radical feminism, and activists and scholars looking to improve issues involving racism and power. Six key tenets of CRT have been discussed that heavily inform critical whiteness. I will now address the social construct of whiteness and white complicity.

The Social Construct of whiteness

Using CRT as a guide, critical whiteness attempts to analyze how white people are complicit in racism and how the white race has come to be the social construct that it is today (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). A social construct means that humans created the term and that we as separate races are not biologically different (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Kendi, 2017). My research is more focused on our complicity and less on the history of the social construct. However, Appendix A provides a brief overview of some of the things a committed antiracist may learn, including how the history of race and racism developed, how white people benefitted from this construction, and how race and racism have changed throughout time including the poor treatment of immigrants and the hidden curriculum of whiteness (or the coded language that is used to continue the reproduction of white supremacist ideals).

white Complicity

This section will review the second aspect of critical whiteness, which explains the need

to address white complicity in the reproduction of racism and white supremacy. It is vital to acknowledge this complicity so we can work towards addressing it. Finally, I will review the literature and highlight some of the more common myths about race/racism.

Addressing Complicity. Many scholars highlight the need for white people to analyze their role in reproducing racist and white supremacist values (DiAngelo, 2018; Gillborn 2005; Gillborn, 2008; Kendi, 2017; Leonardo, 2009; Love, 2019; Marx, 2004; Okun, 2006). Gillborn (2005) goes so far as to state that "the most dangerous form of 'white supremacy' is not the obvious and extreme fascistic posturing of small neo-nazi groups, but rather the taken-for-granted routine privileging of white interests that goes unremarked" (p. 485). Unchecked racism is especially important to confront behind the scenes when white solidarity is reinforced through joking and white silence (DiAngelo, 2018). Scholars essentially say that if white people are not proactively fighting racism, they are complicit in reproducing those acts (Gillborn, 2008; Kendi, 2017; Love, 2019; Marx, 2004).

Bonilla-Silva (2006) claims that colorblind racism allows for *Racism Without Racists* where racism definitely exists, but nobody is willing to admit their racism. He highlights the contributing factors in the four central frames of colorblind racism: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Abstract realism allows whites to "appear reasonable and even moral, while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with de facto racial inequality" (p. 56). This allows white people to claim their antiracism without interrogating their harmful beliefs on things like segregation, affirmative action, or police reform. Naturalization occurs when white people claim racial phenomena as natural or commonplace. An extreme example of naturalization is when someone claims the use of the N slur word by Black people permits them to use it as well (they rationalize that others say it so

they can too). Cultural racism uses deficit thinking to announce the inferiority of others. For instance, some may ignore that Black people were denied access to equitable education for hundreds of years and point to the lower graduation rates as a sign of lack of intelligence compared to white people. And lastly, the minimization of racism discredits the severity of racism. Saying that racism ended when slavery ended or when Barack Obama was elected severely minimizes the experiences of Black people now, but so does trying to explain away microaggressions by discussing the guilty party's intent rather than their impact. These are important things for white people to understand on their journey toward antiracism.

Critical whiteness provides another lens through which to view the history of race and racism. Critical scholars point to several themes that include the intentionality of maintaining white supremacist views, including legal support, coded language in policies and politics, and intentionally instilling fear (or fear of Black revolt) to justify segregation (Anderson, 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Crenshaw, 1989; Harris, 1993; Kendi, 2017; Leonardo, 2009; Omi & Winant, 2005). Issues with police brutality started from this fear of revolt, and critical scholars point out the government's role in maintaining segregation, silencing the Black vote, reversing affirmative action, etc. (Kendi, 2017). From the critical vantage point, white learners can see the systemic nature of racism and its involvement in religion, politics, policies, schools, housing, calls for "law and order", media, etc. All of this is to maintain the image of white people being superior. Bell (2005) calls this level of involvement the permanence of racism. We have essentially been conditioned to support the values of white supremacy. Guiding that conditioning has been the development of many myths or false beliefs. These common traps may seem believable but when carefully analyzed, the logic becomes flawed.

Myths. Some of the more common myths expose three key themes: the arrogance of white people, the lack of initiative in learning about racism, and the lack of respect for the Black experience. These themes will be discussed in that order. Arrogance is exposed when white people assume that only "bad" people are racists, so they cannot be racist. It is common to associate racism with the KKK, but Gillborn (2005) points out that the more common everyday racism can actually be more harmful. He believes this deep-rooted support for subtlety is what lets racism continue. white people also tend to associate with the ideology that we are objective, good, special, and free of bias (DiAngelo, 2018). Thinking the best of ourselves can close us to the belief that we have something to learn or make us less aware of our complicity, both of which are important in creating change.

white people lack initiative in learning about racism for several reasons. One is that white people tend to believe that Black people are the experts on racism, so white people can only learn from them (DiAngelo, 2018; Leonardo, 2009; Matias, 2016). Leonardo (2009) focuses on constructing whites as knowledgeable about race because it holds them accountable and dismantles their innocence. He speaks to how white innocence allows white people to act passively, as if racism (or learning about racism) does not have anything to do with them. It places ownership of fixing racism squarely on the shoulders of Black people rather than white people, who are the ones who created it and benefit from it (DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenberg, 1993; Leonardo, 2009; Matias, 2016; Omi & Winant, 2005). white people may also believe it is best to stay quiet rather than risk making a mistake or offending someone. While white people may feel better keeping their thoughts to themselves, white silence can be viewed as indifference to people of color, which can heighten anger or frustration (Tatum, 1992).

The last series of myths all share the common trait of minimizing the experiences of

Black people. Five myths will be discussed: the myth of meritocracy, the myth of individuality, the myth that we are all immigrants, the myth that reform benefits Black people more than white people, and the myth of achieved success.

The myth of meritocracy is the belief that we all get what we deserve, so if we work hard, good things will happen. Unfortunately, this myth tends to ignore the effects of systemic racism and the lifelong impact that can result (Baldwin, 1965). Think of things like segregation influencing a student's education or generational trauma building from a history of being enslaved (hooks, 1992; Love, 2019).

Another myth can be found in the ideology that we are all individuals, we all make mistakes, and we can learn from those mistakes. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the majority of Black people. DiAngelo (2018) and Kendi (2017) point out that when Black people mess up, their entire race is generalized, and they are severely punished. The white experience is very different from that of Black people.

Similarly, the belief that all Americans are immigrants is flawed (Baldwin, 1965; Ladson-Billings, 1998). This devalues the fact that white people have had a much different experience than Indigenous or enslaved Black people. Immigrants turned against each other to solidify their association with white people and avoid further persecution (Baldwin, 1984). This escape was not available for Indigenous or Black people.

Another common myth is the belief that reform benefits Black people more than whites. Bell (2005) explains:

> Because of an irrational but easily roused fear that any social reforms will unjustly benefit Blacks, whites fail to support social reforms that are needed in this country to address the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, both Black and white (p.

573).

This also downplays the fact that reform tends to benefit more poor white people than Black people (Bell, 2005; Kendi, 2019).

The last myth I will discuss points to the amount of improvement as an indicator for success. While some may bask in the small moments of change and chalk that up as a success, critical scholars point to the need for large drastic changes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Only pointing out our successes leaves room for a return to the way things were and excuses the work that still needs to be done (Gillborn, 2008).

Awareness of these myths is important because once someone is aware of the myths, they can work to challenge them in their everyday spaces. I have reviewed myths that speak to the arrogance of white people, the lack of initiative in learning about racism, and the lack of respect for the non-white experience. Understanding that white people have been conditioned to believe these myths helps us understand why a change in beliefs can result in such an emotional process.

To summarize, the second aspect of critical whiteness explained why it was essential to address white complicity in reproducing racism and white supremacy. Most white people are ignorant to their socialization to be this way, and that racism is rooted and reinforced in our churches, schools, and other systems. Evidence can be found in the coded languages that were discussed in Appendix A and our ideologies that support the myths that I grouped into three categories of the arrogance of white people, lack of initiative to learn about race, and lack of respect for other ways of knowing. Learning about this process can be incredibly taxing, which will now be explained.

The Emotionality of whiteness

While some white people have transformative experiences (Mezirow, 1978) while

learning about antiracism, most white people have very emotional reactions (Tatum, 1992), because it goes against all the false ideologies that we are used to believing (DiAngelo, 2018). These ideologies support the values of white supremacy, and this can be challenging to accept our complicity in those actions. This section will focus on that emotional process and prepare me for the range of responses of the white women I interview. Most of the literature I discuss is taken from three areas involving teachers in training, adults attending diversity training, or educators writing about their experiences teaching both populations (DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenberg, 1993; Gillborn, 2006; Leonardo, 2009; Marx, 2004; Matias, 2016; Obear & Martinez, 2013; Patton & Haynes, 2020; Tatum, 1992; Tauriac et al., 2013). This section is organized into five parts covering common reactions, challenges in doing the work, responses in different groups, how power can impact this process, and the adult learning experience as it relates to transformative learning.

Common Reactions

Understanding the common reactions to learning about our complicity in racism is extremely important to my work. Research points to a range of responses to discovering racist attitudes and behaviors. Some white people are very open to analyzing their complicity while others may avoid learning, deny there is a problem, or "question the accuracy or currency of statistical information" (Tatum, 1992, p. 6) and research. Many white people will freeze, stumble on their words, or bounce through all the previously mentioned myths so as to explain their rationale or fight for their claims (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). These "moves act as rhetorical shields to save face because many whites can always go back to the safety of the disclaimers… as I told you, I am not racist" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 81).

While Matias (2016) speaks more in-depth about the emotionality of whiteness,

DiAngelo (2018) is most known for coining the term white fragility to explain the emotional responses of white people as they discuss or learn about racism stating: "Ideologies are the frameworks through which we are taught to represent, interpret, understand, and make sense of social existence. Because these ideas are constantly reinforced, they are very hard to avoid believing and internalizing" (p. 21). Tatum (1992) points to this resistance because racism is a taboo topic because white people are "socialized to think of the United States as a just society" (p. 5), and because white people fail to address how race/racism influences our lives. Regardless of the reasoning, several scholars (DiAngelo, 2018; Leonardo, 2009) mention that white people seem to have many opinions when threatened but are silent when situations are non-threatening or positive.

Challenges in Doing the Work

Realizing our participation in racism can be challenging. Leonardo (2009) believes that white guilt blocks critical reflection, and whites become concerned with not looking racist rather than doing the work to dismantle it. DiAngelo (2018) speaks of this guilt and says many are left paralyzed with inaction or a sense of betrayal when they learn about gaps in their education. Goodman (2017) writes about a sense of loss that is experienced by whites as they do the hard work to end their complicity. Relationships can feel diminished, they can learn they have less integrity than they believed, and they can see how much they have missed out on by not getting to know other cultures. This sometimes shows as white silence and is another way we recreate white supremacy on a daily basis. A variety of responses may vary due to different levels of awareness or openness to change.

Responses in Various Groups

Marx (2004) and DiAngelo (2018) address discrepancies when white participants are in

segregated or integrated groups. Marx (2004) mentioned that participants in segregated groups could not define/describe whiteness, held deficit views of people of color, would never call themselves racist, brushed off comments that called them out on their racism, and referred to their racist comments as honest. DiAngelo (2018) discusses how white solidarity is reinforced when people of color are absent. She highlights common behaviors of students when people of color are present:

> acting overly nice, avoiding contact (e.g., crossing a street or not going to a particular bar or club), mimicking "Black mannerisms and speech," being careful not to use racial terms or labels, using code words to talk negatively about people of color, occasional violence directed at people of color (p. 49).

Addressing whiteness is essential, and being aware of how white people interact in and out of segregated groups can impact self-reflection on the journey toward antiracism.

All white antiracist groups are sometimes referred to as white affinity groups. Research on these groups provides consistent descriptions of recognizing privilege and working towards the values of antiracism to "dismantle consciously or unconsciously held racist beliefs and values" (Ortega, Andruczyk, & Marquart, 2018, p. 30). DiAngelo (2012) explains that the segregation of groups reduces "the pressure of worrying about how their discussion might impact another group. Typically, the white group discusses internalized dominance, and the groups of color discuss internalized racial oppression" (p. 207). The goal is to address these issues so white people cause less harm when interacting across racial groups.

Benefits include improved camaraderie, awareness, commitment to antiracism, and experiencing more meaningful conversations (Blitz & Kohl, 2012; Cullen, 2008; Goodman, 2019; Michael & Conger, 2009; Obear & Martinez, 2013). Michael and Conger (2009) speak to

the importance of this work for educators: “white affinity groups can help white American teachers become competent and comfortable with racial issues, so that they can better support their students as they navigate racial structures that constrict opportunities” (p. 60). Obear and Martinez (2013) point to the relief and freedom when white people hear white colleagues admit their instances of perpetuating racist ideas. They describe feelings of relief and an increased ability to recognize and interrupt these ideas in themselves and others. They also mention how these personal changes advance into other spaces with:

> An increase in their ability to engage in authentic dialogue about race across racial identities; greater capacity to recognize dynamics of internalized dominance and internalized racism in daily interactions and practices; a deeper understanding of how dynamics of race and racism impact colleagues and students; an appreciation for the commitment of colleagues across race to create racial equity and inclusion on campus; and increased willingness to continue this level of dialogue both in leadership meetings and daily activities with colleagues and students (p. 83).

Scholars add to the additional benefits of addressing institutional racism in this way. Besides support for personal and professional growth, organizations see their commitment rewarded. As they hold white people more accountable, the recruitment and hiring of people of color improve across all levels (Blitz & Kohl, 2012). This commitment validates the experiences of people of color (Goodman, 2019), and leaves the unit “better positioned to effectively address bias and move toward equity” (Blitz & Kohl, 2012, p. 482).

While there appear to be many benefits to white affinity groups, there are also some concerns, including the “potential to get off track and perpetuate self-serving and even damaging solutions if they fail to ground themselves in the expressed needs of people of color” (Cullen,

2008, p. 77). In an interview with Beverly Tatum and Robyn DiAngelo (American Council on Education, 2019), DiAngelo warned about statements like "You're preaching to the choir" because we all have more to learn, and Tatum, in response, added: "Even the choir needs rehearsal." The benefits listed seem immense, but being aware of the concerns is just as important. In this case, it reminds me that we need to stay humble, always have more to learn, and remain focused on the journey toward antiracism.

The Impact of Power

Gillborn (2005, 2008) is another influential scholar who can aid our understanding of the emotional process of learning. He highlights inequalities at each level of education and explains common reactions to those in power. He explains the troubling power dynamic in determining if something is a coincidence or a conspiracy and claims that those in power tend to be viewed as knowledgeable while "the oppressed are dismissed as (having) paranoid delusions" (Gillborn, 2008, p. 242). This means that as white people in positions of power (and white people have power because of the color of their skin), white people are assumed to be knowledgeable, and our colleagues, students, and friends of color are assumed to be paranoid or delusional. As educators, it is crucial to keep this concept in mind, especially as we learn about inequities on campus or the experiences of microaggressions. If one always assumes they are right and other ways are delusional, then they are not actually open to change or improvement.

Gillborn (2008) explains how the law defines conspiracies and how society works together to uphold power. The most applicable to antiracism is the hub-and-spoke conspiracy:

> Individual people (teachers, policy-makers, commentators) and separate agencies (education; the media; the criminal justice system) can be viewed as spokes connected through a central hub of whiteness, i.e. the shared supposedly ‘‘commonsense’’ beliefs

> that privilege white experiences, assumptions and interests. This, of course, is a wheel with literally millions of spokes (p. 244).

Gillborn (2008) explains that institutional racism is so prevalent and ingrained in our daily lives that people escape accountability by placing blaming others. In reality, each one of us, and each policy, is complicit: "Unless you are actively resisting, the chances are that you are just another spoke who routinely reinforces the situation (whether you realize it or not)" (p. 244). This highlights the importance of attending to our complicity, because if we do not, the wheel continues to spin. By analyzing how we reproduce racism and white supremacy, we can cause disruption and create change. Committed antiracists may be more open to this process and notice a change in how they think, act, and believe.

Adult and Transformative Learning

Research shows that adults learn best in an environment that is both supportive and convenient to their lifestyle (Merriam, 2001; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Renn & Reason, 2012). In addition to white emotionality when learning about racism, Dirkx (2001) reminds us that learning as an adult can also be an emotional process. Drawing from Knowles' (1980) theory of andragogy, adult learners are known to place a lot of importance on lessons learned throughout their lived experiences (including mistakes), they need to be internally motivated to study the topic, they are independent learners who seek out information to fix a problem and like to see change or results quickly (Draper, 1998; Knowles, 1980; Sipe, 2001; Tice, 1997; Titmus, 1999). Marsick and Watkins (2001) stress the importance of learning being informal, and Rager (2003) speaks to the prevalence of this, reporting that more than 95% of adults direct their own learning.

These statistics may explain why many white people stop working towards antiracism

after being challenged. Statistics from the ACLU report that white support for BLM decreased 20 percent from June to September 2020 (Thomas & Horowitz, 2020). While this may indicate a preference for gradually introducing whiteness and antiracism, that is the exact opposite goal of antiracists and critical scholars who call for immediate action and drastic change. They view small incremental changes as creating an environment that is more likely to return to the status quo with little to no change. While we may have to be sensitive to how white adults respond, we can hope that any and all of our introductions to antiracism and whiteness can create an environment of transformative learning.

Transformative learning is the transformation of someone's basic worldview resulting in psychological, convictional, and behavioral changes (Elias, 1997), which is often triggered by a major life transition or disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991). Knowing that transformative learning involves deep analysis, discussion, and change of opinions (Mezirow, 1991), transformative learning could prove to be an essential part of the journey toward antiracism. Therefore, it is important to understand adult learning and transformative learning so we can have insight on how adults are learning to be more antiracist and how it may be changing their lives.

According to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2006), "When we are authentically open, transformation can occur" (p. 142). Many white people experienced this authentic openness, more so than they ever had, after the murder of George Floyd and subsequent protests. This suggests an environment was created that left more white people open to the possibility of transformative learning. Researchers have described supportive, transformative learning environments, which include safe spaces for reflection, exploration, guidance through instruction, supportive peer relationships, and awareness of alternate ways of knowing and

learning (Dirkx, 1998; Merriam et al., 2006; Mezirow, 1991). Transformative learning requires a supportive environment, which is how some white affinity groups are described (Cohen, 2016; Tauriac et al., 2013). These spaces may provide a place for deep reflection to occur. Being in a supportive environment with other white people who are committed to a journey towards antiracism could be extremely helpful in informing change. This process could be an essential part of building a better society, better environments for our students, more inclusive campuses, and a better understanding of how institutions can better serve *all* students.

Studying the emotional process of learning about whiteness is important because it seems to be a major factor in understanding why white people have difficulty addressing their biases. To summarize, I spoke about how responses vary, but many white people experience white fragility as they learn about being complicit in racism. Responses can vary if groups are segregated or if there is perceived power in a group. Understanding important aspects of adult learning may help us understand why some experience transformative learning as they commit to antiracism. The following section will focus on different theories of how these commitments progress.

white Racial Identity

white racial identity can help explain what people may experience on their journey toward antiracism. This section briefly covers two theories of white racial identity development and will spend more time evaluating the two final stages that appear to be more aligned with what I would consider committed antiracists.

Helms (1990) was the first to identify six stages of white racial identity development that can explain why we see different responses when white people learn about racism and their role in reproducing it. Tatum (1992) describes the stages as follows:

1. Contact - ignorant to the depths of racism or white privilege
2. Disintegration - the discomfort in realizing white privilege
3. Re-integration - can be a step back into accepting the status quo
4. Pseudo-independent - involves researching to learn more but may still involve unintentional perpetuation of racism
5. Immersion/emersion - learning about whiteness and the associated myths
6. Autonomy - energized efforts to fight racism and understanding that this is a lifelong process

While these stages are presented in a linear fashion, they never actually appear in that way. Tatum (1992) speaks of the model like a spiral staircase where you can still see the view below. white people can be at one stage in one moment and another stage in the very next second. For instance, someone may consider themselves in stage two (disintegration) when debating the effectiveness of affirmative action in admissions decisions to schools. However, that same person may be in stage one (contact) when it comes to their feelings of the appropriateness of affirmative action for a job they are considering.

Okun (2006) adapted this model and created a ladder of acceptance of whiteness where white people may advance up the ladder but can easily slip. These stages include:

1. Innocence - naivety about power, race, racism, and oppression (educators may believe Black students want to assimilate to institutions of higher education)
2. First contact - aware of differences or prejudices
3. We're Similar - sense white privilege but don't think we are part of the problem (minimizes differences but also doesn't want to be thought of as "one of those" white people)

4. Denial – we act like we can not create change and tell our Black friends to work harder
5. Guilt, shame, blame – more ownership for racism/white supremacy. People "either feel extremely responsible for racism (sometimes taking it on as our primary issue) or deny any responsibility at all for racism (I am not racist)" (p. 10)
6. Opening up / acknowledgment phase - overattachment to Black people or celebrating Black culture (we want them to tell us we are one of the good ones)
7. Taking responsibility/self-righteousness – we "take responsibility for our power" (p. 12) and commit to change
8. Collective Action – actively antiracist and work towards addressing racism on multiple levels (work, home, schools, government, and other institutions)

Okun's (2006) adjustments to Helms' (1990) model are very similar for the first few stages. However, after that, Okun (2006) simply seems to allow for more transition within the stages. Regardless, both models are still helpful in considering what may be involved as white people come to learn about their whiteness and their role in reproducing racism and ideas of white supremacy.

Highly committed antiracists seem like they would fall in one of the last two categories for each model. Helms (1990) and Tatum (1992) explain the immersion/emersion stage as one in which the white person immerses themselves in the history of white culture and replaces

> "racially related myths and stereotypes with accurate information… Learning about whites who have been antiracist allies to people of color is a very important part of this process. After reading articles written by antiracist activists describing their own process of unlearning racism, white students often comment on how helpful it is to know that others have experienced similar feelings and have found ways to resist the racism in their

environments" (Tatum, 1992, p. 16).

Okun (2006) describes a very similar phase called "taking responsibility/self-righteousness" (p. 13). The stage is very similar to immersion/emersion but adds comments about feeling better than other white people and not completely understanding that all of us white people are complicit. white people in this stage know mistakes will happen, but there is judgment of "those" white people because they see themselves as better than them. "This is another form of denial called distancing" (Okun, 2006, p. 14). As they separate from this way of thinking, they reach the final stage.

Autonomy (Tatum, 1992) and collective action (Okun, 2006) are described very similarly, where the white person is energized to actively "confront racism and oppression in his or her daily life" (Tatum, 1992, p. 16). Relationships with people of color are more authentic because the "person's antiracist behaviors and attitudes will be more consistently expressed" (Tatum, 1992, p. 17), and "the person is continually open to new information and new ways of thinking about racial and cultural variables" (Helms, 1990, p. 66).

These final two stages of each model are what I consider to be committed antiracists. The work of Tatum (1992) supports the telling of these stories because she mentions how autobiographies and narratives can help. She recommends the work of Mcintosh (1988), Lester (1987), and Braden (1987) to model a curriculum with stories that may help people on their antiracist journeys. My research will focus on sharing participants' stories to assist other adults in these final stages. I hope the stories add depth to the current scholarship on the final stages of white identity by focusing on a population of adults who voluntarily commit to a lifestyle of antiracism.

Summary

Critical whiteness demonstrates how the white race originated and how white people are complicit in racism and white supremacy. Being aware of that complicity allows us to work towards addressing it. This information is crucial for groups committed to antiracism and explains why we have so much more to do; we white people must work twice as hard to stop the momentum. The research on the emotionality of whiteness and the white identity models highlights some common reactions and how those reactions differ in segregated or desegregated groups. The literature explains the varied responses and the multiple challenges that may occur. While most of the research is derived from studies on undergraduate pre-service teachers or adults attending diversity training, one can assume that committed antiracists may experience some of those same emotions. My research will seek to tell the stories of these antiracists to see if there are similarities or differences.

white identity models are helpful in understanding the antiracist journey, and the final stages of those models are what I expect to see from highly committed antiracists. While research defines the stages of white identity, there do not appear to be narratives that speak to the challenges in the final stages. The final stages are presented as an ideal, but antiracism is a lifelong commitment, so I am curious as to where participants will reside within these models. Learning all this was extremely helpful in normalizing my experience, which is what my study aims to do for others. My research will share the detailed experiences of highly committed antiracists to provide people with a sense of belonging by normalizing the different challenges or difficulty levels. By doing this, white people may be more likely to remain active antiracists in community with our activists of color and continue the fight for change.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The methods section is divided into seven main parts. The first section focuses on the qualitative design and important aspects of conducting narrative inquiry. Next, I focus on the participants and the research design. Afterward, I explain how I coded the data, discuss some possible limitations of the design, and cover how the study establishes excellence. As with the literature review, this section is informed by the following research question: What do white women in higher education experience as they commit to antiracism?

Qualitative Design

My research on the experiences of white women on their antiracism journey demands a qualitative design because of the interpretivist nature of my research question. As Sipe and Constable (1996) stated, interpretivists are concerned with understanding situations from the point of view of those who experienced the situation. This qualitative study shares the in-depth stories of four white women deeply committed to antiracism. I specifically address the participant's and the emotions involved. The hope is that this will encourage, inspire, comfort, or normalize specific challenges one might face as one commits to this lifestyle. The goal is to help continue participation in antiracist lifestyles.

> This qualitative study uses narrative inquiry, which Chase (2018) explains as:
>
> meaning making through the shaping of experience; a way of understanding one's own or others' actions; of organizing events, objects, feelings, or thoughts in relation to each other; of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions, events, feelings, or thoughts over time (in the past, present, and/or future) (p. 549).

In this study, I examined what the participant's experienced as they committed to antiracism.

Humans are natural storytellers (McAdams, 1993). By using narrative inquiry, researchers can understand the nuances and contexts of a participant's life that they may not otherwise learn using different methodologies (Seidman, 2006). Often, these stories are presented chronologically (Czarniawska, 2004) and rely on authenticity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) point out that:

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study (p. 477).

One of the main reasons I chose this methodology is both the intention to promote social justice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 2017) and the attention to the researcher's positionality. In terms of the commitment to social justice, Cronon (1992) argues that narrative is "our best and most compelling tool for searching out meaning in a conflicted and contradictory world" (p. 1374). Scholars link narrative inquiry to revealing what has been unsaid or unspeakable (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). Other scholars discuss how narratives are used to make communities care (Cronon, 1992; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). "Narrative inquiry helps us to see more carefully and completely. It compels us to care about people's lives in all their complexity and often moves us into action" (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011, p. 1). Chase (2018) adds that

"storytelling educates and thus transforms the public life of local, national, and global communities. In these contexts, individuals' stories become a collective story" (p. 555).

In terms of positionality, Groenwald (2004) credits Hammersley (2000) with the concept that "Phenomenologists, in contrast to positivists, believe that the researcher cannot be detached from his/her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise" (p. 45). Researchers need to examine "our own personal biography, power and status, interactions with participants, and our written word" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 80). Chase (2018) adds:

> This attitude of humility – whether on the part of the researchers in their relationships with participants or among people as they converse across differences in everyday life – lays the groundwork for trust and further efforts to hear another's story, the groundwork for genuine dialogue (p. 557).

As someone who values the lifelong commitment to antiracism, it was important to disclose my experiences and imperfections, so my participants understood that this is a learning process and there are no experts. While I am the researcher in this study, I am learning and unlearning just as they are during this antiracism journey.

Conducting Narrative Inquiry

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) are often cited in studies using narrative inquiry because they identified "three commonplaces of narrative inquiry—temporality, sociality, and place— which specify dimensions of an inquiry space" (p. 479). "They provide a kind of conceptual framework for narrative inquiry" (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p.23) explaining that these should all be considered when conducting narrative inquiry:

- Temporality: understanding people, places, and events as always in transition. (My participants are not the same antiracists that they were a year ago or even a month ago.)

- Sociality: personal and social conditions (including that between the researcher and participants)
    - "By personal conditions we mean the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480).
    - Social conditions include the "environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise, that form each individual's context" (Clandinin et al., 2007, p.23)
- Place: "The specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequence of places where the inquiry and events take place" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). "Place may change… and a narrative inquirer needs to think through the impact of each place on the experience" (Clandinin et al., 2007, p.23).

In my study, temporality was built into the design by collecting data that reflected the participant's life experiences with race, racism, and antiracism. For example, a participant in the group interview mentioned that she is not the same as she was a year ago and who knows where she will be a year from now when she learns more. Sociality was displayed in the personal descriptions used by the participants and the social conditions they recalled. In addition, each participant's story is told through my experiences with them, which addresses the relationship between the researcher and the participant. All interviews took place over Zoom, so we were in an online environment, but each story took place somewhere as well (most of them in southern states that the participant's labeled overly racist).

Participants

The participants in this research study are four white women nominated by a committee of Black antiracist educators and vetted as deeply committed to antiracism. This section explains

how the recruitment process worked, why I focused on white women specifically, and why only a few participants were ideal.

Purposive and convenience sampling was used to recruit participants. All four women work in higher education and understand the challenges of working at an institution while fighting against systemic racism. To ensure I had committed participants, I hired Dr. Angel Jones, a woman who identifies as Afro-Latina, to lead a committee to find these committed antiracists. Dr. Jones leads an active antiracist social media platform on Instagram with over 60,000 followers. She hosts several weekly sessions to discuss current issues, CRT, and the Black experience (this is called counterstories, and she usually has a new guest speaker each week). She also has a weekly session where she and her best friend, who is white, discuss multiple topics. Dr. Jones is known for not shying away from any topic. She tries to infuse joy whenever possible but is also very vulnerable in sharing her struggles in racist environments. She communicated with other Black women who led other antiracist platforms to nominate all four women.

Once participants were identified, Dr. Jones gave me their contact information, and I had them take an initial survey (seen in Appendix B) that reported some of their experiences. This survey also confirmed that participants identified as white women and worked in higher education. Three extra participants were nominated, but two had never worked in higher education, and one could not attend the group meeting, so they did not continue participation in the study. Participants who used to work in higher education while going through the antiracist process were also be invited to participate (as some may have left higher education after realizing their perpetuation of racism).

Focusing only on white women is not an inclusive or antiracist decision. However, in all

this research, I never once saw literature on the reactions of non-binary or transexual women (who would count as women). For this study, anyone identified as a white woman was allowed to participate. While the literature does primarily focus on white people, gender is mentioned in instances of claiming men are less likely to change or more likely to resist, or more likely to have anger-filled tantrums as a response to antiracist training (hooks, 2004; Love, 2019; Matias, 2016; Rothenberg, 2004). By comparison, women may be more open to change, and the experience of oppression via the patriarchy may allow them to be more empathetic. Women are not always presented so positively. There is a violent past of white women using their tears or power to cause harm to people of color (DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2017; Love, 2019). This is important to be aware of, but in the end, I decided to only use those who identify as white women to provide a space of relatively equal power. Without patriarchal representation, I hoped the participants would be more open to sharing their experiences without judgment.

A small number of participants is ideal for this research study. Narrative inquiry, and likewise phenomenology, typically investigate the lived experiences of a small number of people by using in-depth interviews to capture detailed descriptions of the participant's experience (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Research provides evidence of groups being as small as two people (Boyd, 2001; Kvale, 1996). These smaller sample sizes are also ideal when discussing white racial identity as scholars report more comfort to be open for discussion (Rothman, Malott, & Paone, 2012; Tatum, 1992).

Participant's individual stories are documented in chapters four through seven of this dissertation. Three of the four participant's knew Dr. Jones, who led the committee, and one participant was nominated by someone else on the committee (but also knew of Dr. Jones via her platform). None of the women in the study thought they knew each other, but towards the end of

the focus group, two people realized they had met at a conference once (Dr. Jones had introduced them). Three participants had all completed their dissertations, and the fourth participant was in the middle of her doctoral program. With such a shared understanding of the research process, I could gloss over some explanations (more so than I would have to had done with less knowledgeable participants).

Throughout the study, all four participants made comments about feeling more willing to be open and hop right into divulging their stories because they knew the woman that nominated them had high standards. They had complete faith that she trusted me with their information and would not allow me to misinterpret them. This led to almost all the participants commenting on feeling like they were in therapy (or talking to their therapist). This unique situation created a bond of trust rather quickly and allowed for friendship and allyship. The group had also reported being excited to see how this research would progress and wished they would have had similar stories while committing to antiracism. They liked the idea that it was scholarship for them and other people committed to antiracism.

I reminded these participants that their identity would be masked using a different name and location. They were able to select their pseudonym and institution. Everything they shared was used for coding (exact methods will be explained in the section on coding), but they could all make edits and hide their identity when they wanted. Member checking was used throughout every aspect of this study.

Research Design

My research design was influenced by Seidman's (2006) recommended plan of three separate 90-minute interviews that should address 1) the participant's life history, 2) gathering details about the experience in question, and 3) reflecting on what was learned. While the first

two interviews were supposed to just gather information and examples of what occurred, the final interview intended to focus on what was learned and the meaning-making process because of these interactions. In adapting aspects of this strategy, I was less concerned with which interview they shared their experiences or what they learned, but I was more focused on the quality of what they shared. Because I did not follow Seidman's (2006) plan exactly as intended, I say I adapted aspects of his plan.

I first met with each participant via zoom to explain the research study, confirm they would commit to the entire length of the study, and collect signatures on the research consent form. The protocol for this meeting can be found in Appendix C, and the consent form in Appendix D. In that same meeting, I explained the instructions for the first portion of the study.

Participants were asked to participate in these activities in the following order:

Interview 1: Write or record a reflection or autobiography (or interviewed if they prefer)

Interview 2: Participants participated in a focus group with all four participants, and

Interview 3: Participants were interviewed individually.

In addition, I wrote field notes (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) with each interaction so that I could reflect on any themes, feelings, or observations. This allowed me to clarify comments or behaviors to ensure I understood the participant's entire story.

Interview 1: Autobiography

The autobiography, or reflection (used interchangeably for this dissertation), allowed me to gain insight into the participant's life history and antiracism journey. This reflection of their life history as an advocate, ally, or antiracist included their experiences with race, racism, or antiracism at many stages of their lives. Life histories "tend to focus on "ordinary" people, seeking to uncover their lives as they have unfolded. The goal is to describe this individual's life,

focusing on what it is like to be this person" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 164-165).

To provide an example, I shared my story (the introduction of this dissertation) with the participants after I received theirs. They were warned that mine was for my dissertation and was more intense than what I expected of them. I believe this helped solidify what the expectations were while assisting in the relationship/trust-building between myself and the participant. Knowing the person that recommended them and understanding my story expedited deeper conversations at a more efficient pace. In addition, I was the only one to read the participant's reflections. Participants did not share their stories with any other participants, but aspects of their stories came up within the focus group.

Participants were given three options to complete the autobiography; they could write it on their own time, record their autobiography that I transcribed, or meet with me to answer the questions and I would transcribe that interview. All three options were used by the participants; Kathryn and Hannah wrote theirs, Rachel recorded hers, and Ann and I met to discuss her responses. The intent was to provide the participant with a comfortable environment and enough time to provide a detailed and rich description and reflection of their experiences that shaped their antiracism journey. Some felt a lot of pressure in writing the reflection, so they opted to talk or record their responses. Participants were prompted with seven different questions or prompts listed in Appendix E. Participant's reflections were written chronologically as they mentioned experiences from youth to adulthood that shaped their views on race, racism, and antiracism. These reflections were crucial to understanding where each individual started on their journey towards antiracism and how that informed their current commitment to antiracism.

Interview 2: Focus Group

The second interview was a focus group of all four participants. This was a recorded 90-

minute group interview via Zoom to discuss their experiences in more detail. It is important to remember that antiracism journeys are never over, so this interview focuses on what has occurred up to this point. Narrative inquiry "encourages attention to emotions, nonverbal communication, and possibilities for dialogue and community" (Chase, 2018, p. 547). Having the highly committed antiracists meet each other and participate in a focus group was a great way to support the commitment and normalize the adversity for everyone. Participants reported feeling that sense of community and everyone asked if we could meet again. One participant had something happen at work and wanted to call the group to ask for advice. One person mentioned feeling relief that others had struggled, making her feel less alone.

The times of the meetings were all based on the participant's schedules. The focus group took place about a week after everyone had submitted their reflections and the individual interviews were one to two weeks after the focus group. I had prepared to do the focus group with three of the four reflections, but everyone had turned them in the week before. Appendix F provides the focus group protocol. This protocol reminds participants that their names and institutions are disguised so they can answer honestly, and if they did not want something disclosed, I would not name them specifically. I also reminded them that they could pass on questions if they did not want to answer; however, I planned to remind them of that question again in our individual interview.

Questions were open-ended to elicit more feedback and assist with storytelling, but the protocol was kept flexible, so I could explore themes as they developed. Several scholars support a less rigid structure. Rossman and Rallis (2017) warn:

> Narrative inquiry researchers tend to view the interview as an exploration and discovery of the participants' experiences and perspectives… (but) a fixed sequence of questions, as

> in the standardized open-ended interview format, is inappropriate for capturing subtle and nuanced perspectives articulated by the participant (p. 165).

Kvale (1996) adds that the researcher needs a "deliberate naivete" (p. 33) to remain open to the many possibilities where the stories may lead. I had a structured protocol prepared, but I was also prepared to deviate when needed.

The group interview was recorded over a Zoom meeting until transcribed. Member checking ensured that the participant's comments were not taken out of context. Creswell (2014) recommends sharing transcripts in a timely manner so participants can make any corrections, edits, or additions if they wish to clarify their statements. These transcripts were shared with each participant within 48 hours, and they had one week to submit changes. In addition, I wrote memos or field notes (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) to summarize what happened and reflected on any themes, feelings, or observations. I also noted any follow-up questions I wanted to ask in the individual interviews.

Interview 3: Individual Interviews

The final step was conducting 90-minute interviews over Zoom with each participant to reflect on their individual antiracist journey. The individual interview provided an opportunity to reflect on the process, explain experiences in more detail, clarify any previous comments, and discuss anything that we still needed to examine. Exact questions changed after analyzing the data from the autobiographies and focus group interviews, but my initial protocol plan is listed in Appendix G. As in other interviews, this protocol reminded participants that their names and institutions were disguised so they could answer honestly. If there were items they prefer I not disclose, I would not name them specifically. The protocol was flexible, so we could explore themes as they arose.

I made time to focus on questions about the advice they may have for other white antiracists who may be feeling how they once felt. The focus of this question was to get people's advice and to see what the participant felt worked for them (or what they wish they would have done). Having them reflect on what happened and describe how they wish they would have responded told me what they valued and may have done differently.

Individual interviews were recorded and destroyed after being transcribed. Member checking was once again used to ensure that participants were accurately represented. The transcripts were shared with participants so they could take a week to make additions or corrections to anything they felt misrepresented the discussion. I allowed for this alteration to correct errors in recordings such as sounds or pauses that leave out important words like "not" that can change the meaning of the sentence entirely. Once the participant approved their transcript, I deleted the recording.

As with the focus group meetings, I wrote memos to summarize what happened and reflected on themes, feelings, or observations. After the four autobiographies and one group interview (and reflection memos from each of these events), I had two prominent themes and some subthemes. I coded the transcripts looking for evidence of those (sub)themes. These (sub)themes were confirmed via member checking in the final individual interviews. Everyone agreed with my (sub)themes, and two people refined how I was viewed the theme of belonging, so I adjusted at that time.

In writing the participant's stories that were later coded, I told their story chronologically, including my perspective of our first interaction to the final one. I took notes at each meeting and then created one story per person using all data. Each story was written from the perspective of me witnessing the participant's interactions in each of the experiences. Participants verified that

these stories accurately represented what they experienced and shared.

Data Analysis and Coding

Narrative inquiry focuses on each participant's story, so I have a chapter dedicated to each of their experiences, and a chapter summarizing the key findings. Chase (2018) highlights that:

> Narrative researchers often use analytic tools developed by other qualitative researchers (e.g., phenomenology, discourse analysis, grounded theory), but what distinguishes narrative analysis is a focus on each account in its entirety and integration among its parts, rather than on discursive or thematic parts per se (p. 552).

Telling participant's stories and reflecting on the experiences as a whole provides a complete understanding of the data. Narrative inquiry often synthesizes all data and uses narrative analytic procedures to construct coherent stories (Kim, 2015). This is exactly what I did; I used the reflections, transcripts from the focus group and individual interviews, as well as my memos to create chronological stories of how I was introduced to each participant. According to Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002), narrative researchers often engage in "restorying" (Creswell, 2012, p. 509), where they reconstruct the story as a "chronology of events describing the individual's past, present, and future experiences lodged within specific settings or contexts" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 332). Each participant's story was approved via member checking and can be found in chapters four through seven.

Narrative researchers then code the data into themes (Creswell, 2012). Braun and Clarke's (2006) deductive thematic analysis was used. They recommend six stages that first include familiarizing yourself with the data through repeated repetitions of exposure. Reflections, transcripts, and memos were analyzed multiple times to identify recurring themes

and codes (see chapter 8) to develop a "rich, developed account of findings" (Merriam, 2002).

Second, I produced initial themes from the data. Saldaña (2016) states that coding is not an exact science and it that it is primarily an "interpretive act" (pg. 5). So, I tried to seek patterns that were an indicator of my participant's way of thinking and understanding of their experience. To help me manage the process, I asked myself the following questions: What stories are participants sharing? Are there any common themes? What is the participant trying to convey? What was difficult for participants? At this time, I had the reflections from each participant, participated in the focus group, and also had my memos to help answer these questions. Two major themes stood out at that time. Every participant had talked about the hardships of being a betweener or not fitting in with any crowd which seemed to encapsulate their experience so well. This was an emotional process involving isolation, not belonging, and there being a need to process these emotions without causing harm. Originally practice makes progress was the name of the other theme and that

included the fact that participants experienced imposter syndrome at every stage on their journey.

Third, I found data to support each theme. I went through every reflection, transcript, and my memos to match participants' experiences to these themes of being a betweener and practice makes progress. The only items not assigned a theme were the first and last questions of the study. The first question had participants introduce themselves and discuss what antiracism meant to them (this is discussed in the findings in chapter eight). The final question of the individual interview asked what advice they had for other people who may be experiencing what they experienced (this is discussed in chapter nine with the recommendations).

Fourth, I reviewed the themes to ensure that those themes made sense with the codes in the entire data set. I went into the final meeting with the participants, the individual interviews,

with a list of my proposed themes and subthemes. Because the participants were experienced researchers, I had them name what they saw as the themes before I shared mine. Themes and subthemes were unanimously supported. Participants also helped refine the themes to include becoming as an overarching theme that had the ability to be more advanced than what I was initially proposing. Participants also helped refine being a betweener by mentioning a certain amount of pressure to be the one to speak up against injustice. Finally, I produced a report of the findings and compared my findings to the current literature (found in chapter 8) using deductive coding processes.

To explain the deductive coding process in more depth, participant's stories were coded individually and (other than the first and last question of the study) every line was placed either in a category labeled betweener or becoming. Once every line was placed in one of those categories, I analyzed every sentence in the betweener category. I noticed that there were themes of isolation, not belonging, and wanting a space to process emotions without causing harm. Every sentence within the betweener category was placed into one of these areas of isolation, not belonging, or space. Then I looked at the becoming category and separated instances of imposter syndrome from practice makes progress. Within the practice makes progress category, I highlighted instances of advanced ways of thinking about antiracism; ways that seemed more advanced than anything I had read. This is what eventually became refined as becoming where becoming was the theme and the subthemes were experiencing imposter syndrome and practice makes progress. Examples of these themes can be found in Appendix H.

Limitations

It is important to consider critiques of every research design, and I have two significant critiques. First, I used the lens of critical whiteness (and therefore CRT), which should focus on

drastic and systemic change rather than the incremental and individual grassroots efforts I envisioned. While this does not seem drastic, one could argue that the large number of white people analyzing their complicity is a tremendous change from the former ways of avoiding the conversation and/or reflecting on their role of reproducing racism. Several critical scholars have mentioned the need for drastic change but made adjustments to avoid issues with white emotionality. This was discussed in the literature review, where authors catered to white feelings or did not point how their participant's whiteness was revealing itself (DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenberg, 1993; Kendi, 2017; Kendi, 2019). Matias (2016) credits Leonardo (2009) with the idea that "whiteness permeates every structure of education such that even radical pedagogies, such as Critical Pedagogy, cannot be divorced from the hegemonic ideals of whiteness (Allen, 2004)" (p. 100).

This presents a challenge to my work because committing to antiracism is challenging and emotional work, and the stories that I share may provide ammunition for those who claim that CRT makes white people feel bad about themselves. The goal is that these stories normalize the process and help keep white people committed to the movement. I want to encourage white educators to commit to antiracism as a tiny step in a more significant act toward change. In addition, many white people can feel attacked when discussing race (DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2017; Kendi, 2019; Matias, 2016). Analyzing my alignment with the values of CRT and critical whiteness is an important step and one I kept in mind throughout every stage of this dissertation.

The second critique involves possible researcher bias in sharing the values of the participant group, which could be viewed negatively. I discuss how my positionality is a benefit in the section on qualitative design. I recognize the potential conflict of interest but point to the literature on qualitative research (specifically participatory action research) that highlights the

value of exposure to the more intimate process of emotional responses, biases, and ethical dilemmas (Saldaña, 2011). Saldaña (2011) stresses the importance of increased authenticity in research. “Action research is conducted with the expressed purpose of not just observing social life, but reflecting on one’s own practice or working collaboratively with participants to change their setting and circumstances for the better” (p. 18). I see this in line with the ideals of antiracism in that white people need to first analyze themselves before making a true contribution to the fight against racism. Paris and Winn (2013) add to the humanizing impact of action research and mention its use “to inform actions aimed at challenging and dismantling oppressive conditions” (p. 78). I should clarify that I am speaking about the role of white people in antiracism and analyzing white complicity in racism and white supremacy to stop the cycle for future generations.

Trustworthiness

Scholars use a variety of ways to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research. Clandinin and associates (2007) focus specifically on narrative inquiry and explain that it is more than just storytelling. They mention seven critical elements related to the design of such studies.

1. Justification of the importance of the study:

> Narrative inquirers need to attend to three kinds of justification: the personal, the practical, and the social. The personal justification comes from… situating yourself in the study. We do that by writing something we call narrative beginnings that speak to the researcher’s relationship to, and interest in, the inquiry… We also need to justify the research practically, that is, how will it be insightful to changing or thinking differently about the researcher’s own and

> others' practices? The third justification requires a researcher to think about the larger social and educational issues the study might address (p. 23-24).

This justification was displayed throughout this dissertation. I share my story in the introduction and explain in chapter one of this dissertation how I hope these stories impact the practice of antiracism. Finally, I discuss my contribution to education in the final chapter.

2. The need to name the phenomenon, the "what" we are inquiring into: The "what" (whiteness) was also discussed in chapter one and why we white educators need to do more to create the more inclusive environment that we claim, and the institutions claim we have.
3. Consider and describe the particular methods used to study the phenomenon… "these decisions need to be undertaken with care to how the kinds of field texts are attentive to all three commonplaces, that is, temporality, sociality, and place" (p. 27). This was addressed in my methods section but will be restated here. Temporality was built into the design by collecting data that reflected the participant's life experiences with race, racism, and antiracism. For example, a participant in the group interview mentioned that she is not the same as she was a year ago and who knows where she will be a year from now when she learns more. Sociality was displayed in the personal descriptions used by the participants and the social conditions they recalled. In addition, each participant's story is told through my experiences with them, which addresses the relationship between the researcher and the participant. All interviews took place over Zoom, so we were in an online environment, but each story took place somewhere as well (most of them in southern states that the participant's labeled overly racist).

4. Describe the analysis and interpretation processes… "how we examine, describe, and specify the commonplace features built into the study" (p. 27): Within the methods section, I was detailed in describing why certain decisions were made and presented limitations to the research as well.
5. Position the study in relation to other research: The final chapter of this dissertation compares how my findings relate to research on undergraduate students and how results confirm and expand on previous research.
6. The uniqueness of each study that may provide insight in some new way: My study included a group of dedicated adults working on antiracism on their own accord (rather than younger people forced to do so for a class). The participants shared a level of respect for the person who nominated them for the study, which allowed for a unique environment of trust and connection without knowing any of the participants involved.
7. "Ethical considerations… are central in narrative inquiries" (p. 30). In narrative inquiry:

> inquirers must deepen the sense of what it means to live in relation in an ethical way… Ethical considerations permeate narrative inquiries from start to finish: at the outset as ends in view are imagined; as inquirer-participant relationships unfold, and as participants are represented in research texts (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 483).

In addition to antiracism being focused on the ethical nature of equality, participants also mentioned feeling strong trust in me, the researcher, and this research process (of using the expert nomination to be included in the study). Similarly, member checking allowed participants to correct mistakes or what they may have considered misrepresentations of themselves.

Summary of Intent

This qualitative research study used narrative inquiry to share the stories of four white women committed to antiracism. By sharing their stories, I hope to address a gap in the research that speaks to the experiences of adults voluntarily committed to antiracism and provide more information on people who may be in the final stages of white identity. In addition, I hope to normalize some of the tougher experiences and provide positive and negative examples so others can learn through those moments. Ideally, these stories will connect people and possibly motivate and/or inspire white people to start or continue their antiracist journey when things get tough. Doing this tougher work can help us provide a more inclusive environment for our students in higher education.

Chapters four through seven share the experiences of the four participants in this study. Their stories are told as I learned them and what I witnessed over three main interactions. First, we first met to discuss the study, their willingness to participate, and I provided the instructions for the autobiographical reflection of their experiences with race, racism, and antiracism. Second, we met as a group to interact and learn from one another. Finally, I interviewed each participant individually to get a better understanding and follow up on specific questions. These are their stories.

CHAPTER 4: KATHRYN

When I first met Kathryn to explain the study, she was by far the most nervous of everyone I met. Before I could get into any details, she told me that she was not sure she belonged in this study because she did not view herself as being at the height of her antiracist journey yet. She explained that she questioned herself daily and "definitely did not have all of the answers." She wanted to ensure I completely understood that, so I had the best participants for my study. She gave me the impression that she was expecting to not qualify for the study but also that she cared deeply about the work being done. I explained that what she viewed as her faults are the qualities that got her nominated for this study in the first place. Being a white woman in antiracism means we often have to question ourselves and practice humility. She was clearly exhibiting both. Besides all of this, I had/have complete faith in the nomination process and the Black woman that recommended her for this study. Kathryn agreed with me after I explained all this and mentioned that she often feels a lot of imposter syndrome in this work. When I explained that I wanted to share her story with others who were going through this to unite them and feel less isolated, she was entirely on board and wished she had something like that for herself.

Reflection

I asked her to write a reflection on her experiences with race, racism, and antiracism throughout her life so I could get a better idea of what may have led to this process of committing to antiracism. Once I read her reflection, my suspicions about her being a good fit were confirmed. She grew up in a suburb of a very large city in the Midwest and was surrounded by diversity everywhere she went. However, she wrote:

This diversity did not necessarily translate into anti-racist beliefs or actions for me or for

most other white people I knew...

Very early in my life, I noticed racial differences but did not think much about what they meant for me or the people around me. I certainly didn't understand that racial differences were related to historical and contemporary racial oppression. Like many white people, I was aware of race yet unaware of racism, and, at the same time, I was learning how to be racist. From representations on television, conversations with my family, and offhand comments by others, I acquired the potently racist belief that Black poverty and pain resulted from poor decision making on the part of Black people. My mother encouraged me to think about race and racism – she once took me to the Black Expo… (in town) and, later, slipped a copy of *Black Like Me* under my bedroom door. However, we never had significant conversations about the topic, and I would say that I remained mostly ignorant throughout high school and well into college.

After high school, I attended a small, public university, where almost all the students were white. At the time, I did not consider this racial imbalance to be noteworthy. Most of my classes did not discuss issues related to race and racism, and I had only one non-white professor throughout my entire college education. I am forever grateful for that professor because she taught me that Africa had been colonized, and learning that fact changed my life. While learning about settler colonialism in Africa, I first began to understand the horrors of white violence and white supremacy.

In my senior year of college, I received a small research grant to study a topic of my choice, and I decided to learn more about HIV/AIDS prevention efforts in Africa and their inexorable connection to logics of white supremacy. I continued to study this topic throughout my graduate school education.

I worked in the… City Public Schools as an AmeriCorps service worker for one year between graduating college and beginning my master's degree. While the elementary school I worked in was not very far from my own childhood school, the two were incredibly different. The City Public School System is predominantly Black, and I worked at an elementary school in north… part of the city plagued by the enduring legacy of de facto segregation. The school was composed of almost all Black students, staff, and faculty, and while working there, I learned a lot about how systemic anti-Black racism shapes people's lives.

Our students were sweet, brilliant, and loving, but a lack of generational wealth and community resources meant that many struggled. Working with and caring for these students exposed the lie that everyone has an opportunity to build the life they want. These brilliant young people, caring parents, and dedicated teachers were hamstrung by systems designed to oppress them. Wealth and resource inequity became painfully obvious to me, and I could no longer understand Black suffering as even partially the result of Black moral failure. In a society that pretends to value freedom, these 5- through 12-year-olds were denied countless opportunities simply because of their race and socioeconomic status. I became incensed and committed to making things better, however I could.

After my year with AmeriCorps, I decided to continue my education. I wanted to learn about – and possibly help dismantle – racist systems in the United States. At the time, I assumed everyone in higher education would be interested in, if not fully committed to, eliminating racial injustice; with a problem this damaging, how could anyone want to think about anything else? After beginning my program, I was very sad to

learn that I was one of only a few students passionately committed to undoing racial injustice and, while many of our professors were anti-racist thinkers, many more were concerned with other questions or theoretical matters. As I stayed committed to my goal of helping undo anti-Black racism, I started to feel lonely and out of place, like everyone else couldn't see that our world was on fire, and they thought I was annoying for caring so much. It was a challenging time for me.

While in graduate school, I primarily taught traditional undergraduate students on our university's campus, but I also had the opportunity to teach in the prison system. I taught in a women's and men's prison, and I learned so much from those experiences. Like when I taught in the… City elementary school, working in the prisons forced me to confront more of my racist assumptions and biases. Before, I had assumed that people in prison "deserved" their incarceration, whatever form it might take. In seeing how the American prison system exploits and abuses people, and in learning some of the stories about how my students ended up on the inside, I shed old stereotypes and recognized that people often make the best choices they can within their contexts. For many Americans, those contexts are the contemporary manifestations of more than 100 years of systemic, systematic anti-Black racial oppression.

Eventually, I wrote my dissertation about anti-Black racism and the racist discourses of moral failure that blame Black people for Black suffering. Looking back, I can see how this dissertation arose from my own distorted beliefs as a very young person and the contexts that imbued me with them. Intellectually, I have spent most of my academic career trying to understand these racist rhetorics and the complexity of human agency within situations of constrained choice making. Personally, this knowledge helps

me understand patterns of marginalization and how they might impact people while also reminding me to never, ever make assumptions about individuals' lived experiences. From these accumulated experiences, especially my time as an AmeriCorps service worker and my time as a college educator in prisons, I have gained a lifelong commitment to doing my best to help dismantle racist oppression. I simply cannot look the other way, as I see the evidence of white supremacy everywhere, and I refuse to sit on the sidelines as some people suffer. And, because I am white, I view my own efforts towards dismantling racism as a personal responsibility borne from my incredible privilege. I think about my students, and I know we have to do better, and I think about myself, and I know need to be a part of the change.

I am always re-learning how to work towards this goal, and I constantly wonder if I'm doing so the right way. I have had to recognize my own desire to be validated and celebrated for my advocacy, and in some instances, I have been paralyzed by white guilt. However, I refuse to stay paralyzed for long. I would rather try to make a change and do something wrong than never do anything at all. The hardest moments for me in this journey have been related to sharing my opinion and pointing out injustice. In graduate school, some called me aggressive, and in the workplace, some of my colleagues think that I can only talk about racism, and I have often been critiqued for being so vocal. For example, I have received an anonymous letter from a school colleague telling me to shut up and stop playing the martyr. I have been disciplined for not contributing to a "positive" environment in our workplace. I have received negative student evaluations claiming that I talk about race too much, and one of those evaluations claimed I was racist against white men. Since I am always just trying to do the best that I can to help

create a world where everyone is free, I find these experiences very painful.

At the same time, I have been able to keep my job, live my life, and ultimately choose the path that I am on. At any time, as a white person, I have the privilege of opting out and no longer inviting this criticism by no longer sharing my perspective. I take my position of relative privilege seriously, and I try hard not to get distracted by the negativity. Instead, I do my best to use the criticism as feedback about how I might be able to become more effective.

Right now, I am choosing to focus on the places where I can make a positive impact and avoid wasting energy by advocating in places where my voice is easily dismissed. I am trying to write more scholarly publications and, as a result, gain more credibility, which will allow me to have a bigger impact. I am also working to create spaces in my classrooms where students feel confident discussing many uncomfortable topics, including racism and anti-racism. I teach classes related to diversity and inclusion, and I do so with an anti-racist focus. For example, when teaching gender-related topics, I prioritize intersectionality. Additionally, I mentor and support students from marginalized groups, and I show up authentically wherever I am.

I often feel exhausted, lonely, and anxious. I'm terrified of causing harm by doing something wrong – I have had so many moments in my life where I had to unlearn racism, and I'm sure I have lots more unlearning to do. Sometimes I wonder why I bother at all, given that many people with lots of power prefer to maintain the status quo (which they benefit from).

I also try my best to find hope, spread love, and create joy. While what I do today, tomorrow, or ten years from now may not create an immediate change, I have faith that

> what we do matters. Teaching one student to read does not fix the systemic racism in the educational system, but it does empower that student, and who knows what they will do one day. I am playing the long game, and I hope I'm being a good ancestor.

In reading her reflection, I was impressed with the honesty, awareness, and intentionality in naming racist systems and how we are groomed to continue to oppress. I was surprised that someone who has done so much work could feel they may not belong in a group of women committed to antiracism. It was obvious that she was committed to taking action even if that hurt her career. I admired her passion and could not wait to speak again.

Focus Group

The next time we met was in a group setting, and while Kathryn still attended the meeting via zoom, she was fighting COVID, and I took this to mean that she may be a little more emotional than usual. One of her first comments involved how isolating the commitment to antiracism can be. She mentioned feeling "seen" by the women in the group and said, "finding a space where I can show up in all of my flawed-ness as a white person and not cause potential harm… that feels comforting to me." Later in the meeting, I asked about everyone's support system, and she was the first to respond, saying "what support system?" She explained that had been a real struggle for her. Her white husband studies race, so she sometimes speaks to him, but:

> And I'm just going to lay it all out there because I can't figure out the benefit of not doing it, I struggle… because I know a lot of Black women who I can go to, but I won't go to, frequently, because there's enough shit on their plate… and when I have in the past, I've often left feeling terrible because I've unburdened myself in that space, so I have a therapist. And I seek out therapists who understand racial justice… I will try to go

> to my white women friends who… I think kind of get it and sometimes that works out and sometimes it doesn't… but finding the support that feels relevant and wholehearted has been a challenge for me, unfortunately.

Throughout the conversation, Kathryn seemed to really relate to everyone in the group. She mentioned this multiple times and nodded in agreement when the others spoke about what they had been through. She had previously mentioned the painfulness and loneliness but got really emotional at one point and felt she was going to cry (which she was embarrassed by). She mentioned:

> I mean, friendships are challenging for other reasons too. And so, like, I can be annoying, but… you add the I'm annoying and I won't shut the fuck up about racism and… it starts to pull (she paused). Connections is just something… and support… is something that I find difficult to discuss.

Everyone in the group nodded, and one person pointed out that the process is difficult because it is "really painful," and "this work is alienating and isolating by design… but that the boulder is not yours alone to carry." Kathryn and everyone nodded again, and it was nice to see the support in action (even if it was just reminders of things we knew but had forgotten in the moment). This same person also spoke about being a rock in the river and making the river change its path by standing solid in your ground/remaining in the fight for equality. Another person pointed out that because white woman's tears can be painful to the Black community, we often need to compartmentalize our emotions. "And so, my hope would be that this is a space where that would be okay" to acknowledge, express, and release those real emotions.

For most of this group meeting, I thought that Kathryn was very sad about something (possibly losing friends or a loved one because of this commitment to antiracism). However, as

time passed, I began to think that she just really wanted to feel more of a sense of belonging. Everyone shared their experiences throughout the group meeting, but you could really feel the emotions when Kathryn spoke. At different parts of the meeting, she explained that her emotions also included anger ("I'm really pissed, why aren't you?") and self-doubt / imposter syndrome. She said the imposter syndrome shows up like "I'm not enough… I'm not doing enough… I haven't read everything you have… I haven't shifted enough…it's just this constant journey of trying to be better, trying to do better." She spoke explicitly about the challenges of fighting the status quo in a college environment that benefits from that way of being:

> It's just often a space that's adamantly opposed to critique. Right? That being said, there are lots of individuals who see things that are wrong and talk about them in their own ways... But I would show up to our meetings and raise issues that I found concerning. And in one meeting… (where a representative from the diversity office was there) an older white male professor… was asking them "but if I say something that a student finds offensive and they show up at your office, you know to just tell them that he has academic freedom and he can say whatever he wants in his classroom, right?" And I was like, "hi" (she raised her hand to stop the man from speaking and explain why his logic was flawed). I got frustrated and I was talking about how we need to make sure we're creating spaces where our students are safe. And that we owe it to them to create those spaces. And that *is* our responsibility.
>
> And after the meeting, I got a text message from a former friend who was then in a position of power related to diversity and inclusion, saying, hey, you're going to find a letter slipped under your door. All of the leadership of the school received it as well. I just wanted to give you a heads up, just so you know… (that) other people felt the same

way. So, I'm like, Cool, I can't wait to see this letter. And it was an anonymous letter saying that I was a white martyr... And that this was from a minority. And that's all they said is a minority. And that if I would just shut up, then things could actually progress. And that… the way I communicate things was just making things worse and… it just kind of *broke me down* (she emphasized broke me down). Because it started to be this question in my mind of like… is the very fact that I'm saying anything making things worse? Because of the way I say things, because of what I care about, because of how I show up. Does my voice actually cause more harm than good in this space? …And I've been specifically told, can't you just not talk about it? It would be better for your career. Like, if you could just not bring it into your classroom, then it wouldn't show up on the course evals and it wouldn't show up in x, y, z space. And then you could get your promotion…

But… what keeps you going is because in the same moment that I get like something like that, I have all these students who are like, "Thank God for you! If you weren't vocal, we wouldn't know that anybody cared if you weren't doing these things. Like you make it feel safe to be ourselves." And so that feels like you have to keep trying. But it has shifted... How I keep trying... And that's always a question in my mind, is: "What is the most impactful way to move forward?" And I'm currently leaning towards those moments in meetings where, you know, something needs to be said from my perspective... Maybe it's better that it's a question and maybe it doesn't have to come from me and maybe there's another way... And so, I'm trying to think about how I can, even though research isn't a required part of my job, how I can publish more so that I get a little bit more credibility, how I can say things in spaces where... people are receptive,

and then how I can create classroom spaces that are positive and welcoming? But that was just a hard moment.

When asked what her advice would be to other people in the same situation as her, she responded:

This is a hard question for me… I don't know if it's the right answer, but something that I woke up to at one moment is how much joy is an intentional act. And how Black folks, who live in a harder circumstance than I, live and cultivate that in the moments where they can find it. And I've taken that as a challenge for myself to try to recognize (that) creating joy is a part of the work too, as an intentional action, that if we're trying to create a space where everyone can be loved and feel seen and be free, then we have to celebrate the moments that we feel that…

And a tiny story is, I remember. Do you remember when Trump had just won? Everything was shit. And then I forget. But it was. Was it Alabama? Doug Jones... Somebody was running, and he had like literally been the worst human being ever. And then he lost. And I was out at a jazz night at a local bar, and it was a predominantly Black crowd. I was there with my friends, one of them an anti-racist friend who I do work with and did work with at the time. And everybody just like erupted in the most joy I feel like possible, and it had been the most joy I had seen since Trump had been elected. And my husband, had gotten himself into a really negative place about Trump's election. And I had too. And I was like, we have to celebrate these things (anything – even if it was a bad person losing). And so, I find the I find the moments to celebrate. And that's become a part of my intention is to figure out what is good…

Not that I'm getting it right all the time, but I took a group of students to Puerto

> Rico on a global study for a week at spring break. And it was a diversity and inclusion class. And they... For many of them, it was the first time they'd ever been in a classroom that wasn't majority white. In fact, we only had one white man and he was not straight... And the amount of joy in that classroom and that whole experience was just phenomenal… I keep trying to find those moments that are worth celebrating and that are fun and try to bring those to spaces, too. So that's kind of what I've... That's my little answer.

Individual Interview

My final interview with Kathryn was two weeks later, and she had greatly improved health-wise. She enjoyed the group interview and said, "it felt really good to be among like-minded and like-hearted folks." She said she thought so fondly of the group that it would be nice to reconvene (she had an issue in class that she was hoping we could discuss). She said:

> It was a really meaningful meeting for me. And I kept hearing us all being so perfectionist… Honestly, I'm surprised… how everyone felt like we failed from time to time… I think I have maybe a lower self-regard than perhaps is justified… but I appreciated that honesty too.

It was hard not to smile at that moment. To me, her comments meant that the group meeting had made her feel better about her experience and normalized some of the mistakes or feelings of imposter syndrome. I also liked how she phrased that she should be more confident ("I think I have maybe a lower self-regard than perhaps is justified").

Before the interview started, I casually asked if she had ever spoken with her mom about the book that was slid under her door. Kathryn explained that their relationship was not that close where they could talk about things like that. She gave me a little background to help me

understand how life was different for her mom:

> My mom… used to not feel very confident in her intelligence. And so, my guess is it partially comes from that. But something she did share is that… her parents at one point when she was in college, she started dating a black man in college and her parents responded by sending her to therapy.

We spoke about how inappropriate this seemed now, but Kathyrn gave her mom some credit for exposing her to some things.

> But I mean, she took me to the Black Expo and she would take me to Martin Luther King days at different churches. But we just never talked about it… Like the exposure was such a big step… Now everyday on Juneteenth, she speaks to her church about what it is and the importance of Juneteenth.

This was a very brief conversation, but Kathryn's takeaway was that her mom was responsible for exposing her to Black culture, which was a big step in her mom's generation.

We then started the official interview, where I asked about moments of growth. Kathryn spoke about self-reflection and named at least three mistakes that allowed her to grow. I do not know if she realized, but the way she spoke about them made me think that they were early in the process, somewhere in the middle, and I know one of the mistakes occurred more recently.

The first example involved how to speak up:

> Something that I read as perfectionism is trying to always get the vocabulary. And I know that words matter. And I sometimes worry that the white anti-racists I know are far more invested in perfect vocabulary than the Black anti-racists I know. And I just don't know if that's true or if that's just my personal experience. But it's something that, because I do diversity and inclusion work, and I'm frequently teaching MBA students who have never

encountered these ideas before… And it just reminded me of the students, you know, who give up trying to be better because they… don't feel like they can get it right. Or just the more general sense of, like, nothing I do will ever be enough.

I kept running into "Who am I to say this? Who am I to say this? Who am I to say this?" And thankfully, I had two Black women on my dissertation committee who were very adamant, like, you... have to say something like, you can't say nothing! You have to say something. And so just say it the best that you can. Like, don't get stuck in that… And so, I think having Black women as mentors throughout my career has been a really positive way for me to kind of get past some of that.

She continued with another example that included when she realized she was exposing her white savior complex:

One of my major developments was having to get past was having to recognize I was feeling like a white savior. Like working in the elementary school... I had as my Facebook picture at one moment... Like white me and four Black kids playing with my hair… And it felt authentic. Like, it was a moment I loved. Right? But in that experience of being in that school, I realized that I went in (and many of us went in) thinking like, we have something inherently valuable to offer this space. And then we showed up there and it was Black women who have been teaching in this school for 20 years and came out of the community... And there were moments when I was told to my face, like, why do you think that you are going to be better at teaching?

Reflecting on these experiences and seeing things she had not previously understood allowed her to improve.

The third example occurred that week at work, when an Indian colleague felt like

Kathryn was questioning their leadership. Another Black woman mentioned to Kathryn that some people might have thought she was being a "Karen" (a slang term used for a white woman taking it upon themself to use their power, police the area around them, and make demands or accusations that are either biased in nature or racist). This led to an honest conversation about how there is a little bit of Karen in us because we are all trained in a system of white supremacy culture and how difficult that can be to realize or admit sometimes. Kathryn did not seem too distraught by this mistake, possibly because the issue involved a trusted coworker bringing up more of a hypothetical situation. Nevertheless, Kathryn did some self-reflection and learned how to better proceed in the future.

People may be tempted to judge Kathryn here, but if we are all sincere, we must admit that we all make mistakes. I appreciated her honesty and vulnerability. Kathryn opened up about a lot during this individual meeting. She disclosed that she was frequently invalidated throughout her childhood and how she felt similarly now when people ignored social justice issues or were happy with the status quo. She said she was sometimes described as aggressive, explaining that she can get frustrated with people and that because of the way she was invalidated, "my tendency is always to get bigger (I took this to mean louder and passionate or more adamant about something being unjust). And so, there are many things about toxic masculinity that I actually identify with internally in that I have the same habit of interrupting and talking over people." This completely surprised me because this was not evident in our meetings. She must have noticed my surprise because she continued:

> But I'm also very upfront person. So, in every job interview we have for my school, I will say, just so you know, this is a pretty, you know, like most institutions, this one is racist. And I invite them to ask me questions. And I do this with the white people. I do it with

> the Black people. And so, I tend to put myself out there really quickly. And then how people respond to that is usually the indicator that I get, if that makes any sense. I've been told by two people that that was one of their major decisions on why they decided to come because… and this is in my research too, like transparency is huge… I mean, there is no non-racist academic institution. And so, the idea of there being transparency around it is better than when we don't have that conversation. But on an ethical level, I just don't… want to feel like I tricked anyone.

I admired her transparency and could understand how naming racism in the academy could create some trust; if someone is willing to say this in the interview, then they are probably saying this outside of the interviews and fighting for change.

One of my favorite moments of meeting Kathryn was discussing creating a better environment for her students. Her face lit up as she spoke about a student trip to Puerto Rico. We discussed how beautiful it is to see students be their natural selves without code-switching or feeling like they have to act like someone they are not. We spoke about how everything is better - for them and for us - and how the students are more creative, more authentic, and more successful (meaning that their work is better). She added:

> The number one thing I've learned about students from nontraditional… backgrounds is that they feel like they don't belong there. So, like a sense of impostor feelings is one of the biggest hurdles that I've noticed. At some point I started earning a reputation of being someone that people felt like they could be open about... (with) their challenges... And probably it's from me saying things in class like I'll self-brand as anti-racist or self-brand as inclusive... Or people will send them to me, right… And from all those conversations, I really learned this sense of like this deep sense of "I don't belong here. This space is not

for me," which is just heartbreaking to me to think about.

And so, what was cool about Puerto Rico is the admissions team for that program specifically decided to build it so that it was minority white, like significant minority white. And so, for many of these students, it was the very first time that they'd been in a classroom in a really long time that was full of people, in their words, that were like me, like people who they felt like could relate on some innate level. And to see that broken down and to see the students, the ways that they showed up differently was remarkable for me… I felt like I had a privilege of being in that space and seeing students be themselves with each other. And… it's kind of like addicting to see students who don't feel like they can shine to like see them all shine around each other.

I asked her if she ever felt stuck in the commitment to antiracism. She explained that she did feel stuck in white guilt:

I get stuck… less and less. So, I almost have to be, like, empathetic with a previous version of myself. But like, the idea of… I have been afforded so many privileges and I want to discount myself or I don't want to not take advantage of opportunities. Or I want to… sacrifice things so that I can feel more equal with other people who haven't had that. And I'm trying to think of like an example or moment that was really powerful for me... So, in my first year, there was a Black woman who was a huge advocate for students and for Black students who wanted to raise their voices. And I was really inspired by her and I like sought her out. I viewed her as a role model. And after either that year, or the next year, she was let go. And I wasn't. And it was... a very guilt inducing moment for me. Like, so that would be maybe the best example is in that moment I felt like I didn't deserve to keep my job, I didn't deserve to be there. And if I were really going to be a

> good white woman, I should say something bold enough to get fired... I should put my job on the line in the same way that she put her job on the line… But I didn't do that. And I felt terrible, like, oh, I should be writing op eds, oh, I should be doing this, this and that.
>
> But I came to the realization that giving up power. Giving up influence is not actually going to move the needle necessarily… And I think in terms of moving beyond it, you know, the thing I say to my students, and it's so cliche, but it's a really deep reminder to me… which is "with great power comes great responsibility" (the Spider-Man line), and I think it, in my head, is like with great privilege comes great responsibility. And so, if I'm going to have the privilege, it is in my... It is in the world's best interest for me to consider my best interest. And so, I have to think about not how do I give up on my values or my integrity, but what do I actually do?

I told Kathryn that her statements also reminded me of survivor's guilt. She replied:

> Yeah, I think it's survivors (guilt), but also an acute awareness that part of how I've gotten to where I am right now is because of the privileges afforded to me by my race. And... maybe this is part of it, too. Like, I think that the reality is... the Black women that I work with often are significantly more credentialed or intelligent than I am, or… definitely more wise. And in my experience again. And so also that piece of like. You might deserve this (job) even more than I do. And you still are the one to be to be let go if that makes sense.

She paused for a long time as we both reflected on the situation. Then she spoke about racism and antiracism:

> It's… inherently ambiguous. And so, I've been working a lot with radical acceptance... But there's something that has to keep pulling you towards more. And I think that idea of

> “becoming” allows you to radically accept the present… while still wanting to continue to improve...

This seemed to be something that helped Kathryn and I mentioned something about helping other white people, and she said:

> I don't think I can fix any white people... And… I don't really want to change white people… Like when my cousin was so hurtful at my grandmother's funeral, I was just like, okay, we don't have to talk again. And like that didn't feel like a loss. We weren't close enough. And then in my family. Like my dad was always the one fighting it. And what ended up happening was my sister ended up dating a Black man. And this is like years after we had been fighting, and that like switched something in my dad's mind… I think the years of disagreeing with me and us just like butting heads over and over again, and then the lived reality of seeing what that meant for this young man's life. Like there was a moment when he got pulled over by the police for having an air freshener. And... this young Black man… was talking to my family about, you know, “I was ready to die. Like, I just assumed I was going to die in that moment, and I was ready for it.” And my dad was/is such a fixer that he was like looking up lawyers and laws and he just started to get into the, like, F this system, and once he got pulled in on a personal level... a lot of that has dissolved. And so... I haven't felt that at a family level, like I've lost very much…
>
> So, I think there's that sense of like, it is better for all of us to create something different than what we have now. And, and I think that where I get stuck is in how do I create it from a space of freedom and joy and not create it from a space of struggle. It's really that ancestor piece (being a good ancestor). Like I was going to say this earlier about the white savior piece. I've gotten into the firm belief. There's that quote, you

know, "if you have come here because you pity me, I'm not interested. But if you have come here because you're... You see your liberation as bound up in mind, then welcome." And that that's where I'm at this point is I see the harms of white supremacy are not just upon nonwhite people.

The features of white supremacy culture harm me. Like my perfectionism, my sense of urgency; These are hurtful to me. And I frequently feel like the world that we've created denies a key, core part of my humanity, because I cannot be in community with all of the beauty and all of the beautiful things that are around me and all the beautiful people that are in my world. And so, you know, that idea of liberation is, for me, a very selfish one at this point. I just don't see. The world I look at now in the way that racism shapes it... is just not a world that I find particularly enjoyable… I think our ability to love is stunted. I think our ability to... The art that gets created is less interesting. Like, I just think that there's so much... All of the hurt and the harm and the differentiation and the creation of you're this, and I'm that, is like fundamentally painful and reduces my ability to live a life that I want to live. And so, I… when I say I want to be a better ancestor, it's because I want there to be a world in which everyone can be themselves in their pursuit of freedom and love and peace and joy. And I think if we have that world, we're all gonna just. It would just be so much better.

This conversation made me realize that Kathryn was thinking about things on a much deeper level than she had shared in the group meeting. These were not just words that she was reciting. She believed these statements with her whole being. I realized that I had pre-judged Kathryn to be earlier on in her journey towards antiracism, when actually, she was much farther along than I anticipated. She grew from a lonely/isolated learner to an active committed

antiracist with a deeper understanding than most people I knew. I might be exaggerating her growth a little too much here, but I was impressed by her; especially when she said she was not feeling a sense of loss. She just yearned for something better/something more fulfilling. I am happy to have met her and fight alongside her.

CHAPTER 5: RACHEL

Rachel is currently in a Ph.D. program in a southern state that has been passing laws against teaching about CRT, gender, or race in schools. I was pleased that there was someone dedicated to antiracism in the state to fight against the mis/disinformation being spread. Eventually, I learned that Rachel's research interest involved law and the legislature. I thought it was so honorable (because it is not an interest of mine) and exciting because many critical race theorists and antiracists believe that the best way to proceed is to start with laws, and people will have to adjust (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). I felt proud to know someone covering that aspect of the fight.

In our introductory meeting to explain the study, we spent some time bonding over these topics and our Ph.D. programs. Rachel was very easy to talk to. I caught myself talking to her more as an antiracist friend and noted that I would have to be ready to shift the conversation back to the topic at hand to perform better as a researcher. To give Rachel credit, throughout the study, she would catch when this would happen and correct it, so I never had to step in. I was thrilled when she agreed to participate and was excited to learn more about her through the interview process.

Reflection

Rachel sent her reflection to me as a recording, and it was so great to hear her tell her story in her own voice. Her voice was stronger in certain parts, and I may have emphasized different words if I were just reading something she wrote. I could also hear her pondering her thoughts as she spoke. It seemed almost more authentic or meaningful to hear her voice tell the story. She said she wanted to start with one of her earliest memories that stood out:

I'm sure that I encountered things much before this, but I remember I think I was in

kindergarten or so and for Christmas, I had asked for a doll. Her name was Kenya, and I had seen ads on television and thought that she was so cool because she came with all of these accessories and stuff where you could braid her hair and put beads in it. And so, I asked for this doll for Christmas. And, you know, as a young child, I guess I didn't really think anything of the fact that the doll was Black. But I remember overhearing my mom talking to one of my aunts on Christmas day about it and she said something to the effect of "Well… I went and… bought her the doll because she couldn't stop talking about it, but I don't really know why she would want a Black doll." I didn't realize, you know, I'm sure that I realized that it was a Black doll, but I don't think... there was like an association there that it seems like it was strange for me to want a Black doll or, you know, that maybe wanting a Black doll wasn't a good thing. And so that's one of my earliest memories thinking about race and recognizing its existence.

Rachel then shared an example of the message she heard about schooling. She went to school in the suburb of a major city in the south and explained:

It was a really good school district there, but there were only like two high schools. And… you know, as pretty much anywhere, there's… this binary of good school versus bad school. And, you know, I never had an experience thinking that I went to a bad school, but I heard, throughout my childhood and into my teenage years, other people talk about the schools that I went to as not good schools or bad schools. And I remember in third grade, my best friend, after third grade, she moved because her parents didn't want her older sister going to the junior high that we were supposed to go to. So, they moved to a wealthier neighborhood… it was kind of like there is this hierarchy there and I didn't quite understand why at the time... And then I… was wondering, well... is it going

to be bad whenever I go to junior high, like, what's wrong with that junior high?

And as I kind of came into consciousness later on, I realized that not only was this good, bad binary coded language for socioeconomic status, but I also recognized that there was a definite trend in racial diversity. I remember it really stood out to me at a football game whenever I was in junior high and we were playing one of the wealthier junior highs and just kind of having this realization that in the stands, like the rival school, like everybody was white. There were very few students of color. And you know, looking at the stands of my junior high, even our cheerleading squad, which I was a part of... and our band, you know, there are many less white faces.

And so, I kind of came to that realization as a teenager. And then it was more codified in my high school years and then especially when I went to college. And so, as a first-generation college student, I… applied to three colleges… and the first time I went to visit was at orientation. And I just remember walking on the campus and like thinking, "Oh, my God, there's so many white people here." And I think… I had realized that I had grown up in a pretty diverse community. I think that I didn't really realize that until I lived in an environment that was very different from that... And I think going to a university that was much less racially diverse than the area that I grew up in, kind of made me start like wondering.

And then in college, as I prepared to become a teacher... (I) realized that one of the reasons I wanted to become a teacher was not necessarily... (she shifted her thoughts) Was this more of, like, white savior complex? Maybe? Probably. I don't know. I just remember specifically thinking about the importance of understanding about other cultures and the purpose of education to not only prepare students for their future lives,

but also to expose students to cultures and people who are different from them, who believe differently from them, who have different lived experiences from them… But when I finally, you know, was applying for jobs to teach high school... I had done some interviews, and the first job that I was offered… was at a school that was racially diverse like the high school I went to, and I had purposely sought out schools that were, you know, not in white enclaves and had a student population that was similar to the school that I went to, just because I thought that that was important and that those are the kind of students that I wanted to teach – students who came from different backgrounds and spoke different languages at home and you know, maybe were having experiences like I had.

I distinctly remember I got a call… and (another school) offered me a job... And it was a suburban school outside of (a major city). And, you know, I told them, "oh, well, I've already accepted a job." And I told them where I was teaching. And they were like, "okay, well, come to us next year." You know, basically... you're going to regret your decision and... you would have a better time here. And I was like, "hmm, that's really interesting." And, you know, even other people, like my husband's boss asked, "Well, why didn't you apply to this specific school district? Like, it's the best one in (the city)," which is a white enclave… so... when I shared with people that… I purposely wanted to teach... at a school that was racially diverse. People just seemed really confused, I think, especially because I was a white woman... Even though there was this narrative of like bad schools were the schools that had students of color and students living in low-income circumstances, I knew that my educational experience was a good experience.

And so, you know, thinking about this, and then as a teacher just kind of having

like a front row seat, unfortunately, to witness, you know, systemic issues, systemic racism in education. I think I came became even more aware about how systems at large disproportionately, you know, negatively impact students of color, specifically Black students, but students of color in general… And so, I feel like that my experience teaching in public schools in (city) really kind of... Allowed me to see how... that these patterns are not unique to any certain context. That they are a part of a larger system and a part of a system, obviously, that has roots in United States history specifically. But of course, you know, these things are true in other countries as well.

She then went on to explain her expertise in civil rights and how that interest began:

I became interested in like the history of the civil rights movement and learning about like segregation and like why it happened at a young age… I'm sure, you know, students from traditionally ignored backgrounds heard these stories growing up from their family members and things. But I read... the Little Rock Nine… I think it was Melba Patillo Beal's biography. I was really fascinated by the Little Rock Nine and... Just really wanted to learn more about why segregation existed, (and) why people felt that students need to be separated by their race. And so, I was really interested in learning about the civil rights movement and reading about Martin Luther King Jr and Rosa Parks and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee from a young age.

A lot of times when I had school projects, I picked the Civil Rights movement and like the 1950s and 60s as my topic, if I had a choice. And so, I think that kind of going back to being interested in this idea or like wanting to explore the reasons for these inequities and the reasons how this kind of traces back to, you know, decades ago, if not hundreds of years ago with... You know, the start of enslavement in the United States.

And so... These are things that I've always been really interested in and as a history teacher wanted... because... a lot of my learning I did on my own and it wasn't things that I learned in class. And as a teacher, I wanted to be sure that I brought those stories into my classroom and that even when I taught world history, you know… I was purposeful about bringing in Latin American, African, Asian history into the fold... because our standards were very European based (our state standards).

Rachel then shared another example of witnessing discrimination. She had left the classroom for a while and moved to Paris, France, for three years, highlighting:

That experience showed me that racism isn't just unique to the United States. I saw a lot of segregation, racial segregation and also like cultural ethnic segregation in Paris… and it was very similar in the way that, you know, Americans talk about neighborhoods... that are highly segregated as well. (They use) a lot of deficit language, a lot of implications that, you know, those areas are dangerous. Whether that's true or not. That's... That's the narrative. So that was something.

I think also living abroad made me realize that... I had the experience of being an outsider and being othered. But… because I was white, I had a certain… privilege... because of the way that I looked… Being white in Paris, I didn't stand out until I opened my mouth and spoke. And even though I spoke French, obviously I had a very heavy accent and, you know, I think that that was something that in some ways I realized, oh, I can maybe relate a little bit more to experiences of... people who have been othered, but also that still my whiteness gave me this protection and privilege. And then and thinking about back to my time as a teacher and as a student, you know, although no matter what situation I was in, I always realized that my whiteness protected me and that I was

protected because I was white.

Rachel wanted to make sure that she spoke to all of my questions and realized that she had not yet discussed how she got into antiracism:

> I guess thinking about when I kind of really discovered like anti-racism as a concept instead of just thinking about, you know, Gloria Ladson Billings and culturally relevant pedagogy and things like that... When we moved back from Paris, I was a museum educator and I worked at a library... I worked with students and teachers, did professional development for teachers, and did activities and stuff with our archival materials with students when they came (in). And I really enjoyed working at the library because my interest in civil rights that had gone all the way back to fifth grade - whenever I learned about the Little Rock Nine.
>
> And I, I can think about how when I first started working there, I kind of took the activities and the professional development workshops and stuff that we would do. And just kept on doing them and… thinking about like, okay... I want to include not just talking about the civil rights movement and talking about it from the perspective of the (white people). I began to think about ways that we could incorporate resources that really centered Black voices and other voices of color… even if we had to kind of be creative about how we... used different materials and supplemented them with outside materials… but really be talking about issues that were relevant to teachers today. And so we started doing... more like culturally responsive teaching, more racial awareness types of trainings with teachers, and I felt like that was a real turning point... As a professional, really thinking about how I could have a role in taking a very white institution… and trying to make some kind of change about the way that people thought about…

> communicating these histories and recentering the narrative... around the civil rights movement, around the activists and people who PUSHED the government to get things done, and definitely had more conversations, more explicit conversations, with students about the connections between the 1960s and what we were experiencing at the time... And so, I think the racial reckoning that followed… George Floyd's murder… we were already, you know, specifically having lots of teacher trainings and student activities and things that centered around race and trying to undo a lot of problematic interpretations of history and trying to make the history relevant to students for them to understand that like these things are still existing. These things happened 50 years ago and we're still working on them. And why is that? And also making the connection to students that like at that time in the 1960s, like so much of this was spurred on by student activists, by young people, and that, like, they have that same power.

She went on to speak about how things changed after the murder of George Floyd and her antiracist journey afterward:

> I really started to take a turn, especially in my professional life... I actually wrote a letter to our, to our director... basically expressed disappointment in them not saying anything about what was going on. And that, you know, (if) they really want (to highlight) Civil Rights... you can't... be silent when things like this happen... And so, I made my... disappointment, and really disapproval, like very known. And... (I) organized a webinar series, since this was during the pandemic for teachers about dismantling systemic racism in education... we had amazing speakers. We were able to have Dr. Gloria Ladson Billings talk. We had a lot of really amazing educators and educator activists talk. And it was... It was so needed.

But we experienced a lot of pushback with the title, especially after Trump passed the executive order that like banned any type of like diversity trainings or, you know, any of that kind of stuff in federal organizations. And since (I worked in) the library system… that applied to us. And… we had to cancel… (but because) I was (technically) employed by (an outside foundation)... I was able to basically finagle everything so that the series could still go on and was sponsored by the foundation and the (university) instead of the… government...

I feel like that all of these things that kind of happened in succession, I really like found my voice specifically advocating for anti-Racist programing, anti-Racist practices within our institution. And… I really felt responsible… as a white person in a mostly white organization that... someone needed to bring these issues to the forefront and make us recognize some of the problematic practices that we had and force us to not back away from things whenever they got hard. Like, you know, the government telling us that we couldn't do that webinar series. And… this is the purpose of what I'm doing, and that I specifically want to disrupt these systems that are, you know, based in white supremacy and upholding whiteness. And I think I found my... voice and I found my words... to be able to express that, like, this is what I thought was important. This is what I… felt… compelled to do during that time.

She spoke about wanting to do something more and how that led her to apply for graduate school:

I felt like I was really limited in what I could do at the library because we had all these restrictions of being a federal institution that I just felt like this wasn't the place for me anymore, and I wanted to do something different. And I was really looking at policy and

specifically education policy. And that's why I decided to actually apply and go back to school. And now I'm getting my Ph.D. in education leadership and policy at the (university). And I mean, in my... In my statement of purpose that I submitted for my graduate school application... I talked about the good/bad school binary, but basically. I said… I had a front row seat to witness systemic issues in education that negatively impact students of color, students with disabilities, and students growing up in low-income circumstances. While my whiteness protected me from experiencing the harmful effects of a system that was designed to uphold white supremacy and to aid in uprooting the system, I plan to use my ability and my privilege to challenge systemic oppression and reimagine an educational system that serves and empowers all students. And obtaining a Ph.D. would allow me to channel my passion for transforming education into action by providing me with the skills and knowledge to leverage research and creation of education policy that centers equity and justice for historically marginalized groups.

So, I specifically went in... because that's... that's what I wanted to do. And even I had someone review my resumé and they saw all these things about like anti-racism and dismantling systemic racism in my resume or like doing different trainings and stuff on race and they were like, "Hmmm... Are you sure that you want to include that on your resume? Like, there might be some people or schools that are like turned off by this." And I was like, "Well, if they're turned off by this, then I don't want to go there" or “I don't want to work there. I don't want to go to that school.”

Rachel’s descriptions of these experiences made me feel like she gained added confidence by practicing speaking up. She seemed more prepared and, unfortunately shared a more recent experience where she had to say something:

In our first semester, we had a professor who was actually the former Dean of the College of Education, and he was co-teaching with a former Assistant Dean in the college, and basically... Their syllabus was whitewashed… There was (also) an incident with a student being really racist to a Black woman in our class. They refused to handle it and refused to acknowledge it. They refused to acknowledge or consider changing the syllabus... to incorporate more diverse voices. And so myself and two other students in our cohort organized to... remove ourselves from that class... and basically... within a week they formulated a new section and brought in another professor to teach that section for our cohort.

I think, because I had found my voice and was able to articulate some of these things in my, you know, in my previous work... I feel more empowered and emboldened to speak up and speak out whenever I see those things happening, and not only to speak up and speak out and disrupt those things, but also to... To seek out, you know, my cohort mates and my friends who are not white and checking in on them and making sure that they're okay... There's been a few circumstances in which, you know, a couple of my friends and cohort mates who are Black women specifically asked me to intervene with the professor because they were like, if it comes from you, they'll listen. If it comes from us, we don't think they will. And so, I feel like… I've (tried) to really be a coconspirator and agitator and ally through my program.

She spoke about the research she had done which fascinated me. She looked at racial power dynamics in policymaking and who was being listened to (the white legislators) and who was being ignored or cut off (the Black legislators). She shared some challenges she faced:

Something that I've really struggled with... Is trying to understand my place in all of this

as a white woman who is interested in these issues that are really centered in race. And doing research in a way that promotes the disruption of these systems, while also understanding that there are sometimes when my voice is not the voice that should be telling these stories or doing this research. And so, it's something that I've thought about. You know, I've had a couple of experiences where... I thought I was speaking up in a way that was being helpful. And I had a Black friend tell me, “No, this is not your place to speak up like, you know, I appreciate you, but also like I'm calling you in to just say, like, this isn't your place, and your voice isn't the voice to, like, bring these things up.” And so that's something that I kind of... I'm trying to be really conscientious of, but also understanding like I've kind of had this realization, you know, is that like... No matter what I do, because of my positionality... there are going to be people who maybe do not support me being in those spaces. And I've kind of thought about how I need to accept that.

I've gotten some pushback on a research project that I am working on, where in that same legislative session I am kind of doing mixed methods... research project... I've been able to quantify the number of times that legislators of color and specifically Black legislators were interrupted or like not given as much time or just really some of them are basically silenced in the process. And like the qualitative part that I would like to do is interviewing some of those legislators that participated in that process and were the people who experienced the silencing and the like... very overt racism in these debates. And... I got pushback from a friend who was like, “You shouldn't be interviewing Black people. Like, as a white woman, you should have a Black research partner,” which I do... she's just very busy. And so, I feel like I also don't want to lean on her too much or make

her do too much of the labor.

But on the other hand, like, I do understand that like it's a complicated dynamic and like Black legislators specifically might not be as open speaking to me about the things that they experienced and also thinking about like, I don't want to like make them relive their trauma or that their trauma is something to be researched and be on display... But I still think that the research is important. (I've been) thinking about a lot of the research that I want to do is not necessarily for the academic community, but for like. You know, the community at large to be able to use to inform action and change and like gathering this data and having this information and being able to get it into the public in some capacity, whether that's through like a news outlet or... I don't know... for them to be able to use or even to the legislature themselves, for them to maybe think about the practices that they have. And maybe… they're not aware that this is what's happening, even though I think that they're totally aware of what they're doing. And so anyway, like, so I kind of struggle with it. I struggle with all of it. And I want to listen to especially the people that I know and respect and, and care about their opinions. But then also, I still think that this research is really important and that there are ways in which this could really make some kind of an incremental change for the better.

So, I think something that I realized is that this is a work in progress. It's something that will never be done… Like, my personal work will never be done in my anti-racist journey, and our work as a... a local community in our state, in our nation, like it will never be done. There will always be room to do better and improve and make things more equitable, more inclusive, more accessible for everybody.

Rachel's reflection was relatable to me. I had heard similar societal messages that you are

weird if you want a Black doll (or go to a diverse school). I was also intrigued because she touched on many things that are in the research. She was also seemingly admitting that she probably went into teaching with a white savior mentality (it is not always easy to find people willing to admit these things about themselves, but every one of the participants had been very open to pointing out their mistakes). I admired her research, and I wrote about white researchers interviewing people of color in the introduction of this dissertation.

Focus Group

We had the group interview next, and Rachel had been nodding to comments made by others that the work felt very isolating. She added:

> Thinking about this constant effort and how this is something that like, as a white person, it's really easy to just be like, "Oh, this doesn't necessarily directly affect me," even though it actually does, but like, you know, it doesn't affect me in the same way that it does, you know, my friends who are Black. My friends who are not white. And so it's easy. It's easier... To kind of, you know, take a pause and say, this is hard to do this work. And so for me, I think thinking about my anti-racist journey and always kind of having in the forefront of my mind that like this is something that I always need to keep up at the front of my mind and very actively… I am really conscious of the ways that I can be an interrupter and disruptor and actually like advocate on behalf of my cohort mates of color, especially the two Black women in our cohort... And so, I just I feel like it's always just there and I'm always consciously trying to keep… that lens, (with) those glasses on.

Someone mentioned that they did not feel supported by white people in this work and some relationships had been damaged; Rachel nodded in agreement and later said:

> I feel pretty lucky that I do feel like I've had a support system, whether it's even just one

or two people... And I agree that I feel like it's so important to have (support). I do have a cohort mate, we are the two white women in our in our cohort of ten, and basically sometimes after class we check in with each other and check each other, but also I'm fortunate enough to have a couple of friends in the cohort who are not white, who are also very gracious to call me in if necessary. And so that's I feel like really important, too, because it's nice to have other white women to talk about these things where I feel like I'm not inflicting harm on someone.

I was interested in how she felt supported, even if it was only "one or two people." I imagined it must be quality support for her to feel that way. Participants then discussed the challenge of speaking to those on different levels of awareness as them. Rachel spoke about having trouble speaking with her family but specifically mentioned her parents:

It felt really hard because although we disagree politically, like they feel like that these issues of race are political. And I'm like, well, yes. But also, like, this is an issue of like humanity. And if you cannot honor someone's humanity and their experience and the fact that… white supremacy is the air that we breathe and… everything that we do on a daily basis is impacted by it and the fact that you cannot recognize that that is harmful to people, like, I don't know what to do there.

Especially because, like, I grew up in (state), my family is very religious, and I'm just like, I don't understand where this disconnect is between you being able to, like, how does this align with your religious beliefs? I don't understand how you cannot care about this and how you cannot just like, as a person, not care about other people and the damage and harm and violent racial violence that is happening. And so that has been really hard. I have other issues with my parents besides that, but like that was another

thing that just kind of made me be like, I just don't like (it).

That's kind of where I am with some people right now is that like people who, you know, maybe I was not great friends with, but just like… maybe had drinks or something every now and then or work together or something. And I'm like… this is something that I feel like I can't move past is that if you can't even realize that this is an issue and that it's very important and that like it's urgent, then like it's hard for me to feel close to you. Like, not to say that, like, I'm not going to have friends who are, you know, whatever, but it's hard for me to feel the same closeness with you as someone who, like, understands this and can get it…

I want to be friends with people who… we can be active together because it's just hard for me to be around people who can like turn it off and say like, "oh, I can't, you know… I guess maybe this matters or like whatever, but like I'm just going to ignore it" is really hard for me, especially with people that I really thought I respected and loved is hard, but also at work, the job that I had before I went back to school... I was one of the only people who was kind of leading efforts to try and be more inclusive... I was the person... that I was just constantly in meetings like, "What about this? What about that? Have you thought about this? Why are you thinking about this? On this panel that you're talking about, why is it only white men?" You know, and so that in itself is exhausting. And also when you're a person who doesn't have a position of power, you know, you kind of feel like how long am I going to last here for?

She mentioned burnout and the group had a conversation about needing rest but feeling awkward about that because of our white privilege. Rachel spoke about how she felt this might have an impact on burnout:

So, yeah… it's not sustainable, right… but it is exhausting... I kind of think strategically… about where my place could be. That makes it feel a little bit more sustainable. And like, I wouldn't burn out as fast because if I can think about like, okay, this is where I can be most effective... Like if it's my space to go talk to the old white men who run things and try and give an economic argument for something that is an argument about humanity and, like, you know, people's rights. I'll do it. Yeah.

My next question asked the participants to share one of their most challenging moments with the group, and Rachel shared her research interests and that her Black colleague disagreed with her on handling the interviews. She added more to the story this time:

She (the Black colleague) also wanted me… to interview the… person who was the bill author. And also, like other white legislators who were doing the racial gaslighting. And I was like, to be honest, I have no interest in interviewing them because they don't see what's wrong. They're never going to see what's wrong. And like, I don't think it's a valuable use of my time to sit and interview these people... Like for me, it's not the issue of them. Like, we can see that all of this was superficial, but what I care about is how this is impacting people who are not represented in this area and like how this might affect future Black people from running for legislature. If this is the way that, you know (that they're treated), like this is already an isolating space that was not designed for people who are not white. And so anyway, it was. It was a whole thing. And so, I was feeling like really torn about like, well, what do I do? Because this is what I'm interested in and how I want to be conscious of my place in the space and what's okay for me to do. But I also kind of had this realization that like kind of no matter what I do, somebody's going to be upset about it, you know, and just trying to obviously, like, minimize the harm

and... I kind of came to that realization that I… have to press forward with this, but I do want to be sure that I'm doing so in a culturally responsive way. I think this just like constant, like imposter syndrome and questioning and it kind of like... I don't know. For lack of a better word, I know this is the able-ist and I'm trying to think of a better word. Like, it kind of, like paralyzes you. Like you just kind of get rendered immobile of like, "Oh no. What do I do now? How do I pursue this? Should I not be pursuing this?" And so, like I really related… to what you were saying, because it's really hard. It's really hard.

The focus group ended with me asking each participant what advice they may have for people dealing with the same things they went through. Rachel confirmed the importance of what others had said:

Along the lines with what you all are saying is stepping back and listening, being an active listener, and realizing that this isn't about you really, you know, it's not about you. And… not to be… the one who's getting the reward… But listening to understand, like, where your place is and how that differs depending on where you are and what your setting is, what… community you're living in. And so, I think… a lot of times we have this like urge to be like, oh, I want to say this because I want people to know that like I'm a good one, you know, like I'm not like the others, but… it's not necessary for me to be the person to step in and say that. Sometimes it is. Sometimes it is. You know, me as a white person being able to say things that other people in that space might not be able to get away with saying or that like would come up differently or maybe not be received well. And so yeah, I think being very conscious of not centering yourself and just and being a good listener and being willing to take a lot of feedback and feel uncomfortable.

> Feeling uncomfortable isn't great, but it's like, you kind of always have to be uncomfortable in this work, you know?

Individual Interview

Rachel had to leave the group to teach a class, but she was the first one I met with after the group interview. We started with an informal evaluation of her experience in the group. She said:

> I really enjoyed being able to kind of connect with other people who are in similar situations… I mean, I thought it was a great experience. I mean… nothing's great anywhere, but like in (our state), I feel like it's especially bad. And so, you know, I just feel like it's nice to connect with somebody else in the higher education space… I thought it was just really nice to hear everyone else's perspectives and it was reassuring to understand that like, especially, I think, my feelings of inadequacy and like messing up and that like, yeah, we're all going to mess up. And, like, even though you feel like it's, you know, the worst thing in the world. (She references someone who said it reminded them of failing forward.) So, yeah, that just felt good… I think I was surprised that, like, the amount of times I teared up, I mean, I'm kind of an emotional person anyway, but like, you know, hearing about other people's experiences and seeing them be emotional, like I've never met these people before, but I felt I could connect with them. But also, I don't know. Even though I don't know them. Like, I just… really had this, like, deep sense of empathy for... For things being difficult… I mean… I feel like now I have more of a support system that I'm in school. I feel like I'm surrounded by a lot more like-minded people, but in my job that I had before I went back to school. (I) definitely relate to most of the time being the only person in the room or like not always the person on our

staff, but like the only person who was willing to speak up… And so… yes, I identified (with that) because I was like, oh, been there. But not necessarily. I don't necessarily feel that same sense of isolation now, but I have definitely experienced that in other settings.

I noticed that Rachel had nodded (possibly in agreement) throughout the meeting, so I asked about specific instances. She said she could relate to the person who said she "found it really challenging to find support that felt relevant and wholehearted." Rachel explained:

Yeah, absolutely! Because sometimes you feel like people are giving you lip service because they just want you to shut up. You know, they're like, "Oh, okay. Yeah, I understand." And then nothing changes or it's kind of disingenuous because they have, you know, I mean, the institution I was at before I went back to school like... it just felt like people were talking out of both sides of their mouth and you don't really know really where anybody stands, especially like our leadership, you know, like most white men in leadership. Like they just - a lot of it went right over their heads. And then also, you know, they gave these. I don't know. Like they would be like on one hand, "Oh yeah, we totally support you." But then the next day be like, "Well, why? I don't understand why you're doing this." In public in front of others, (they) support, and then behind closed doors (they say) like why? Why do we need to do this?

We also spoke about issues interacting with those with similar or different levels of experience. I wanted to know how she knew someone was committed to antiracism. She replied:

So, I think one of the first things that I was thinking is like use of certain language I think is an indicator of someone getting it. And I was trying to think of like what examples that would be. I mean, I think the ideas of decentering whiteness or using white supremacy, not just talking about like the KKK or something, you know, like understanding that

> white supremacy is like this big thing that like operates even if we do nothing, even if we're not actively supporting it. It moves along on its own and… we are actively supporting it in ways that we don't know and understand because of the way it's embedded in everything... Talking about those ideas of things being systemic in nature, historical in nature, that like this is not a new thing. This has been going on for a long time. Understanding that, like you as a white person can't get it all. You'll never get it all because of who you are and your lived experience. No matter how hard you try, you can never understand what it's like to be a Black woman, you know? And… this sense of awareness of, like, understanding your place and your privilege and your. And just having an awareness of like your positionality in the world and how it, how your lived experience is different from other people. And that's one thing. And then I think just having kind of like this lens or these glasses to be able to. To look at things and instead of just be like, "Oh. Hmm. Well, that policy doesn't seem fair." Like having the… understanding that, like, the inequality is a lot of times by design and being able to like understand that, (and) point it out…

She continued to explain how she felt history had repeated itself, with the protests after George Floyd's murder being similar to Selma, where people could not ignore what was happening and wanted to work towards change. People "who otherwise wouldn't be engaged or wouldn't be paying attention to those specific issues" were now paying attention. I asked why she did this work, and she explained the role of education for her:

> I feel like because like my awareness started in education and that is the field that I continue to be in... I mean, not just in education, but in my… future research and my future like advocacy and activism and stuff. Like, education is my thing. And I feel like,

you know, there are all of these promises that we've been made and all of these kinds of mythologies about, you know... The United States is the place of the American dream and, you know, everyone is created equal. And like all of this stuff that we do not live up to and like public education is like one of the places that, like, touches almost every person. You know, at some point in their time here in this country, on this planet. And I feel like living up to those promises and beyond is really important.

Toward the end of the interview, I asked what themes she had noticed; her viewpoints were similar to mine. She added to my identified themes by mentioning the pressure to be someone that "Black people can count on." She further explained:

You want to deliver on that. But then you're still feeling these feelings of conflict of like, is this the time when I should step in or is this not the time when I should step in and then feeling like you always need to ask like, hey, is this time for your white friend to say something?

The interview concluded with a discussion of what the group meant to her. She mentioned it being fun and how fortunate I was because of the quality of the participants.

It's mutually beneficial, it's reciprocal (to) like talk through these things. And also, just to get to know other people and expand your network of people that you can reach out to about some of these issues and experiences or that how to navigate higher education, which is so difficult.

Reflecting on my time with Rachel, she had a lead in learning about the historical significance of our current inequities, and I really admired that. I shared her experiences of being exposed to diverse and lower socioeconomic communities but had only had her historical understanding much more recently. I had also lived abroad, so the comparison to being othered

while recognizing the white privilege that was instilled resonated with me. I also relate to how she grew into her voice or her ability to speak up. I was pleased that she mentioned the emotionality of the experience and that she reported still having work to do.

I felt connected to Rachel and offered to help her with the dissertation process when she gets there. I hope her research has an impact on the ways that the legislative discussions influence what is and is not considered. It was clear that Rachel felt that there were injustices as to which voices were heard and considered, and I would love to help her work towards the same goals. Just before we ended the meeting, she disclosed that she was pregnant. I was so excited to hear this news. It was as if a close friend had told me they were expecting. I took this as evidence that I did fluctuate between friend and researcher when chatting with her. I am so excited to follow up with her and am especially looking forward to possible future discussions on raising antiracist children.

CHAPTER 6: HANNAH

Hannah is very close friends with the woman I hired to nominate participants for this study, making her the person I was most nervous to meet. I wanted to ensure that I represented everyone well (my nominator, Hannah, my institution, and myself). I felt some pressure that she may judge my academic work, but I quickly learned I had nothing to worry about because Hannah was extremely genuine. She had this aura of respect and kindness that made me think of a combination of a therapist and your favorite cousin or aunt. I could immediately see why she was nominated and why she and the nominator were such good friends; Hannah was very humble and had no ego (even though she had every right to have one). She was sensitive and displayed empathy for everyone involved in the process. I want to say she was like the fairy godmother of the group, but this implies she is older (and I am pretty sure *I* am the oldest in the group). Hannah often led the group by being the first to initiate a response to the questions. She also helped mediate the conversation in times when people felt emotional. She even displayed her emotions by tearing up at different times throughout the study.

Reflection

I was incredibly excited to read Hannah's reflection and was surprised that she found it much more challenging to write than she had envisioned. She wrote:

> It strikes me that subconsciously I may have been putting off needing to process some of these things and put them on paper. For that, I definitely apologize.
>
> When I think back on my life experiences and what shapes my views on race, racism, and antiracism, my family, and the town I grew up in have to be the clearest first part of the shaping of these things. Most of my family has lived in the town or nearby for at least 4-5 generations, maybe longer. I checked and it says the community is currently 82% white,

though I believe when I was growing up that number was over 90%. It is the type of place where, while there was a backdrop of racism that showed up in the language and jokes that would be told, people would tell themselves this was just someone being "funny" and that they weren't racist because they were good friends with the few people of color in our town, they were in band together and played sports together, and they loved that person, so they couldn't be racist. As I think back, I cringe knowing the times I giggled even if out of discomfort at the joke, but never really spoke up in those moments while I was still in school.

While this was a backdrop to my experiences there are also a few clear moments that stand out to me that I think were most salient in shaping my thought on race, racism, and antiracism. The first happened when I was in jr. high. I am unclear on the specifics of how things started, but I believe it had to do with concerns about discrimination in the high school cheerleading tryouts and the NAACP had come to talk with the school about what happened. Eventually there was a klan rally held at the city hall in our town. I can remember that it was a Saturday. I was working on something at my church with a few other members of our youth group and we had the side doors open to let some air into the sanctuary. I can remember hearing the yelling from city hall through the doors. I remember passing the rally as we drove home. And I remember that night seeing the fire on the hill as they continued the rally at a member's house that wasn't far from our home. I remember how scary that much hate felt even as I realize now, I still didn't have any concept of how dangerous it was, and I cannot imagine the level of terror it created for the few people of color in our town. This memory for me was the clear and undeniable evidence that racism was alive and well in our town and more broadly, but it also meant

that I really understood racism as overt exercises in hate.

Three other moments stand out to me. One was I believe in late jr. high or possibly my first year of high school. I can remember sitting in the high school gym with my dad and middle sister who was only two years younger than me. We were really early for the start of a tournament game so there were people running around getting things ready, but not really anyone in the stands. I don't really know what prompted it, but I remember my dad saying, "There is nothing wrong with dating a Black man, but I don't think God is going to have you marry one, so it doesn't seem like something you should have to try." I remember feeling gutted in that moment but had no idea what to say. I never had a boyfriend in high school, and the only two dates I went on were to prom and I had asked a friend to go with me each year.

My senior year I was deciding between two of my friends who were in the first year of band. I knew all of the juniors and seniors would already be going and thought that they might think it was fun. They were friends with other people in the group I would be going with and could come along. One was a young white man that had been a family friend all of my (well his) life and the other a young Black man, who honestly had been my first thought to take. As it came time to ask, I heard my dad's words come into my mine, and while I figured my dad would be nice, I also became worried about comments my grandfather might make if he was there when we took pictures beforehand. I didn't want to create a scenario where my Black friend could be hurt and I didn't want to have to navigate an uncomfortable situation, so ultimately, I chose the family friend to ask (it was a fine decision that night, but later in life he treated me with a lot of disrespect and I hated thinking back on this event). Another senior white woman that year did take a

young Black man from the sophomore class to prom. I can remember in the coming months being at a friend's house and them calling her and the young man a derogatory term that I won't repeat here – but it alerted me to the fact that these "friends" would not be a safe place to talk about an interracial relationship if I ever had one. I remembered being grateful for the choice I had made about prom so that myself and my potential date wouldn't be dragged into this.

These were the experiences I went to college with. I was uncomfortable with these beliefs and values from my hometown but wasn't really sure what else to turn to. For me these experiences also created an understanding of racism as something that looked like broad acts of hate, or individual feelings and statements of disrespect. During my time as an undergrad, I had opportunities to learn more and be exposed to ideas and values that felt more comfortable for me. This primarily happened through my religion major, which was one of the more progressive spaces I ever found on campus. Still, while I found people whose values were better aligned, this primarily meant an erasure of the language and jokes that I was exposed to growing up (now clearly those things still happened on campus, but it wasn't something that I was constantly exposed to), it also didn't really challenge me to think more deeply or on a systematic level about how racism was imbedded in everything around me.

This began to happen when I became the Graduate Assistant for Multicultural Activities during my master's program. This is where major shifts began to happen in my understanding as I saw the ways that the university was set up to minimize participation of student organizations of color in many of the campus traditions. How our students of color often felt used and exploited being asked by administrators who hadn't created

relationships with them to be in photoshoots to represent the university on brochures and things making sure that "diversity" was represented in the materials. Traveling with a group of incredible young Black women to a leadership conference and having everyone in the airport ask them what sport they played. I felt embarrassed to be in this role and just now be seeing these deep systematic ways that my students were constantly being undermined and pushed to the side, except for when placing a spotlight on them was to the benefit of the institution.

This is also when I began to see the importance of advocacy as not just making space for and supporting the many celebratory events our student groups would hold but looking for spaces where they were being neglected by the institution and showing up for them there too. Trying to think about how policies could change to create a more inclusive space. This is where my understandings of antiracism began to truly form and take hold. Understanding the systematic nature of things meant it wasn't good enough to just "not be racist" and show up to celebrate and help put together events, it meant that I needed to be actively seeking how to push back on and change these systems.

From here, this has been a growing process for me, constantly pushing myself to reevaluate the ways that I show up in spaces to try to be accountable for harm that I cause, to not speak over or seek the spotlight in my work, but to amplify the work of the communities I want to support. These are all lessons I have learned and am learning from the missteps I make. Learning when I need to use my voice to speak up and when I need to be quiet and listen, learning how to take critique and feedback about the support I'm trying to offer and not get defensive. However, I continue to try to constantly think about what I have control over to create change and how I can support the work of people of

color are already doing. What scholars am I amplifying in my research, writing, and syllabi, what policies can I work to change to make, what classroom or grading practice should I be change in my own classroom, etc.

The most challenging aspects of this journey have been the relationships that have been strained or lost. I have people that I used to consider close friends who have "unfriended me" both on social media and in real life because of my "extreme" or "woke" views, and of course this is hard, but the times and places where it strains the relationships with my family are the hardest. Once in the middle of the night, I received text from my father who said if I wasn't careful that my "extremist" views were going to push my whole family away. This came after a post about how a school district in Texas called the police on a young man saying they thought he brought a "bomb" to school, though they followed none of their protocols for a bomb threat. In actuality, the young man had made a clock from a kit and brought it to show his teacher. My brother-in-law is in law enforcement, and it often feels like they believe I am speaking up against racism that I am "attacking" him. When I talk to my family about specific issues that happen to people, I know they are appalled and talk about how wrong it is, but when I am trying to speak out on a bigger level they think I am extreme or attacking them. They even admit that they know this is something I have studied and researched deeply and that they don't want to do that work but they don't agree with me – which feels extra hurtful.

This all makes me feel like an outsider to my family many times (except for my youngest sister), which is lonely, they have each other, they have their spouses and their children, and I feel really alone. It means walking a tightrope of continuing to push them and try to maintain the few real relationships I still have. I have only had a handful of

relationships as an adult and a few of those, including my current one, have been interracial. My family has been supportive of me and are I believe, genuinely happy that I am happy and are grateful that I have found someone who cares about me and treats me well. Still, it requires me to push them even harder on issues to understand that it impacts me and to a much greater extent the man I love differently than how they see it. And that it can't just be about accepting him as my partner but shifting some of the biases that I often don't even think they realize remain – or are unwilling to acknowledge. It also means me having to have conversations with them about how the people they have voted into office are now actively voting to not protect our right to marry. They keep telling me this is "ridiculous" and "would never happen" and I have to show them that yes, it is "ridiculous" and yes, it is indeed happening.

Again, it leaves me heartbroken and lonely. Also, many of my close friends are people of color and I don't want to place the burden of these strained relationships on them (though from time to time we have talked about it) and so I have a few strategic other white people trying to do this work who have been important for me to be able to turn to in the loneliest of times – one set a friend from childhood who is chosen family, but it is hard.

Reading this reflection, I felt comfort that someone as advanced as Hannah even experienced some challenges and made mistakes (or wished she would have responded differently). She was so honest about her perpetuation of racism (which I would say is a sign of being committed to antiracism). I liked how she admitted to laughing uncomfortably at racist jokes. I feel everyone I know has done this at some point, so I respected that she pointed that out. I felt for her as she wrote about seeing a klan rally. I could also relate to protecting Black friends

so they did not have to deal with ignorant friends and family members. I understood she did not want to make her Black friend/date feel unsafe. I did wonder if her decision had anything to do with her not wanting to experience being challenged, but I was mostly reading her experience as one that seemed very normal in a racist environment. Finally, I could relate to her feelings of being an outsider to even her own family, which was explained further in the group interview.

Focus Group

Hannah was the first to speak up in the group interview and introduce herself. As the group finished this process, a participant said that "finding the support that feels relevant and wholehearted has been a challenge for me." Her comments were supported and reiterated as others replied. Hannah was very reassuring:

> Like cosign. Yeah… I do have a dear, dear friend and chosen family (I loved that she used this phrase) from where I grew up that I think is the one person that I feel actually, and another dear friend that I get to work with, we're sort of the two people who I feel like, okay, I can come here and this is a safe space where you can unburden yourself with me, where I can unburden myself with you, where we can be supportive, where I can be, like you said, flawed and whole and talk about all of this together, and I'm not placing that on people who are who (could be) harmed… like I'm impacted… this work has damaged a lot of relationships or *other people have damaged the relationship with me as a result of pursuing this work*… But like pursuing this work created a lot of distance from a lot of meaningful relationships with me or cause people to push away. And so, like meeting one or two people like that, when we think about support, it was like a wave of anti-support and a wave of… And there have been so many incredible, again, particularly women of color, who have been supportive and helped me to learn and see and ask like,

> hey, like this is hard and they have been supportive too. But I think trying to think about what am I doing that doesn't… yeah, like place "Fighting racism is hard" (she used a whiny/complaining voice to emphasize that she was being sarcastic). “Oh, but you're living it directly.” Like, I don't know. Like that's just an uncomfortable… Yeah. So, I think some of those relationships that are close enough, and they love me enough that they want to be engaged and want to see and understand like what is just happening in my life, because they see it harming those relationships and they're supportive in that way.

She pointed out two important things that are easy to miss. First, she used the phrase chosen family. This language intentionally described people she felt very close to - as if they were family. Similarly, it signaled that she is closer to this person than her biological family. That was an important distinction that was made. She also pointed out that she did not ruin any relationships. Other people damaged the relationship by abandoning her due to her beliefs. She was pursuing this work with or without them.

The same participant felt emotional about not doing enough or not being antiracist enough. The lack of support was very painful for her. Hannah helped her and all of the group members as well. She spoke about the difficulty of the process and why this was the perfect space for that. Hannah was very empathic and even teared up a moment or two. She said:

> A lot of times in the midst of doing this work, particularly as... As a white woman, I was definitely not good about it in the beginning, but I spent a lot of time trying to make sure that outside of like joy that I'm trying to regulate my white woman tears and my emotions in this space. And so, my hope would be that this is a space where you can, like, feel those emotions more comfortably, because I think it's an important... And I think that is

important for us to be able to say, okay, I have these feelings and this isn't the space for… like in a lot of places of this work, this isn't the place for that. Like, I need to process them in another space where my emotions won't be causing harm or distracting from what we're needing to happen. But emotions are still real, and you still need to, as a human, need a space to process those. And so, my hope would be that this is a space where that would also be okay (everyone nodded). And sort of acknowledging the ways in which we sometimes need to compartmentalize those emotions to like take the time to move and process those emotions in a different space than maybe where they're actually happening.

And I'd also like to point back to a point that (someone) made earlier about like, can I really trust you... white people in this space to do this work and I will say, coming in, I was like, yeah, probably like this is going to be good. But as soon as I knew that (the person who nominated her) had vouched for or like trust it, that either knew and recommended, or trusted the people who recommended, I was like, okay, I know sort of where her standard would be and felt like that was nice/that was a piece that made it more comfortable to be able to (everyone nodded) feel like it was okay to be more vulnerable in this space. So, I appreciated that piece of it.

Her comments brought about a discussion on how the recommender was respected and trusted by everyone, which had a unique impact on the study. Everyone spoke about feeling more open and able to hop right into deep topics. Almost everyone mentioned feeling surprised that they could divulge so much personal information. I am not sure if that was because we were in a virtual environment or because everyone trusted me because they trusted the recommender, but it was a unique benefit that I do not see in many studies. We continued with a discussion of

the challenges of losing relationships or experiencing a diminished quality of relationships. Hannah then shared an interesting view:

> I often say, gosh, if I was doing this work as a missionary in another country, my parents would be so proud and supportive and like, wow, look at her go. And so, it's really hard to understand. I'm like, I feel like a lot of the things that I thought were the values that you were instilling in me are what bring me to this place. And yet now you seem to think that my work is an attack on you. And I don't know, it's a yeah, that's been an interesting thing to process. I. So, so yeah… it's hard to reconcile… those pieces.

Hannah then shared an example that led to a discussion about challenges with people at different levels of commitment on their antiracist journey. She told the story of her father texting her that she would push the whole family away with her extremist views. This time, she added her frustration that the school did not follow any of their standard protocols for having a bomb in the building. She also shared more details of the story:

> At the time, I was working on a summer bridge program with engineering students who did these lab projects on Friday that were. They like went in and built cool stuff and I said something about like "I'd bet he'd be really amazing in this program…"

She even shared more about the text message itself and how she felt afterward:

> And I got, like in the middle of the night, received this long text about how my liberal extremist views or like my liberal extremist views, were going to isolate me from our whole family. And that he'd always loved me, and he knows… But the thing that I think really hurt was that he's like, I know this is what you study, but I'm really conservative. And it was this moment of like, I know that you've done a lot of work to learn about this and know about this, but I don't want to do that work, and I'm willing to push you out of

my life because I don't want to do the work to learn. And we've made some progress since then, but our relationship has become pretty superficial, where we mostly talk about sports and barbecue and, you know, things like that because that was where it was.

So I think for me, if people are willing to learn and want to learn and want to engage, I'm like, “Okay!” For me, what is harder is when… I talk about individual events or things that happened to my friends, and (they’re) like, “Oh, that's horrible.” And I'm like, “Yeah,” but… “Why can't you extrapolate out?” Like, I'm trying to help you…and you know that I have the resources and I've been offering you the resources to say like, oh, this is happening on a broader and... You're like, “That's so wrong.” And I'm like, “Yeah, yeah. And here's that, but and here's why it's happening…” And they're like, “Nope.” And I think that that's where I really, really struggle.

And I think it's particular for me. Everybody else in my family is married and has children in their own family. And so, when I get pushed more and more off to the side, like I'm the one who doesn't. And… my partner, my person, I'm in an interracial relationship, and that makes it even more challenging. And they're like, “Well, we love you. We’re supportive. We’re… happy that you're happy and that you're being treated well.” And I'm like, “Well, you're also happy that I live back in (state). All of the people that you've elected to office just voted against protecting my right to be able to marry him.” And they’re like, “No, that would never happen…” And I'm like, “Okay, but you said you wanted me in (state), and the governor is lying about and trying to ban the work I do. And you say that you're proud of me because you think it's really cool to have a daughter who finished a Ph.D. and has a faculty position, but actively, the work I'm doing in that role is stuff that upsets you and pulls us apart.” So, I don't know. That's... probably

rambling, but I think goes into like difference between not just people in different education levels but people who are like, “Oh, I see that what you're saying. That is wrong (against my values).” And being willing to, like, I want to learn more and figure out what we can do about that. And, and people who are like, “Oh, that's terrible. Let me clutch my pearls,” and move on in another direction. Yeah, I don't, yeah. that's where I'm at.

After a great discussion where everyone shared similar ideas, I asked if people would talk about the biggest challenge on their path toward antiracism. Hannah said:

Yeah. So gosh, for me, for me, it feels like for some of the challenges, it hasn't been one big thing as much as it's been sort of all of these little like constant, sort of missteps. It's like... “Ok, we fixed that now where's the next place I'm going to screw up so that I can fix that one?” Like, you know what I mean? Like this constant, sort of no matter how much I try, if I'm moving forward, I'm a generally clumsy human being in my physical life as I move through the world and feeling that I am also perceived that way, like as much as I attempt to avoid it, and so, thinking about like, how do I take ownership and continue to move that... And I think the most challenging things that make me feel like how am I going forward… the ways in which it impacts the relationships in my life, which I've already talked about… There's just something intrinsically that's like… to not do it is not an option.

And so, sort of thinking about, as much as this sucks, or thinking like, gosh, I just want to take a break from this. Like, none of the people I love and care about who are queer folks or people of color or whatever are getting to take a break from this. And I often do... like there are spaces where I have that. And so, I think that I honestly those are

some of the things motivate like, okay, I just need to keep moving. I think some of the most challenging things in my work have been trying to balance and think about. I think particularly in the classroom... Our cohorts have been pretty diverse. And so, one of the things has been trying to figure out like... What is sort of the combination of providing the most care… and not doing harm, but also helping students… And thinking about like, how do I validate your feelings because they are real and they are important and sort of talk through like, what does this look like to change this?

On top of balancing the goal of providing the most care with the least amount of harm, Hannah also mentioned struggling with knowing when it is appropriate to use her voice and privilege and when to be quiet and listen and amplify other voices. She saw this as a way of decentering herself and then shared that the reflection was challenging:

I think it was really hard for me to sit down and write the reflection because I've spent so much time trying to think about how I decenter myself while doing this work and, yeah. So, I think those are some of the challenges, not decentering myself, like ending up centering myself is what has caused a lot of missteps. So, like all of those little pieces, processing it has been… some of the challenges. And there are moments where it's like, "But gosh, it seems nice to live in a... Man, look at how easy and pleasant it looks to just ignore that this exists and not do anything about it." And it's like, I couldn't! I can't! It's like, it's just… what keeps me moving is that... It just doesn't feel like an option to not.

The group interview ended with participants giving advice to people who may be experiencing something similar. Hannah started the conversation with:

This is an interesting question because I feel like the things that have helped and encouraged me along the way are… these are also things that I… it makes me anxious

when I hear people offer them as advice. So, I think I think a lot of what's encouraged and moved me along the way… (she decided to share a story). I ended up as the graduate assistant for multicultural affairs in my GA, which everybody was like, "Do you know that you're a white lady?" And I'm like, I'm pretty aware (lifts her arm to show her white skin and laughs)... and I was able to build such beautiful relationships, but also to see all the harm that was being done to my students, all the trust that had been broken, but also that these beautiful communities that allowed me, that welcomed me, that allowed me to learn and advocate and see the world in such different spaces. And so, like these beautiful communities that I was able to become a part of and create and move are really what helped me learn and brought me joy. And these are like deep, deep friendships. People who I'm in group chat texts with where we talk every single day and travel the world together. Like all of these beautiful things that came out of that that I think were a part of this sort of journey that I've been on (then she shared the advice that made her nervous). Advice turns into, "You need to be friends with more people of color. Like, you need to go meet people of color. You need to go learn about their stories" and all of it's like "Hi, you need to go make people of color teach you" and do this work for you. And that's the opposite of the advice I would give. Like, I hope people end up in spaces and communities where those things are happening.

But I think it's important, like more and more important to do the work. So, for me it's more like the advice is read as much as you can, learn as much as you can from whether it's podcasts like from all of the world around you. There's a video that I show on the first day of classes where Dr. Stewart says "The work is out there. Use your Googles… There are so many different types of resources that can help you."

And so, my first advice would be like, do all of that *and* be in community in places it feels natural… like find places where community exists that you want to be a part of. But it's not in ways that go in and ask labor of people. Don't go to learn from a community but go to be a part of the community. Like (names a participant), I think it was really beautiful you talking about sort of the relationship and community that you have within your church and the reciprocal nature of that. Like… when I worked in multicultural affairs, we had another graduate student came in and was like, "Hi, I'd like to have coffee with some of your Black students." And I was like, "Going to be a hard no for me," like for sure "Pass" but like that would be very daring (more so) than "Hey, I know that… the multicultural affairs office is literally… 10 seconds into existing and I know that you don't have enough money or support and I'd love to really, you know, offer that. Can I come and help set up the chairs for this event?" Okay, well, while you're setting up the chairs for that event, you're probably going to be working with other students who you can begin to have conversations with. And as they see you constantly show up to help support these events, you will be building relationships with them in ways that are natural (everyone nodded), in ways that show that you're here to offer actual… you're willing to put in the work to offer actual support and not just sort of like, okay, enough of that (using them). And so that's one example, but thinking about the ways in which you can engage in work and do the work that's behind the scenes, that doesn't get credit, that doesn't do that, but that also can help to build and I don't like this sounds manipulative, but like there are spaces where you can build trust, where you can learn and understand that aren't demanding labor, (that) are also places where really rich and rewarding community can be built.

This beautiful distinction provided context that was not really clarified anywhere else I had seen. The meeting ended, and I was excited to continue meeting with Hannah. It probably is not clear in writing, but she does this thing that I do where we are self-deprecating to make others laugh or make moments a little more comfortable. I believe this really helped her engage the rest of the group and make people feel comfortable with and close to her. As a result, I found myself disclosing more to her than anyone else in the group, especially in the individual interview.

Individual Interview

We started the meeting with some pleasantries, then I disclosed something deeply personal, and the empathy on her face made me feel so supported. She divulged that she felt the same way while experiencing the distancing from her father. I caught myself in a friend, not a researcher mode, vocalized that, and she said that she teaches a class on research methods. She believes positionality is everything, which means that it is allowed as long as I am upfront about it. The individual interview began by asking how she felt about the group interview:

> It was nice to have so many people in this space where like, okay, this feels nice… But part of it was because I knew… who had quote unquote given their stamp of approval. And I was like, I trust that source. So, I think that had that not been the case, I might have been more guarded in terms of coming to a specific event.

She then added that the group was helpful because it is an isolating process, which she mentioned had many layers:

> Like you can feel isolated doing this work because it's sort of a constant space of, I think, when you don't trust yourself... when some of the closest people in your life are the people who you don't want to hurt and you don't want to be constantly telling your

> friends of color like, this is hard. I feel alone. I feel like I'm sacrificing these other relationships and like xyz or I'm trying to process this. You went there, but you also like, if you don't have a few spaces where you feel like you can be truly open and vulnerable and like, “Hey, I think I'm really screwing up. I feel shitty about myself. I feel… like I don't have anywhere to turn with this.” Again, therapy is important, but if you don't feel like... And so, I don't know, it was just like… trying to meet people where they're at. But yeah, I don't know… I've been stung. Any time you meet a white person who like agrees with one part, you assume everybody's all in, and then all of a sudden you realize, “Oh, wait. No, we are not on the same page with this.” And we must all be all in… on the same page.

She mentioned how she used to call out racism on social media, but does not participate much anymore:

> Really it happened after January sixth when I was trying to ask people to stop lying about the election... And... I was like... this isn't a healthy space for me to be in. And so now I go on every once in a while if I need to find something or if I'm sharing resources. All it seems to do is bring more hate into the social spaces of my friends of color. None of those posts were changing the minds of the people who are holding on to super racist views in my thing. But they would come to respond with more hate on my page. And then if I wasn't sitting there closely monitoring what was happening, the people of color who are also in my feed are respond... Having to respond to them or feel the need to respond to them and then getting attacked. And... so I stopped.

At one point in the group interview, Hannah seemed to relate to the person who felt it was challenging to find supportive relationships with white people. I asked if I had read that

correctly, and she agreed:

> I have a sister, one sister who like, we can talk more about it. The other sister is married to a game warden… some states call them conservation officers, but it's a like a law enforcement officer, but primarily around like hunting and fishing, though they respond to all kinds of things. And so, she feels like a lot of things they're talking about are endangering her husband but doesn't realize that's not the case. Like you could try to point to data that says no, actually that's not showing up. But it feels hard to talk with her... And so, if you can talk about an incident, she'd be like, "Oh, that's terrible. But why are they mad at all law enforcement?" Well… we want law enforcement officers to hold each other accountable. Like if I have another teacher who is harming students. I can speak out and try to hold that teacher accountable. Without making it dangerous. Like, our profession is more honorable when we hold the person accountable. So, I think if people saw a regular record of law enforcement officers truly holding accountable those who are doing this, that would help build trust… Like it's a repeated pattern of not necessarily speaking up or people not being held accountable. And… it's not the one incident. It's all the incidences and all of the lack of response to those. And it is hard to explain that when she believes it could literally get her husband killed. And I have so many wonderful, supportive friends of color who are supportive in every sense of my life and who honestly, I know could... And if there and there are certain things that I can go and say this to, but in general, like I'm not going to lay this specific burden at their feet. When they are actually enduring the racism... Like they don't have a space... like when I want to be like I'm tired of this, I don't

want to do it anymore. Like they don't get that option so like... There are a couple people, but they're far away and that makes it hard.

We briefly discussed working toward antiracism during the pandemic and the challenges involved. Then, she spoke about a unique strain because of her interracial relationship:

> The man I've been dating for the past three years is a Black man and… we lived about an hour apart when I was in (her old state) and… so we'd commute... And he would say this to me, and he'd like, "Please don't. Please don't go out. Please don't go to the protest..." And I was like, "Okay, like, I'm not going to add... you're the person that I care about. I'm not going to add to your stress in this. Like, I'll take my cue from you." He's like, "Please be careful. Please stay inside." And so, I would, because that's the person that I need to be thinking about that time. So… I had a friend who's like, we have signs that hang on the fence... So, I thought ok, I can go hang the signs (to show support).

Hannah seemed emotional as she shared this story. Her voice cracked as she continued another story. She said it much more slowly than it reads, but she had intense fear for his life as she explained:

> When I know he's been out for a run and don't hear from him for a little bit, you know, or like him telling me a story about a white woman screaming at him, you know, for running… It was during (the beginning of) COVID and she was running on the path. And so, he gave her a wide (area)… like ran into the street to run so that when they passed by, they weren't like this (Hannah held her hands close together) because this was early in the thing. And I'm like, and it was just like, I remember all in my body… "A white woman screaming at you is deadly." Like… (there was a long pause). And I remember talking to my friends. Like, "Hey, if you, you know, if you don't feel going to the store right now,

let me... I will go and I'll bring you this...” Like basically I said… “If you want to go on a walk or something and it doesn't feel... That doesn't feel safe for you right now, let me know. I will come walk with you.” Like… let me be… let me use... whiteness is such a weapon. Let me use mine to protect you if I can.

Her explanation made me think about the different worlds we experience as white and Black humans. Some participants had mentioned a sense of pressure to educate white people about these differences, so I asked her how she felt about that. She replied:

I don't want to speak on behalf of the people of color in my life and I don't want to speak over them, but there are spaces of teaching with other white people that I can... try to lessen that burden. And so, I feel like that's important... there's this (constant) feeling of am I teaching in the right way? Where is this person in their journey and being understanding and respectful of that and not wanting to push but wanting to keep pushing them forward, but in a way that helps them actually move forward and not shut down and be like, “Well, I'm going to just always screw up, so…” (why bother).

I think that I find that particularly hard in the classroom. Especially when… it's my job to keep trying to bring everybody along. And there are many white students in the room who are not necessarily causing harm but have questions and are trying to learn. And… students of color are kind of far ahead of that, and they don't want to have to take that time and space, and trying to figure out how we balance that… As much as I feel it inside a classroom, outside the classroom, even more... It's sort of like challenge and support… like, how am I making sure to continue to push people and think about things but in a way where they keep moving forward? Because I do know people shut down or shut down so hard, they like slam the door and knock themselves all the way backward to

where they were before. And so how am I both patient and pushing? I guess… And feeling that sort of constant tension in those spaces where we're trying to figure that out.

Hannah reflected on her learning of a whitewashed view of history but also expanded to consider the impact that had on her two high school friends who were Black:

> I was so oblivious to it for so long. And I understood and didn't like racism... Like I had seen… such overt acts of race-based hate. And I knew, like, I didn't question that racism was real, but when I saw it only as that and didn't understand the way society was constructed to create that. Like… when people say, "The system is broken" and then others say like, "No, it's not broken. It's working exactly as it was intended to." Like, I didn't know or see that. Like, that's how the system was created... Like in my history classes… I still had… a U.S. history teacher who said, "People think the… Civil War was about slavery, but it was about states' rights." And I'm like, "It was about the states' rights to own slaves, right?" What? So, I don't... anyway… I was so upset and frustrated with myself for causing harm because I was so unaware and because, like, denied... Like my ignorance caused harm in this person's life in my high school.
>
> But like, I also know, when I would make a post that (was antiracist), like, you know there were two Black brothers who were in my grade who were like, "That's my classmate…" And I'm like, "Oh, but like you are experiencing it." Like, it was one of the things I knew, but thinking about all of the ways in which they were experiencing our entire (educational experience), like there are all these racist jokes and things that are happening… but then it's like, we don't think that way about (them). Like they're different. Like they're our friends. We play football, you know, so clearly, I'm not racist because… and that sort of… feeling of like, we've always been friends or whatever, and

then saying like we like all the harm they're experiencing, or just the denial of their experiences, or that those things weren't right. And like, I just genuinely cannot imagine what it was like to (experience) that.

But also thinking about the ways in which so much of our curriculum was reinforcing the erasure of their experiences, and the harm that all of that collectively causes… But that even in my master's program - the history, we... had one class on diversity. Like, we weren't really diving into these things to understand these systems, to say like here's why it's important for you to understand this historical context and how these systems are embedded into higher education so that you understand when you create this race-neutral, gender neutral leadership program, that seems like it has nothing to do with racism, that you're still implementing it into a racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic structure and it's going to have all these disparate outcomes. Like if you were not actively thinking about that, your programs are going to continue to be placed into the system, move through it, and have those outcomes… So, we have to talk about it… so that we can be proactive about working against it. As we seek to dismantle it until it is dismantled, we must also do these other things to try to mitigate its harm. And so, for me, that's why... It's like helping people understand… why it's important to be proactive, not just to know this, but to think about how that impacts work... and like why it has to be everybody's job and everybody's business all the time... Because it's infused in everything. And if you don't pay attention to that, we won't stop its harm.

I mentioned that she seemed to be using her whiteness for protection again. She responded, “I mean... I hope so!” Then she added, “if this privilege is being weaponized against other people, how can I use it to actually fight against... that.”

We were speaking about different parts of the group interview, and I asked if she ever had issues of race come up while doing research. She never really had any issues. One study had to do with her work expertise, so that was a prescribed duty that she had. In another study, she ran everything but then wanted to do additional interviews. She had two Latinas who were interested in assisting her, and she saw great value in their addition because the people being interviewed were Latina. In another instance, she explained, “I was on a research team with a faculty member of color, and so I was like… I'm just going do what you tell me to do, like, it's your project. You know? So, what tasks do you need?” Out of every response I received, this was the one my values aligned with most. I remember thinking, “Finally!” Then I remembered I was not in an evaluation mode. I was supposed to just listen.

We were running short on time, so I wanted to get her views on the themes I was considering. She replied with, “OOH member checking!” I laughed. She spoke about emotions:

> One. And I don't know, this is a theme, but it came out… one of the things that I look back on and I... feel most guilty about are spaces where I was like in class crying as I was processing the harm I had done. Like I'm crying, processing harm I have done and so then sort of shame spiraling out about like all of that but from those experiences. Like really trying to be… I'm an emotional person. Like, naturally in my every day, I don't just mean like in those spaces. I mean, like, I'm the type of person who cries at, like, the Folgers commercials… it has meant me spending a lot of time trying to... Like understanding the ways that white woman tears are weaponized, understanding the ways that intention isn't important. They can still cause harm… Like all of that... I think all of that has to do then with me not wanting to… unburden myself with my friends of color when I'm struggling with this. I'm sorry, I am coming back to a theme, but in thinking

about those emotions, like seeing people like us guarding our emotions in this space… Like this is a space where we're talking about the anti-racism. So, this is a space where my emotions need to be in check and guarded because of that training… like it is important for us to guard those emotions in different ways. In other spaces. And so, like what we all trying to acknowledge, we do also need a space to process those emotions and sort of seeing in the ways in which we're trying to navigate or negotiate...

And… another theme, again, sort of questioning about for the sort of awkwardness of like where is the support? And I think too like thinking about the ways when we have rich and meaningful relationships with people (who are Black). They are the people I want to process with, but I just make sure that they have the space and capacity… like talking about her conversation around the inbetween - I think that's where I think that those are sort of the themes that come, like that sort of are all interrelated, but sort of these feelings of isolation and. In the middle. Like in the middle. Like… I don't really belong in any space. I need to be hyper-aware and sort of regulating myself in all of these different spaces in order to not cause harm and then feeling the need for rest. I think in that... Feeling the need for space to process, feeling the need for rest, and feeling guilty. Because I think this is sometimes for me feeling guilty that I know I could rest (tears start) and that's not necessary...

When I described how I viewed the themes and subthemes and how they included her views, she said, “that sounds very accurate.” My final question asked if she had more to share that I had not asked about or that she would have asked as a researcher. Her face looked so excited as she said, “What a great question! I just had students turning in interview protocol and doing this, I'm like, this is a great way to end.” I laughed and said she sounded proud of me.

After some laughs, she responded:

> I think that there is this sort of it's it is this sort of constant tension that you exist with, like, an anxiousness. And I think, yeah, I know, so I'll be honest, I think of my space as a faculty member as a constant like, “Am I taking up space that I shouldn't be?” Like, I believe that this is really important to be teaching and doing. Am I the right person to be doing that? Am I taking up space that someone who would be, you know, a bit like imposter syndrome and all of those things...
>
> So, I just want to give one more sort of example, I guess. So, I came here from (another university) and I after I got here, one of my colleagues… had put together this morning of workshops, like virtual workshops, and asked if I would do a little intro primer on CRT and they had tons of people there like virtually, like a hundred or so, like more than 100 people there... And so, we're doing like the Q&A at the end and there is a Black woman who is like, “How dare you... like, I live this every day, how dare you? Why should you be teaching this?” And I wanted to be like, “Well, because the nice Black man who's in charge asked me to do it, and so I said yes.” But that's not what I said. I said… that's a really good and valid point. Like, you know… I don't have that same (lived experience), but like, it's just it's something I've been studying. It's something that I want to help with. And part of me wanted to say, like, “Because they don't have money to pay anybody, and I don't want for someone of color to have to do this work for free.” And so, I've been trying to think about like… for all of the CRT workshops and presentations I've done, like I have been paid to do seminars around rural spaces, like rural work, but a lot of the CRT work I've done to do primers and intro stuff I've done for free. And part of it is I know that it's important... and this sounds a little obnoxious, but

for me it's like, okay, if this is a place where they cannot pay someone or they're not going to pay someone, I don't want this to be one more thing that people of color having to do as unpaid labor. So is this… I guess for me, it's… trying to figure out is that a space where I can say, okay, I can take what knowledge I have, be clear about the limitations of that, be clear about the limitations of my experience, point people in the direction of the voices of color where they can learn more... then they can pay for that work or find that work in other spaces.

But... I hear those questions and I like it. It keeps me constantly reflective of how am I doing this? How am I approaching this? And am I the right person in this space? Like, there are spaces where I should be, where I think I should and can be doing this, and that constant reevaluation and constant evaluation of, like, is this what my role should be in this specific space and trying to be constantly thoughtful of that and sort of thinking for myself, what are some of the parameters or guideposts I want to use for thinking through that? Like trying to think through what are some of the sort of metrics or things that I want to use to sort of help myself determine that and it not just be like, this is how I feel today… I guess that would be the one final piece is like… I think about… NOT should I do the work, but what should my work look like in this space?

Our interview ended, and Hannah offered to help with anything else I needed. We agreed to keep meeting, but Hannah was the first to contact me after the individual meeting. She seemed concerned about what some people may think of her and wanted to clarify some things. I did not feel that what she shared was vital to the story, so I did not include it, but I was so glad that she reached out to talk some more. This showed several different things. One, she wanted to talk to process some things (or at least to explain what she had processed). Two, she was possibly

experiencing some more imposter syndrome because she wanted to explain something she thought people would judge. I had not judged her and did not think others would either. However, this made me think about the benefits of imposter syndrome in this specific instance. As advanced as Hannah is, she is still humble and questioning her actions. I do not know if she realized it, but she was exhibiting the constant reflection that people had mentioned made someone a dedicated antiracist. Perhaps she became advanced from reflecting on these instances.

Hannah's story highlights some of the different emotions involved in this process and the darkness of feeling like an outsider to even our own family members. Her family had called her an extremist, and I could relate to this feeling as I felt mine looked at me as if I were a conspiracy theorist. Hannah mentioned being heartbroken by this experience, and I could hear the pain in her voice. She voiced real concerns for the safety of her partner, a Black man. I could not help but compare Hannah's real fear to the perceived fear of her sister's game warden husband. The experiences do not seem very close when one holds so much power, and the other does not. Hannah brought so much to this study; she seemed to help all the participants and even encouraged me along the way. One of her most beautiful contributions was how she explained her advice to other antiracists. I agreed with her comment that there does seem to be some missing element of how to build interracial relationships more naturally. Hannah described how genuine goals of wanting to contribute to communities of care could build deep relationships. With admiration for her, her story, and how she treated everyone in this study, I hope she and I will continue building our relationship and advancing antiracism together.

CHAPTER 7: ANN

When I first contacted Ann about setting up a time to discuss the study, she said she really wanted to, but she was currently in the hospital. The woman that nominated her told me she had some serious health issues, but I didn't realize they were so life-threatening. I told her I would wait as long as I needed to, but I wanted to include her in the study whenever she was ready. Ann was the first person I met, and I was completely overwhelmed by her generosity, patience, and kindness. She had offered so much help as someone who had been through the dissertation process and used a similar research method. She offered to meet with me as many times as I needed. She seemed genuine and encouraged me to contact her saying, "We're all here to help you get through this" and, "It is a challenging process, but you need to remember that you are the expert. Remember that in your defense." This was my first interaction with any of the participants, and I just felt so grateful to have someone demonstrate such kindness. All participants were from the south, but Ann was the only one who had a strong accent. I was hoping I was not misinterpreting the accent as more kindness, but she continued her generosity throughout the study.

Reflection

Ann asked to meet via zoom to discuss her reflection because her "perfectionism takes over, and I want to tell every detail." Meeting in person allowed her to focus on the prompts one at a time. She started:

> I was raised very steeped in racism. I'm from (northeastern North Carolina). It's very rural out here. It's also part of the Black Belt. So, the origination of enslavement in the United States, and I grew up in the middle of that history, which meant we had very explicit direction and implicit understandings about our relationship to and with Black people,

especially growing up. So many things come to mind… We were forbidden as a child to go to (a certain part of town), which was like the Black area of town. Like absolutely under no circumstances. And we knew where it was, like the borders and everything. And that was just forbidden.

And then another example is when I was in kindergarten. My maiden name is Simpson. And the child next to me was a Black boy named (first name) Simpson. And so, it made obvious sense to me that we were married (she laughed) and, you know, we shared scissors and playground things. And I went home and said I had a boyfriend. And then when my family heard or found out that it was a Black boy, it was endless teasing. I was called an N-word lover and shamed in a way that made me understand that was inappropriate...

I grew up in a in a very violent culture toward Black people. I had a Confederate flag on my high school ring and… lots of this is our heritage (in the south). But we all knew we were very racist, you know? I mean, it was like there was no masquerading how we felt… our friend groups in high school were segregated… And to tell you about this place, when I was in graduate school in early… 2011, I went back to my hometown and there was still a local nightclub that had a Black night and a white night so that there were Black patrons on Friday night and white patrons on Saturday nights. And we had segregated grocery stores. All of our cemeteries were segregated because it wasn't until the 1950s that a Black person could even be buried next to a white person where I'm from. We were… very steeped and trained very early.

And so, when I went to college, it was the first time that I was able to FREELY interact with other people in ways that I wasn't (able to before). There wasn't the

normalizing judgment from peers. I didn't have my parents sort of asking what I was doing or screening things. I had... Black friends in high school, but I hid them… we weren't allowed to associate outside of school. Like, they couldn't come into my friend group, and I couldn't go into theirs really, although I would have been more accepted into theirs than them in mine. But yeah, it was something… and so college was the first time that I… really started to think about it.

(After college), I taught eighth grade… the school was 90% Black. It was very high poverty. And it was the first time that I ever realized that people lived in a society that I did not live in. (One) that was abandoned by the state, that was ignored by policymakers. And that was really the first time... With my administration, we were doing a civil rights unit, and he called me a bleeding heart and, you know, and kind of discouraged some of the work that I was doing in building community with the kids... And so that was the first time that I began openly advocating for Black students. And in the, you know, broader parts of my life, it was that experience teaching eighth grade that actually got me into graduate school because I realized so much of what was wrong with education in that school.

And so, then when I went to graduate school, I was… gung-ho like, let's burn down colleges of Ed (Education) and save the world and, I was very loud... And one of my favorite professors in graduate school was a Black woman by the name of Mary Stone Hanley, who... would make the ground feel like Jell-O every class that you had. And I would just go home. My head hurt because I had been thinking so hard... But she was the most beautiful educator, too, because she would just look at you and go, Hmm. You know? And she had us... There was a lot of somatic movement in her classes and

very embodied learning, and she was transformational for me. And I was just like, “Oh, teach me more,” but she wasn't she wasn't granted tenure, but she was one of the most prolific teaching faculty that we had.

I lived in this very romantic world, (so) I papered the entire school of education in fliers that was like, “what is social justice? How do you define good teaching?” Like lots of aversive subversive messages. And I put them in all the faculties boxes and in the refrigerators, and they were spilling out of every classroom. I mean, I used reams and reams of paper and just like, in movie style, papered the entire school of ed. And the next morning my advisor was like, “Oh my God, did you hear what somebody did?” And I was like, “No, what did they do?” That was that was probably my first moment of activism… and it thrilled me. And so, so yeah, like I started, I started to learn and question myself, but I never really did (interrogate that further). I don't think I did deep interrogation like I needed to do until later.

I was married to a white man and had two white kids and then after my divorce, I started dating a Black man that I was very much in love with. And, oh god, he's a visionary. Like, he is a dreamer… It's like he has seen into the promised land, and he came back to tell us what it's going to be like. He... can cut directly through and make you see and think. And he really challenged me, and he was like, “Yo, you got some work to do…” And I was like, “What are you talking about? I'm amazing” (laughs jokingly). And I wasn't. And I've had a lot of hard work that I had to do because ultimately there were moments where I was not... Where I was advocating, but I... was doing so only from the safety of, you know, of myself.

And so, when... my sons and I moved to this very small town (population 5000),

it's because I (was invited) to start an educational justice program in the schools here, and it's actually the hometown of this guy that I had dated. We had long separated… but I moved here and then, because I was identified, I made community with Black folks. (Because) I live on a white street… people have this image of me that I'm a person of wealth, which is funny because I grew up on food stamps… And the white community, at first, they didn't really know what to do with me. I'm a single woman, you know, in a place where marriage is the only route to a husband. You know, I'm a single mom. My ex-husband doesn't live here. And… the white folks were like, well, she works for the university, (but) they just couldn't figure... it out. And then when it became clear, then there was a distancing there. And so, the white people have completely shut us out and they treat, like my kids don't get invited to birthday parties and… they don't invite us for socialization, all of which I know are white ways of being, especially in middle-class ways. Like we, we don't get that... Because here... it's still… Trump country… There are no places where Black folks and white folks are together in community. We sit separately at restaurants... There are just no places… that you would see Black folks and white folks even sitting together in restaurants. You don't see that here. So, it's... living in that ethos... (that) has really shaped the way that I speak with white people about racism, and the way that I engage with Black people.

I was hearing messages of overt racism and overt and covert social influences to continue that racism. So, I wanted to know a little more about what made Ann different:

I think it also bears as part of my journey that I was a writer. I was a creative writing major. And then I was also a philosophy major in undergrad. And so, I had very strong ideals about goodness and justice and things like democracy and ideals. And the romantic

in me was very much into a defense of those ideals. And it wasn't until like when I was teaching eighth grade and later in graduate school that the understandings of systems of oppression really coalesced for me in ways that I could… be able to see broad scale oppression and especially as it related to race. And I used to do the language of race, class, gender, you know, sort of like the laundry list of diversity. And that has become much more refined over the last five to ten years, certainly… I had grown up reading the works of Black authors, (but) it didn't make sense to me until probably within the last ten, ten years forward that I was really like, oh... now it's starting to sit with me and I can see and understand and really unpack these things because I could see the injustice.

But… it wasn't until… when I started to do historical work on the Black Belt and on my region that I was like, oh, shit, like… the plantation folded, but the structures remained. And so, we have all these ruins of, you know, these buildings. And actually, these buildings are they're actually kept up and the lawns mowed, and they're planted with flowers and kids take field trips there. So, it's like these structures are still very much a reminder. And there was an artist I read when I was writing my dissertation who talked about Confederate flags as visual terrorism. And like, now I see that… I understand sort of the ethos of fear that undergirds, you know, it's the act of visibility here is really a big thing.

So, it's very easy to get along, but as soon as you sort of stand up or stand against what is around here, that visibility is a huge threat. It's the threat of visibility around here, and I was emboldened enough and maybe rash enough. You know, moving here, that I was like, I'm going right the fuck in (laughs at herself). And I've been loud ever since I got here. But that's also because of activism in other parts of my life. Like I did a lot of

organizing with my teacher's union when I taught high school, even got arrested in front of the state capitol. Like lots of direct action in ways that we were engaging. I had done a lot of public speaking for the NAACP and, you know, things prior to that. And by the time I moved here, I had an assurance of who I was and was able to really go in that direction in ways that I think... And this is not a dig at people. But I think... I think in the academy, it's really easy for people to live in the intellectual work and not do the groundwork. And so... we become subsumed by the academy in such a way that we forget that the real work is with, you know, Michelle across the street. And, you know, it's here in front of us and not in the hallways of our universities.

I wanted her to expand on what she meant by the threat of visibility. She said:

So, for instance, I'm running for Board of Education right now, and the Conservatives are very unhappy with me because I... You know, my research is on white supremacy. And they've been all over they've been trolling me all over campus and my social media. And so then in their circles, you know, they're talking about me, you know, I'm running against a white conservative male. So, the threat of visibility is really a thing. Like, I can walk into parts of a restaurant and just know from... the people around... It doesn't feel safe oftentimes in large groups of white people around here. Yeah (pause). I had a lady corner me at one end of Wal-Mart because I had a Black Lives Matter shirt on. Yeah. I mean, folks are something out here.

I asked what the most challenging part of her journey has been, and she said:

I think the hardest thing was the... actually the relationship that I referenced, because it broke my heart, and it broke my heart because there were things that I didn't understand and that I really wanted to, and... that's probably been the most difficult. I

> grew up... And I'm going to say this very bluntly. I grew up in a in a household where violence was the norm. And there was a lot of poverty and alcoholism. And my dad was incarcerated. And (there was) physical violence, emotional violence, sexual violence, all of that. So, for me, engaging with other people often feels like I get wounded, but I'm used to that kind of pain. I wasn't used to the heartbreak of it (of that relationship ending). And I think that's the thing that really got me.

These statements made me feel so close to her. I finally found someone that had experienced something like me. I completely understood the difference between the numbness of accepting the commonplace pain from abuse, but the heartbreak was much worse and felt much more painful. I told her that she would read something similar in my reflection and then asked what emotions she went through during this process. She replied:

> Yeah, emotions for me... I do a lot of therapy (laughed again) because it's really hard for me to navigate the anger. I'm used to suppressing it, and then I walked headfirst into a career where all I do is stay angry all the time and I have to suppress that, too. So, I have an autoimmune condition. You know, my body is diseased, (she repeated herself to emphasize the next part) dis-eased basically from years and years of this… I think you know (that) I was in the hospital and so I'm working through that. And from what we can tell, a lot of that is related to my environment. And so... like I'm doing acupuncture and stuff because I'm trying to work through healing and in really specific ways so that I can engage fully in the justice work. But I think for years and years and years, I would just... I was always the person who would, you know, a couple of drinks in and I'd be like, fuck white supremacy. You know, I was a loose cannon. I was also dealing with addiction and a lot of pain. Definitely grieving, as you know.

So, the man I referenced, we were dating at the time of the Charleston massacre. And we actually broke up… right after that because he was enraged. And I had said something like, "we need to go down there, and we need to be a witness and we need to go and support," you know, and he was so angry, and he was like in his head, (she paused) but received it as a voyeurism type of thing and… our relationship just kind of like, you know, (ended) after that. But what was interesting is that years later, we had a conversation about that moment in time because… he was like, as much as I tried to avoid it, I ended up having to go there and be a part of it, you know. And... so yeah, I mean, just heavy grief for him, for me, for all of us as the country… I read a lot of Dr. King's work and... he was writing about how until the white community has empathy and understands grief that we will never actually be able to overcome (racism). Like we have to be touched by that in order to change and to witness the grief and grieving of others. And Bryan Stevenson, who's an anti-death penalty lawyer, he would say it's about proximity; that (white folks) have to get close to the source of the pain in order to understand.

I told her that the way she was speaking reminded me of some of the other things that people had written about in terms of being an outsider. It sounded like she was hinting at that in terms of people giving her looks or tracking her down, so I asked how that felt:

It's scary. It's it can be at times. And I get in my head, and I think sometimes give over too much power. And so, I'm working on really retaining my power and knowing that... I don't want to sound self-righteous, but knowing that I'm right, you know, and that is worth the cost to me. And so really being rooted in in in truth is the big thing that has saved me from living in fear and actually emboldens me to move forward into action,

because I do so very deeply believe it.

I mean, I've had... With my family members not only as a result of like our history with violence, but also, I'm estranged from my brother because he's like a Trump, you know, gun advocate, racist, you know, and he reached out to me when I was in the hospital, actually, and he was like, I love you. And I was like okay. I said... that I believed that he, in his position, harmed people. I was like, and I don't want to be around that. And I was like, if you… think I've wrongly accused you, then I'll send you some books to read and we can talk about it, but I'm not mad at you. I don't hate you. I just I don't want a (relationship). I don't care to have a relationship with you and especially one that would involve my children. And there's definitely been… a distancing between me and family members… my childhood best friend, you know, just lots of distance. And so, grief for those things that were lost, but not in a way, you know, my friend always says… what is something you've lost that you want to have back? And those are things that I actually don't care to return to, you know? So, it's like it's a cleaving (or severing) of self, but in a way that's so much better for me and our family and what we believe in and in the ideals we have.

We discussed how her current environment was very different from mine. I was not shocked, but it seemed like scenes from old movies. It could not and should not be happening in 2022, but it is, unfortunately. She responded:

Oh, I mean, it is. Where I live is almost a caricature, right? Because it really is like... small towns of white conservatives... When I announced my bid for school board, I had people emailing me about whether or not I was going to be teaching CRT. And, you know, I mean, they were… and then you have to figure out... because... I'm really led by

> my faith, which is something I haven't talked about in this discussion with us, but for me, it's also like holding grace and inviting people in. So, it's always that juxtaposition, you know, it'd be really easy to just ignore people or dismiss them. But I'm really trying to wade in and hold out my hand and say, come over here, and see that this is such a much better place to be and actually upholds the ideals that we have. But it definitely… feels like a movie… I mean, there's two plantations within, like, 30 minutes of me. Like, big plantations that are kept up, and people have weddings there and stuff.

We ended the meeting, and I stopped recording, but then we had a great discussion about our kids and getting them involved in antiracism and the different things we do to teach them about antiracism. I loved meeting with Ann and could not wait to meet again. I felt like I had just met a new mentor and friend.

Focus Group

The next time we met was in the group meeting. Ann was quiet but provided so many amazing analogies and different ways of thinking when she did speak. She helped everybody in the group. After her introduction to the group, she spoke about what antiracism meant to her:

> I'm constantly aware of my work not in serving the Black community, but in changing the white community and really moving into those spaces that feel uncomfortable and difficult. But that is my work, right… to build a beloved community in the ways that I see and invasion it. And so anti-racism… is the action. It's also the embodiment of the practice so that it's not just something that we think about intellectually or theoretically, that it's a lived experience for us, for me.

Every participant seemed to nod along as she spoke. I then asked the group about their support systems, and Ann provided an interesting perspective adding:

This is a hard question… I often don't trust white people and I have a really hard time. And it's not that I don't trust white people… oftentimes engaging with white people feels like work. And so, I'm just trying to be very candid here, people will come to me who maybe aren't reading all of the theoretical work that I read (or some of y'all read), but they want to understand race relations. And I often feel like I'm teaching all the time, (and)I feel like I have to be on. And that gets really tiring for me and I have to back out because people will come to me and they just read Ibram Kendi, and they're really excited, but I'm like, okay, so he is here, you know, we got to go up here, right? And (it's) that challenge and constant pushing.

And so, there's a really beautiful autoethnography by Diversi and Moreira called *Betweener Talk* and that helps me think about the ways that I sit between spaces. In my lived experience and my lived context, I attend a predominantly Black church and it's wild because most of the church members are like 60 plus and elders... And I don't necessarily relate to them, but I feel seen by them, right? Like I don't have to do the performative work of explaining my position to them, and I don't have to teach them. I can just sit and, honestly, like they feed me and, and we have a relationship of reciprocity and, this sounds weird but like white lay people, right? It's harder for me to engage laterally that way. But with my girlfriends who have similar thought, work, and training, and backgrounds that I have… I have two white girlfriends who are married to Black men and... because they are also betweeners, we have a shared understanding, and we don't have to do the work with each other. Like I can share an experience, and we can, you know how nerds do, like we'll start critically unpacking it or supporting each other that way.

> And then I also find a lot of support with Black women in this work because I can go to them and I'm just upfront and I'll be like... “What am I missing?” But I usually preface those conversations with a "can we talk about this?" Like, “I'd like to talk with you about some of my shit” and then, “do y'all have space for this” so that it's not just me calling and… there's always a (red) flag for that type of thing. Just trying to be mindful of those relationships too. But those are relationships with Black women and with my white girlfriends, my *critical* white friends, so I'm distinguishing here. But we have… relationships built on love, but also, we are doing shared work.

One of the participants became very emotional while talking about the lack of support and how challenging that was for her to discuss. Ann chimed in:

> Yeah. Well, it's really painful, you know, because I do think this work is alienating and isolating by design for white people... That's why I think the language around betweeners gives me a place to… sit and navigate that space.

The other participant mentioned how she feels constant imposter syndrome about doing enough in the fight for equality. Ann added:

> I want to speak to that real quick if I have the liberty to do so… Okay, so if you think of a bell curve, right? Right. The fact that we are moving the center is enough, right? That and you have to think about… it's a collective work and that boulder is not yours alone to carry. So, the fact that you stand outside of sort of a dictated pull back in the other direction, it's enough for us.
>
> Let me see if I can go at this another way. In the same way that rest is radical, right? It is radical for you to simply resist the pull to embody these racist practices or white supremacy, like that resistance is radical, and who you may be next year, it is likely

going to be very different than where you are right now. And so, you know, we always use metaphors of "the journey," you know, of anti-racism and unlearning and those types of things, right? So, I just want you to give yourself a little bit of grace, you know, where you stand on that path that you're still on the path, right? Whereas some folks are not. Like, they're happily living and riding around with Trump flags. Right? So just grace for you as a human doing a human thing in a really complex system is always necessary… (someone else spoke up in agreement as well).

I had asked everyone to comment on their most challenging aspect in the reflection, but now I also wanted to know what motivated them to continue despite those challenges. Ann started:

When I was in graduate school, we had a pretty fierce group of women in my program, racially diverse program. And, and I and another white woman were part of a larger group of about six women who are all Black women. And there was a Native American woman with us. Anyway, those were my girlfriends. And so, we did what we called table talks. You know, we met every Tuesday, and we would share ideas and collaborate. And we were writing together and doing all these things and we ended up having a split where, rightly so, the Black women felt that I had injured them. And I did. And it was just me barreling forward, like with, you know, trying to be all gung ho. And they were like, yeah, that's not really where we are. But anyway, our relationship had a had a split and that was the most devastating moment that I can remember is because these women, that I respected and valued felt that I was a person of harm and I was like, “Oh, shit,” you know? And I didn't really know how to rebuild after that because I was like, “Well, fuck. This is what I've committed my life to and I'm fucking it up.” Like, it was just this really,

really hard time for me. And I was like, “Maybe I shouldn't be in the academy. Who am I to be doing this work?” You know, lots of questions like that.

And my advisor, who was a white man… was basically telling me… that it was something that I had to do, but also that it was for me to commit for myself and not for approval or not for recognition. That… others would see who I am because my work and my values are evident… And I couldn't figure that out for the longest time, but what I did is I committed myself to the ideals. And even when that made things uncomfortable or difficult for me in like work situations or whatever, but ultimately what happened is that those friendships did come back around, because through the course of like six or seven years for some of those relationships… it took me having to figure out that I was in the wrong place and self-correcting in that way. That was really challenging... that was the moment where I was like, “Oh shit, I got to work on me…” but it's because I had injured people that I loved.

Participants ended up sharing many mistakes they had made, and Ann brought up the idea of failing forward:

You all made me think about how much of this work is failing forward and because I'm really trying to like offer a lot of grace for myself. This is where my life is right now, but the reminder that I often give myself, which I'll offer to y’all here, is that we're in a space and place that's never been created before, and we really have no map for where we are or how we do this work. And so much of it is falling forward. And we're definitely going to work with the centering and decentering…

You know, I… had this really embarrassing moment at AERA (an academic conference) recently where I was sitting in a group of Black folks. And they know who I

am. They know the work that I do. And I was talking about where I live. And I said that I was pissing off a lot of my white neighbors because of the things I say. And I did a big Black Lives Matter in my front yard. And I was like, “Yeah, they really fuckin hate me.” And everybody was really quiet and then this lady was like, "How do you think they feel about us?" And I was like, “Fair. Fair. Fair.” But I had centered myself in that moment. I was so embarrassed. I was like, “okay, you know, you're right.” But also, like, that's only one drop in who I am, you know? And I have to really just give myself the space to say, “Yeah, fucked that up.” Just like I would when I fuck up when I yell at my kids… but like my relationship with my kids isn't damaged because I yelled at them one night, you know, there's always spaces for repair. And… I want to name that.

Comparing her antiracist mistakes to parenting mistakes had a significant impact on me; both cause harm to the people we love. To know you messed up as a parent and to mess up as a white person dedicated to antiracism feels like one of the worst feelings. She continued:

And then for y'all too to be thinking about the ways that, even when things seem hard, the way that we move is by is by trying, right? That's the anti-racist part of it. And that that means that sometimes trying ends up with failure or pushback. And there's a metaphor that I that I think about all the time... rivers can change their path, right? And they often do so when one barrier is pressed in front of them. So, if there's a rock in the river then the river becomes forced to move around it. But, you know, we have to remain in the way in order to change that path, right? And so, to think about our work holistically, I will be a rock in the path of a river and that's my job. That is literally my job is just to be in a place and be sort of obstinate and refuse to really budge. But that's what it takes, because by just standing there, we (make) other people to move around us.

> And there's (an)other thing, and this is what my therapist always tells me, because I constantly feel like I'm fighting and she's like, “Just don't pick up the rope, right?” She's like, “Just don't engage in the tug of war because you know where you stand and just be rooted in where you are, right? And then just refuse to engage that fight so that you can remain embodied and, in your space, but also curious about what's happening around you so that we don't get into a fight or flight (of) how am I going to navigate this or what's the right way?” But really just open ourselves up to being able to ask questions of ourselves and others about how we create more spaces for people to live freely. And reminding people that that's the goal of life - is to open space for everyone to be loved and seen. You know, circling back to that again and again.

Ann had provided so many helpful metaphors, and the one about the rivers seemed to really affect people. In my final question, I asked what advice they may have for people in a similar situation. One participant spoke about how challenging this was because the books give advice, but she felt most people did not understand how genuinely they should proceed with it. She spoke about volunteering for no reward and slowly getting to know the people in those spaces. Only after letting relationships form naturally should you do what the books say. Ann really connected with that:

> You know, that really resonates with me because I'm thinking about the times in my life that I have worked or aligned myself through service to others and those being some of the most rewarding relationships and communities that I've been a part of. You know… there was an alternative school that I wanted to do research in, but the principal, when I went to talk with her about like facilitating a relationship to see if I could do research there she was so overwrought and she was like… “I'm drowning, like, I don't even have

anybody over here to answer the phones. Like, I'm at my wits end…" And I… was sitting there with her and… she's like, "I want to quit." And I was like, okay, well, I can't do… my research here. But I was also like, "Do you need me to answer the phones for you? Because I don't mind coming in and manning the front desk Monday through Friday from 9 to 12 or something like that." And so that's what I did is I started coming in and just answering the phones and I'd been there, I think like six weeks or something and she was like, "Aren't you going to be doing research?" And I was like, "Oh, I thought you were leaving. Like, I'm just here to answer phones..." and she was like, "No, don't be stupid." And so, I became part of that ecosystem and that enabled... my research, but it was actually another year… (before) I even started collecting data, so I was really embedded there.

And when I moved to this really small town where I am now… (I) got connected with a Black woman who was doing a food pantry, and I said, "Hey, can I come and distribute food for the food pantry every Tuesday, you know, from 3 to 5, and show up and just pass out boxes?" And I didn't ask anything of anybody, you know, like I was friendly, and it took about three months before the Black folks who were working in the food pantry were like, "Oh, Ann's here." And it was an okay thing. But I was I was completely okay with that because it was really just about being there in service to a belief that didn't need my recognition…

Which goes back to the advice that I would give is (that) our rewards are often not external, but they're internal, right? So, it's in service to other people, which is part of my theology, but also like just part of a truth about the world is that finding joy or cultivating joy. We really have to do that for ourselves because we can't lead other people to

> something we've never seen or experienced. And we have to have a joyful practice or a practice for ourselves that that is true before we can, you know, bring others into it. And if our work as white women is about anti-racism or disrupting systems of oppression, it can never be about the rewards that we get from that anyway. And that's often, for white women, a pitfall, because when we begin this work, we often get validated by people who are like, "Oh, yeah, you're a good white," and then you want to be a good white. And then you're like, oh, how can I prove to people I'm a good white? And really, the way you prove that you're a good white is by moving out of the center, but still pushing forward, and however you do that in service and with service to other people.

The group interview ended, and I had a pretty good grasp on who Ann was, but a few things surprised me. First, I was taken aback when she mentioned wanting to be a "good white" because I knew she had spoken so much about antiracism needing to be something you do for intrinsic reasons. This seemed so unlike her, and after reading the transcripts, I realized that I did not hear her accurately; she was talking about how tempting it was to think that way when people *first started* in antiracism. That made more sense. Finally, the most surprising thing was that this fierce, passionate woman was quiet in the group. She seemed thoughtful and serious, which she was before, but somehow this felt different. I thought maybe she was feeling ill (she was in the hospital not too long ago) or she was cautious of the people in the group, as if she did not trust them.

Individual Interview

Next came the individual interview, and I was excited to talk to Ann. Before we got started, I had to disclose my error in not hearing the entirety of her "good white" comment, and that was a little embarrassing. I then wanted to address her demeanor. I asked if she was feeling

ok because she seemed pretty different and quieter than usual. She had mentioned not trusting white people, so I wondered if she was reading the room to see if she could trust the group. She responded, “I was definitely reading the room. I'm always cautious in groups of people... I was listening. I mean, I'm a sociologist by trade so… I observe and listen.”

Ann asked how the study was going, and we spoke about that for a little while. I had mentioned that loss of relationships seemed to come up quite a bit so I asked if she had read that would happen as a part of this journey; she had not, but shared:

> I mean, I think… in the narrative, we have to be really careful about framing loss and grieving, or at least intentional about framing loss and grieving, because I'm thinking about myself and my own journey just recently… I'm just shifting into like a new era. It's like… my fourth lifetime kind of thing. But part of… what I'm giving up are things that were unhealthy for me and… I'm slowly growing into, you know, nurturing and tenderness and love in ways that are that our society doesn't afford us the ability to do.
>
> So, we're so mired in capitalism and this onslaught of productivity and all of these things, that our relationships with humans are fractured mostly. But I think one of the things, at least that has been in my experience, is the more intentional I became about my relationships with other people and both white and nonwhite, right, so like thinking about thinking about intentionality, and it's the refusal to bend... to society. So… I think the loss is actually that we are we are disconnecting from a system that's unhealthy for us. And so, we're actually gaining… we're actually creating health for ourselves and for others. You know, my children are healthier because of my orientations, regardless if that means that I have lost, is that they are stronger, and so that there's a protectiveness that… I'm growing for them and teaching them to resist our patterns of brutality. Because I don't

think that whiteness can be separated from brutality… It is the threat of violence and domination, but that isn't something that we have to carry. So, in rejecting the system of whiteness, rejecting the system of brutality, we actually are fomenting a different type of created white space... that resists brutality and domination. And so, there is loss, but there's so much gain, right… And It's... sad in that not everyone is ready to come with us.

I mean, it's kind of like… this would be a very crude analogy, but if you think about… I grew up with smokers. My mom was a smoker. You know, everybody that I knew smoked… but there was a time when people stopped smoking, like in the nineties and 2000s when it became kind of socially unacceptable to smoke. But if you were one of those early quitters, then you were always surrounded by a cloud of smoke, and you would have often avoided being in smoky places, because then you wanted to smoke too. But… you were like, "Oh, this is unhealthy. The smoke smells terrible... it gets in my clothes." But if I'm smoking, I can't smell the smoke. I can't tell that it's in my clothes in the same way as a nonsmoker can. And so, if you were one of those early nonsmokers, you would have avoided smoking culture, which took place in bars and in restaurants… But the gain from that is a healthier way of being. And now… most of us are nonsmoking, so now the person who is smoking is that anomaly that stinks so bad... (and) we can smell it from a mile off. And sometimes that's how I feel about racism, too, is that I can smell it, like even if… they smoked previously. That lingers on them, and then they come around us and I'm like, "Oh, God, I can... I smell you." Right? "I know who you are. (I) know what you've been doing," right? Because it's on your clothes, it's in your… manner. It's in the cough in your throat.

This was supposed to be a casual question before we got serious and started the interview. This is

one reason I love speaking with her. I then asked if anything surprised her in the group meeting, to which she said:

> This is something I learned in graduate school… where… I thought everybody would be gung-ho on race and justice… and they were not, and I was really surprised by that. So, I would jump out at the lead of every class discussion and try to like, this is where we're going, and this is what we're doing. And I ended up... getting beat up in these things because people would resist… whatever it was that I was doing… And it was explicit advice that I got from my advisor… to listen and… wait before speaking and then often to phrase or like think of things in a question or like in an offering. So... he really coached me in my discourse... in my engagement with other people. And so that is a practice I've learned. I've also, in studying whiteness, tried to be mindful of that first move and establishing yourself and how we name ourselves and what we have to claim or not claim. Yeah, so those are always thoughts in my mind.

I asked about her visual reaction to someone saying they felt seen by the group. She began:

> It's like seen by whom? Seen in what way? Right. Like… I feel like I'm in therapy right now... I would say that... I'm not looking in other white people to certify who I am… but I did remember having like a… rejection of that need for belonging. And so now I'm like psychoanalyzing myself to wonder why I would reject belonging. And... if I had followed that thought out. You're like with me in my head... If I follow up the thought of whether or not I reject belonging with white people, that's probably something I'm going to have to sit with. (She paused.) It's just… if I'm committed to the work and fostering relationships and doing things, I can't force other people to be in community with me.

> Right? But I have to show up and let myself be who I am, and then other people make the decision as to who I am with them. Right? At the foodbank... I'm there to serve, but… Black women don't have to accept me. Right? Like, I'm not doing it so that I come away with a lot more friends. Right? I'm doing it because sometimes I think the principles of which we adhere, and which we practice, it is often naming that truth. But as I'm narrating this to you, I'm like, well, damn, I wonder if I've just gotten into a place of, like, not self-castigation, but like am I withholding my connection from other people? And now you really got me wondering about that. I'm definitely going to have to take it up with my therapist.

She did share one of her struggles which involved responding to Black women with whom she disagreed:

> I am in an ideological, theoretical push and pull with my coworkers because they don't identify race as a social construction. They only think about it demographically and as an intrinsic part of being. So, they talk about race, as, you know, the number of Black students without thinking about systems of oppression... So, there's what feels to me incomplete understandings about the world… So, for instance, the Black woman calls herself a humanist. It's become really challenging for me to think about how as a white woman, when I'm in conversation or relationship with the Black woman who describes herself as a humanist, I also have to respect that my way is not the right way… even though I very strongly disagree with her.

Ann and I spoke about our experiences with abuse and how we took different routes in responding to that. She had previously mentioned reading Dr. King's work about white people needing empathy, so I asked if she felt these experiences provided more empathy for her to fight

against oppression. Her response was:

> Hmm... this is a great question. Let's see... I have thought about this and the connections. I do think that there's something in recognizing pain and systems of harm. And when we begin to heal, we become acutely aware of injury. It's the way that people who have been abused are sort of primed for fight or flight. And always being cautious… I have complex PTSD and I am always, almost always, in a sympathetic fight or flight stage… It's my natural resting state for my nervous system and… this is why I read people and read body language, because it's something that I have literally from birth to like… (I commented "it's survival"). Yeah, and so this could probably also explain why I don't connect easily to people...
>
> The other night I spoke up. I'm running for school board, and we had a forum, and I was, you know, I was just speaking, but people were like, "Oh, it's so brave." And "you were telling the truth." And I was like, "Yeah, because it's the truth." There's power in naming. Always. And so, when we name a thing, we are able to see it as it is. If it's something that causes us fear or harm or those types of... By naming it and identifying it, we recognize it. And then that changes our orientation to it. It actually gives us some power because there's a control in being able to assess and kind of evaluate, you know, and I think in our world, we need to do more explicit naming and framing because there's a... danger for us... in niceness, especially with white women, where we get caught up in trying to be nice about a thing.
>
> And I think so much of what's missing in our society is that ability for especially for white people to be accountable to systems of harm and to brutality. You know, so a story I tell when I teach undergrads is... let's say you and I were in a relationship, right,

and you cheat on me and I'm like, “Oh my God, you broke my heart.” And then you come back to me, and you say, “Well, you know… I want us to be together and can we go to the movies?” And I'm like, “Bitch, you cheated on me,” right? Like, we have to talk about this. Like...yes, we can go to the movies *and* you fucking cheated on me... There's injury and we have to be able to name and I need to understand from you, what led you, what broken parts of yourself, led you into that harm. Right? And recognition in order for me... to understand whether or not you're someone trustworthy and someone for me to move forward with because... there was injury. And again, that's another crude example, but, thinking about any system of harm and how we engage it and how it primes our bodies, and then what our... defense and orientation is to that. Yeah. There's a lot to be plumbed there.

I asked if she was always primed to fight or had to learn or work towards that as I did. My response was to freeze, be quiet, and take the abuse because it seemed to end quicker. She replied:

Oh, no. I was an aggressor from an early age. And I would fight neighborhood kids who were wrong or mean to other people, which is so bizarre, because I would… fight other people who were doing wrong, and I was doing wrong in fighting them. But… we call it… a right fighter. So, like as a kid, if a teacher said something that was unjust or that I felt didn't align with what should be, then I was always very quick to say, “No, this is wrong, and we should not do that…” And so... fighting for me is very much both a survival mechanism and a... and an adapted behavior… And it's much easier for me to engage with things that are not close to me.

So, I was in… a relationship with a narcissist for seven years and so... Incredibly

toxic, incredibly harmful... mentally abusive, emotionally abusive. Just horrible. And that relationship, I would try to stand up for myself, but I kept capitulating there. But like at my university, I'll email my dean and tell him that he does something racist, right? Like and that is easy for me to do. But in my interpersonal relationships, sometimes it is much more difficult for me… Because I have also learned growing up that my needs and well-being, those things didn't matter. So, I'm having to claim those for myself. And so interpersonally it's much more difficult.

We talked about how our abuse has trained us to read people. I did not feel I could explain it, but I was curious if she could. She tried:

So, I don't know how this would speak to Ann of five years ago, or six months ago, you know, we're always iterative. We're always developing. I always say that I'm in the process of becoming… Who I am now is just in this moment with my brain and my half a cup of coffee… but I'm in the process of this spiritual journey where I am really working on being rooted in my body, right? So, I do a lot of somatic therapy, I do a lot of meditation. I do a lot of mindful breathing and really trying to rest within my body. And what that means is because, you know, for 42 years, I've essentially been... My nervous system has been hijacked by trauma and so to get my body into a resting state is an everyday practice for me.

And that has been facilitated really by my development in my racial identity, because... I do believe that as humans, we have a deep need for belonging and understanding of self and others. And I'm now in my forties in this place within my life, but with also within my body where I'm experiencing safety. Okay. So, I have safety within my body, which means… I understand, I have more grace and recognition for, the

brokenness of our world. And so… because I am rooted and... don't have an emotional way response in the same way to those things... Like I will… get pissed off at people and I get irritated, and I get frustrated, you know, I'm not a saint and I'm definitely not a monk. But… it allows me to read people with grace and accept people with grace... that I think of everyone as... in the process of becoming… I have friends who are... safe, but they still make mistakes, and so do I. And so… how do I recognize people who are anti-racist… for me, it's… how much dexterity or ability do people have to reflect on themselves? Or humility. How much humility do people have? And I am more apt to move toward people who have more grace and humility for others.

Me walking with you in relationship often means like, how about how can we think about that in other ways? Or, you know, like challenge ourselves to do things... In the same way that I would speak to my kids, in the same way that my girlfriends speak to me, but that is emotional labor. And so… it is hard for me to do that with everyone. That's why my circles are small, because I can't do that kind of emotional labor on myself and with others… So, I definitely have friendships with people... with white women... who are not anti-racist. They may not be as intimate with me as, as I would be with others. Hmm. Daune, these are good questions, because now. Yeah. Now you've got me thinking about the intersections of all of these things... The body, racialized trauma, trauma, physical trauma...

I think where I was trying to signal about where I am in my life right now is I'm in this really, really deep… self-work where I'm trying to breathe and allow things to be... I've been reading a lot of Pema Chödrön… sort of Buddhist… work and thinking about suffering and these things and our orientation to those. And my therapist, we talk in terms

of there's so much struggle in the world that... we become battle weary… (but) I can't do the emotional battle of being angry anymore… So, when I start to get angry, my practice is to be like, why am I angry? What am I feeling? What is the thing? And then really working that out so that I can then go forward and name harm that I'm feeling or name something that I'm engaging.

I mentioned that I hope to develop that skill because it helps her. Then I asked if she ever got stuck in terms of not trusting herself around her friends of color:

Oh, yeah. Like I have vacillated wildly. I also deal with a lot of depression and anxiety, and so feeling inauthentic or feeling like someone is going to find me out, has always been a thing. And I… had to slowly learn to integrate all the parts of myself, and… when I embrace my own softness and vulnerabilities… when I am in my personhood, it's much easier for me to be like, yeah, I do this weird shit, you know, like I am corny and I have all of these human things that I do and that has become a healthier orientation for me... than before. And that's just a process of really being in our personhood… we have to resist the parts that that pull us from our personhood…

Howard Thurman, who's a Black theologist, spoke at Spelman College at a graduation. And he says... He was telling these Black women on… their graduation, you know, to really pay attention to the sound of the genuine within ourselves, you know, that rooted self of us... it's called *The Sound of the Genuine* or something to that effect, but there is something when we do justice work, that's a reclamation of our personhood, right? It's a reclamation of what's human in us because it's the reaching for others in their full selfhood and resisting the systems that pull us apart. Right… So that we can become curious about what pulls us apart and what pulls us together. And we can foster in

different ways those things between us, but we have to be… connected to ourselves. Because if I'm a disembodied head, right. And I'm angry or, you know, going about my day and I'm living in my head, I've disconnected from the ways that I that I feel and experience the world. But to integrate mind and body and then to move wholly. You know, W-H-O-L-Y but also H-O-L-Y. Right, because we're fully formed. I think that's a radical way of reengaging the self...

And Black feminists write about this all the time. There's Cole Riley, who was writing about this. She has a book called *This Here Flesh*. And of course, Audre Lorde and bell hooks. And the way, you know, Audre Lorde talks about rest as being radical and self-care and bell hooks writing about the love. And love, not as romantic love, but love as life, in connection with and for each other. There are Indigenous ways of being that white supremacy has done a really great job of destroying and separating us from… and because white supremacy is capitalism, white supremacy is domination. And those are the things that we have to reject. And to really be anti-racist, we have to pull back and say, well, what does love require of us in this moment for ourselves and for others? And what is a path from this place forward? So… I'm not even going to frame it that we have to defeat harm; It's that we have to grow love. And that's… anti-racism for me.

She shared some concepts that further testified to her deeper way of thinking about these things and intrigued me even more. She brought up the language of betweener and also mentioned Edward Soja, whom she said, "talks about a third space as a new created space," a more safe and beautiful place. She added:

And then there's also my friend Joy Howard... And so, context is really important here. Joy is a white woman married to a Black man and they have mixed race children is how

they identify. And Joy has written a lot of poetry that's really beautiful because she talks about how her children are part of a nation that she and her husband have passports to, but not citizenship. And so, they are able to visit, but they would never be native to the world of their children because they come from different lands...

And so, the idea of marronage… was the practice of people who were enslaved. So, like in eastern North Carolina, because we're surrounded by swamps, it was physically difficult, you know, in terms of distance and land travel to get to freedom, and so enslaved people in my region would go… into what was called the Dismal Swamp. Land that is largely uninhabitable because it was swamp land, but they would create free communities within that… And so they were hidden, but they were completely free because they weren't in an enslaved place… And so… marronage is that practice of creating a third space that's actually more representative of freedom, than freedom would have been, you know, under our guise of (the U.S.). So, they weren't in the north and they weren't in the enslaved south, but they were somewhere else that is free. And so that language of betweeners or like a fugitive state, is that we are resisting things.

That's why I (wanted) you to name it as a place of… creation, because we are… (in) the process of forming a new river or changing a river's path. If there's a rock put in the river, the river is forced to move around it… But that rock becomes its own site. And so, I'm… Just trying to help you think about the… process of becoming.

Ann seems to be quite advanced in terms of white identity. She has a unique combination of fierceness for the fight and a gentle and supportive presence for those who want to learn. She is honest and deeply reflective. She is willing to admit mistakes and critically think about why she does what she does or thinks what she thinks. She was so giving of herself during this

process. I felt pressure to make her story perfect; I admire her and want to do her justice. I feel very close to her and view her as a role model. I just really like her and love the dreamer in her. She is unique and much more than her abusive past, and remarkably, she still has this beautiful outlook on how things could/should be. Ann definitely has a complicated past, but she is very focused on the fight. That may be the best way to describe her. I usually get a safe or unsafe feeling about people, and in the case of Ann, I just felt safe. I know I have another antiracist ally and mentor in my corner.

CHAPTER 8: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This section will briefly discuss the shared understanding of what antiracism means to the participants in this study, and then I will review two major themes that were identified. While not exactly a theme, it is important to explain how the participants viewed antiracism as there were nuances within the group. Everyone agreed with Kathryn, who mentioned that antiracism was an active practice of undoing systems and structures of harm. Hannah added the importance of admitting faults, reflecting, and educating oneself. She also spoke about actively working to decenter herself. Rachel agreed and added that being a good listener and willing to be uncomfortable was also important. She felt the language one used provided insight into how far along someone was on their journey.

> I mean, I think the ideas of decentering whiteness or using white supremacy, not just talking about like the KKK or something, you know, like understanding that white supremacy is like this big thing that like operates even if we do nothing, even if we're not actively supporting it. It moves along on its own and we're actively supporting it in ways that we don't know and understand because of the way it's embedded in everything… (It's) historical in nature… like this is not a new thing, (and) understanding that… you as a white person can't get it all… because of who you are and your lived experience.

Ann reiterated the involvement of action. "It's also the embodiment of the practice so that it's not just something that we think about intellectually or theoretically, that it's a lived experience." She valued humility and having the dexterity to self-reflect as antiracist traits.

Themes

With these shared ideals in mind, I will now discuss the themes and subthemes and compare them to the literature discussed in chapter two. Themes and subthemes were identified from the participant's written reflections, the transcripts from the group and individual

interviews, and my memos after every interaction. Because every participant was an experienced researcher, I used that to my advantage and, in the final interview, asked them to report what they viewed as themes in this study. Once disclosed, I shared my identified themes and subthemes, which they confirmed. A couple of participants expanded on my themes which helped name the final two themes of being a betweener and becoming. Being a betweener had subthemes of the emotionality involved when experiencing feelings of isolation, not belonging, and not having a space to process the experiences or emotions without causing harm to friends of color. The subthemes of becoming included the imposter experience involved throughout the process and the idea that practice makes progress (as opposed to practice makes perfect). Every participant mentioned experiencing all themes and subthemes at some point during their commitment to antiracism.

Betweeners

Being a betweener was the language borrowed from one of the participants. Ann introduced the idea by explaining, "There's a really beautiful autoethnography by Diversy and Moreira called *Betweener Talk* and that helps me think about the ways that I sit between spaces" (when things feel challenging). Being a "betweener," in this sense, means living in between different worlds; our whiteness allows us access to ignorant comments or racist ideas that are normally hidden in interracial spaces, but our activism allows us to be included in spaces where we will never truly understand the depths of discrimination. Being a betweener is an extremely emotional experience with the negatives providing some of the lowest of the lows and the positives providing some of the highest highs. The range of these emotions is evident in the subthemes which include isolation, lacking a sense of belonging, and needing/wanting a space to process some of the emotions involved without harming people of color.

Isolation. All participants vocalized feeling isolated at some point. Kathryn said, "It's very isolating and I frequently feel disconnected from people." White classmates and professors had often let her down by not being "passionately committed." She was particularly frustrated with those who ignored the issues or were happy to go along with the status quo. People called her "aggressive" and "a white martyr." She was punished for not contributing "to a positive work environment" and told that "if she would just shut up (about racism), then things could actually progress." She tries to learn from these messages, but it is challenging not to feel isolated. She added:

> I struggle… Because I know a lot of Black women who I can go to, but I won't go to, frequently, because there's enough shit on their plate… And when I have in the past, I have often left feeling terrible because I've been burdening myself in that place. So, I have a therapist, and I seek out therapists who understand racial justice… I will try to go to my white women friends… and sometimes that works out and sometimes it doesn't… But finding the support that feels relevant and wholehearted has been a challenge for me unfortunately.

Hannah cosigned this statement:

> I have so many wonderful, supportive friends of color who are supportive in every sense of my life and who honestly I know could... go to, but in general, like I'm not going to lay this specific burden at their feet when they are actually enduring the racism.

Hannah felt the most challenging aspect of this journey has "been the relationships that have been strained or lost." She corrected herself at one point by saying that others have ruined the relationship with her, which felt more accurate and more comforting. She has been called "extreme" or "woke," and her father once sent her a text that said if she was not careful, then her

"extremist" views were going to push my whole family away.

> I often say, gosh, if I was doing this work as a missionary in another country, my parents would be so proud and supportive and like, wow, look at her go. And so, it's really hard to understand. I feel like a lot of the values that (they) were instilling in me are what bring me to this place. And yet now (they) seem to think that my work is an attack on (them). And I don't know… it's hard to reconcile… those pieces.

She said she and her father had made some progress, but their relationship has become pretty superficial, where they only talk about sports and barbeque.

When speaking about how the work felt very isolating, Rachel also mentioned her parents. She felt like her parents viewed issues of race as being political (but not in the same way that Rachel acknowledged that it *was* political *and* a matter of humanity).

> My family is very religious and I'm just like, I don't understand where this disconnect is; like how does this align with your religious beliefs? I don't understand how you can not care about this… not care about other people and the damage and harm and violent racial violence that is happening.

She reported feeling isolated from her family and said that she often had difficulty feeling close to them (and other people) who could not understand that this was an urgent issue. It was not that she was isolating herself from others who did not share her values, but that those people made her feel isolated and lonely.

In helping another participant, Ann spoke to the painfulness of the process. "Yeah. Well, it's really painful, you know, because I do think this work is alienating and isolating by design for white people." Similar to the other participants, Ann had experienced a loss of relationships with family and friends. However, she was mostly satisfied with these losses explaining, "I think

the loss is actually that we are disconnecting from a system that's unhealthy for us, and so we're actually gaining." She compared it to smoking being bad for us and how very few people choose to be around smoke now. There was one relationship that was very difficult for her to lose. She referred to it being "the hardest thing." A Black man she was dating broke up with her after he felt she crossed a line. She explained how that hurt:

> I grew up in a household where violence was the norm... So, for me, engaging with other people often feels like I get wounded, but I'm used to that kind of pain. I wasn't used to the heartbreak of it. And I think that's the thing that really got me.

She mentioned making other mistakes involving Black women and realizing that she had to work on herself because she had "injured people that I loved." All participants mentioned the pain of hurting loved ones who were Black, but Ann's description comparing the pain of abuse and the heartbreak of losing the man she loved seemed to be an emotional distinction; one that could easily result in feeling isolated. In this sense, feeling isolated and feeling like one does not belong can be interwoven. The feelings of not belonging can cause feelings of isolation.

Not Belonging. Ann did not feel she belonged in any space. The white crowds had judged her, resisted her, and called her names like "a bleeding heart" and an "N-word lover." She also did not exactly relate to Black people because she did not experience the same world as them. However, she felt very seen by the Black people at her predominantly Black church. She mentioned having a relationship of reciprocity and feeling that people there know who she is and what she values. However, she did report some challenges with both groups.

> I am in an ideological, theoretical push and pull with my coworkers (one Black woman and one white woman) because they don't identify race as a social construction. They only think about it demographically… So, there's what feels to me incomplete

understandings about the world."

She seems unsure how to proceed because she wants to honor this Black woman's view, but she disagrees with her. Ann can sometimes feel like she is "on" (or having to work) while speaking with ignorant white people:

> But for me, it's also like holding grace and inviting people in. So, it's always that juxtaposition, you know, it'd be really easy to just ignore people or dismiss them. But I'm really trying to wade in and hold out my hand and say, come over here and see that, you know, this is such a much better place to be and actually upholds the ideals that we have.

Ann wanted to point out that this was not about gaining friendships for her; it was about shared principles:

> I can't force other people to be in community with me, but I have to show up and I have to let myself be who I am, and then other people make the decision as to who I am with them.

Hannah shared similar experiences to being a betweener. She mentioned feeling unable to discuss interracial relationships with white friends and family. She seemed to want to keep her Black friends away from that environment. She also spoke about how she wanted to process feelings or emotions with her Black friends, but she needed to "make sure that they have the space and capacity." She actually said the words "I don't really belong in any space." "I need to be hyper-aware and sort of regulating myself in all of these different spaces in order to not cause harm."

Kathryn shared a similar viewpoint about not being able to fit in with white friends because they do not seem committed enough. This is noticeable in the first part of the following quote:

> When I do find people who are passionate about trying to undo all of the horrors that are what's going on, they are often people of color and so finding a space where I can show up in all of my flawed-ness as a white person and not cause potential harm, or you know, try not to, that feels comforting to me.

Rachel also related to the idea of being a betweener and implies that her environment can affect her ability to belong. She said she feels like she is around:

> A lot more like-minded people (right now), but in my job that I had before I went back to school, (I can) definitely relate to most of the time being the only (white) person in the room… who was willing to speak up.

She felt there was an expectation from both Black and white people to speak up. She spoke about how this sometimes adds a little pressure. She felt white people wanted her to speak up because she was more confident in how to address it, and Black people sometimes asked her to step in when they felt their voice wasn't being acknowledged. Rachel explained the feeling of pressure: "You want to deliver on that. But then you're still feeling these feelings of conflict… like you always need to ask like, hey, is this the time for your white… friend to say something?" These instances of feeling like they do not belong in any environment and feeling isolated resulted in a desire for space to process their experiences and emptions.

Space. The participants all expressed the need for a space to discuss issues in an environment where they felt they were not putting themselves in a position to cause harm to their friends of color (this study focuses on anti-Black racism, so their Black friends). There were many messages of not wanting to burden their Black friends with these conversations. Hannah explained:

> When some of the closest people in your life are the people who you don't want to hurt,

> and like, you don't want to be constantly telling your friends of color like, this is hard. I feel alone. I feel like I'm sacrificing these other relationships and like… I think I'm really screwing up. I feel shitty about myself.

The group supported her sentiments, and everyone seemed to agree that having a space to process these emotions was important.

Participants were vulnerable throughout the study and credited the nomination process as impacting their experience. Being nominated by someone they knew, who they deeply respected, and who they knew had high standards made them feel safe to be more vulnerable in this space. Hannah said, "I think that had that not been the case, I might have been more guarded in terms of coming to a specific event." There were many comments about feeling supported in this space and appreciating being able to speak openly without judgment. This was a more advanced group of committed antiracists, and they still felt there was a type of relief and comfort in hearing that other advanced people had made mistakes. This seemed to normalize the experience and helped people feel less alone.

Kathryn said, "it felt really good to be among like-minded and like-hearted folks." The group meeting provided some confidence for Kathryn. It normalized some of the feelings of imposter syndrome and provided some much-needed grace (at the time of our meeting, she was struggling with finding quality support on her antiracism journey).

Hannah pointed out that because white woman's tears can be painful to the Black community, we often need to compartmentalize our emotions and process them in a "different space than maybe where they are actually happening." "And so, my hope would be that this is a space where that would be okay" to acknowledge, express, and release those real emotions. Rachel enjoyed connecting with other people and had reached out to someone in the group to

have their own zoom meeting. She felt that having a space to gather could help with burnout. It "makes it feel a little bit more sustainable. And like, I wouldn't burn out as fast."

> It's mutually beneficial, it's reciprocal… (to) talk through these things… and expand your network of people that you can reach out to about some of these issues and experiences.

There were messages of support when people were feeling some imposter syndrome. Ann spoke about shifting the center of the bell curve and that "the boulder is not yours alone to carry." She also spoke about being a rock in the river and making the river change its path by standing solid in your ground / remaining in the fight for equality. She also shared advice from her therapist about not picking up the rope in the tug of war.

> Because you know where you stand and (should) just be rooted in where you are… And then just refuse to engage that fight so that you can remain embodied in your space, but also curious about what's happening around you.

Ann was more cautious with the group and said she is always that way in groups. At one point, she had mentioned not trusting white people. This seemed to take some people by surprise, but later, they admitted that they understood because they too had been burned in thinking they were in an antiracist space when they were not. Ann explained that she was cautious because "I was listening. I mean, I'm a sociologist by trade so… I observe and listen." By the end of the individual interview, Ann felt she needed to work with her therapist to see if she might be actively avoiding relationships with white women which I thought was interesting.

Relationship to the Literature. In comparing the theme of being a betweener to the literature in chapter two, this study both confirmed and challenged previous research. Chapter two discusses the emotionality experienced by undergraduates when learning about how white

people are complicit in reproducing racism. The participants in this study described some similarities to the undergraduates in that it was/is an emotional process, and they experienced a loss in relationships or quality of relationships. Chapter two also mentions the benefits of white affinity groups which include a sense of camaraderie, increased awareness, more meaningful conversations, and relief that others had similar experiences or made similar mistakes (Blitz & Kohl, 2012; Cullen, 2008; Goodman, 2019; Michael & Conger, 2009; Obear & Martinez, 2013; Tatum, 1992). Participants in this study enjoyed the focus group, felt it was a supportive environment, wanted to continue to meet, felt they learned from each other, and felt like the group was a great space to process emotions without harming people of color.

Aspects of this study that were not represented in the literature relate to the nuances of the adult experience compared to the undergraduate experience. Adults seemed to have more intense descriptions of lacking support, appeared more self-aware, and some even felt a sort of responsibility or pressure to teach other white people and defend people of color.

In addressing the intense descriptions, Kathryn said: “Finding the support that feels relevant and wholehearted has been a challenge for me, unfortunately.” Participants seemed to feel isolated and struggled with people who devalued their commitment or were satisfied with the way things were (or were unwilling to work towards change). This was especially painful and confusing when it involved family members who nurtured the values that support antiracism. Kathryn mentioned how it “broke” her, Ann and Hannah spoke about “heartbreak,” and Rachel questioned how ignoring the issues aligned with her family’s religious values. Many participants shed tears as they told these stories and the pain was evident. I see being a betweener as relating to the research on emotionality because it involves the painfulness of the process, the isolation, not belonging to any group, and needing a space to process without causing harm to loved ones

who are Black or people of color.

Adult participants in this study stressed their need for learning in community (Hill, 2022) and viewed Black women as their most valued support system. However, participants wanted space to process and reflect on their experiences without causing harm to these Black people whom they loved. Participants spoke about feeling the need to control their emotions around Black people and feeling strange processing those emotions with people in less privileged situations. It is almost as if they wanted to commiserate in white company while learning and being in community with Black people. One particularly challenging piece was when they felt burnt out or needed a break; should they be allowed to take a break? Hannah spoke to this when she said, “Like, none of the people I love and care about who are queer folks or people of color or whatever are getting to take a break from this.” These were the types of conversations they felt could harm their Black friends, but they wanted to interrogate with “critical” white friends as Ann specified. I had not read anything about the undergraduates wanting a space to process emotions without causing harm which made me think that adults may be more thoughtful, considerate, or aware.

Adult participants seemed more aware of white saviorism and the need to reflect on their own motives. Each one reflected on mistakes they had made and ways they could improve. It is possible that these vetted white women had a more advanced starting point than the undergraduates in previous research. Taylor, Marienau, and Fiddler (2000) highlight the wealth of experience between adults and younger learners, which may impact this awareness. Other scholars credit that the capacity for critical thinking is more advanced for adults (Vaske, 2001). Ann spoke about how she had previously read:

The works of Black authors, (but) it didn't make sense to me until probably within the

> last ten, ten years forward that I was really like, oh... like now it's starting to sit with me and I can see and understand and really unpack these things.

This comment really made me curious if I could have really understood the depths of what I know now at a younger age.

Adult participants also mentioned a certain pressure to teach, correct, or push white people to think about racism more deeply. Hannah said:

> I don't want to speak on behalf of the people of color in my life and I don't want to speak over them, but there are spaces of teaching with other white people that I can... try to lessen that burden.

Everyone mentioned a type of pressure to understand *when* they should speak up for their Black friend(s) or *if* they should stay quiet to avoid speaking *for* them. One participant mentioned Black women being more than capable. Kathryn said, “the Black women that I work with often are significantly more credentialed or intelligent than I am, or… definitely more wise.” There was intent to amplify Black voices or protect Black people in some way, but wanted permission from their Black friends first. Rachel wanted to:

> Deliver on that. But then you're still feeling these feelings of conflict of like, is this the time when I should step in or is this not the time when I should step in and then feeling like you always need to ask like, hey, is this time for your white friend to say something?

It is almost like Rachel wanted a secret signal, so she knew when it was appropriate to step in.

To summarize, being a betweener highlights the emotionality involved when experiencing feelings of isolation, not belonging, and not having a space to process the experiences or emotions without causing harm to Black friends or people of color. In this study, previous research is both supported and challenged. It amplifies research on the emotionality of

the process, the experience of losing relationships or having diminished, and white affinity groups having the potential to be a positive space to process emotions. This study challenges previous research by examining adults who are voluntarily committed to antiracism for a lifetime (rather than undergraduates taking a class one semester). The adults reported more intense descriptions of lacking support, an increased level of awareness or thoughtfulness, valuing community, and feeling a sense of pressure to teach other white people.

Becoming

The second theme of "becoming" was also named by the participants in this study. Ann and Kathryn had used the term in our individual interviews, and at that point, I had not heard it used in an antiracist context before. Hill (2022) would later align it to antiracism. Prior to that, I had only known the term because of Michelle Obama's (2021) book of the same name where she defines becoming as a "forward motion, a means of evolving, a way to reach continuously toward a better self" (p. 419). She explains:

> For me, becoming isn't about arriving somewhere or achieving a certain aim. I see it instead as forward motion, a means of evolving, a way to reach continuously toward a better self. The journey doesn't end. I became a mother, but I still have a lot to learn from and give to my children. I became a wife, but I continue to adapt to and be humbled by what it means to truly love and make a life with another person. I have become, by certain measures, a person of power, and yet there are moments still when I feel insecure or unheard. It's all a process, steps along a path. Becoming requires equal parts patience and rigor. Becoming is never giving up on the idea that there's more growing to be done (p. 419).

The only thing I would add is that becoming seems to involve levels of not only improving but

also a deeper understanding of how things could be with true liberation or living according to our values. Becoming seems synonymous with antiracism because of it being a lifelong process of working towards improvement; there is also beauty in the humanity and humility of the process. In this study, becoming includes the subthemes of having imposter syndrome throughout your experience and the idea that practice makes progress (not practice makes perfect, but practice makes progress) in this lifelong commitment. While there are definitely emotions experienced in this theme of becoming, the focus is more on continuing the process of evolving, rather than managing, reflecting, or processing the emotions.

Imposter Syndrome. Every participant spoke about experiencing imposter syndrome, or doubting themselves or their abilities, at several points on their antiracist journey. It was apparent throughout different stages of the antiracist journey and white identity.

For Kathryn, imposter syndrome showed up as her thinking: "I'm not enough… I'm not doing enough… I haven't read everything… I haven't shifted enough… Who am I to say this?" In speaking about the group, she said: "Honestly, I'm surprised… How everyone felt like we failed from time to time.… I think I may have… a lower self-regard than perhaps is justified." Rachel echoed Kathryn's sentiments about the group, saying it was reassuring that her feelings of inadequacy were common.

> I think this, like constant, imposter syndrome, and questioning, and… you just kind of get rendered immobile... like, what do I do now? How do I pursue this? Should I not be pursuing this?

Hannah adding a constant questioning of "Am I teaching the right way?" "How am I approaching this? And am I the right person in this space?" She said that for her, the challenges have:

> Not (been) one big thing as much as it's been sort of all these little, like, constant, sort of like missteps. It's like… ok, we fixed that, now where is the next place I'm going to screw up so I can fix that one?

Ann said she "vacillated wildly." She mentioned feeling inauthentic at points in her journey as well as feeling depression and anxiety. Her imposter syndrome seemed to mostly appear after making a mistake.

> This is what I've committed my life to and I'm fucking it up. Like, it was just this really, really hard time for me. And I was like, maybe I shouldn't be in the academy. Who am I to be doing this work? You know, like lots of questions like that.

Imposter syndrome was evident throughout the entire commitment to antiracism and is something that brought up feelings of inadequacy for all the participants; however, each one of them remained committed because quitting was not an option with which they were comfortable.

Practice Makes Progress. Another subtheme of becoming is the idea of improving over time or preventing some mistakes by learning from prior mistakes. I called this "practice makes progress" and want to stress that this is different from the phrase "practice makes perfect." There are no perfect antiracists, and this is lifelong work. There seemed to be a lot of reflection after making mistakes which helped people grow. People noticed that they were able to notice ways in which they were being problematic before causing harm to others, so in a way, they improved with time and prevented themselves from making similar mistakes.

Kathryn reflected on a situation that she felt was sincere but, in hindsight, made her realize she was acting as a white savior. She also spoke about how working in prisons forced her to confront some "racist assumptions and biases" that she held. She seemed to improve with time because she gave a recent example when a Black woman told Kathryn that some people may

have thought she was being a "Karen." Her reaction was much more relaxed, as she seemed to accept it, reflect, and think about how to better proceed in the future. She replied: "I get stuck… less and less. So, I almost have to be, like, empathetic with a previous version of myself." Rachel referred to her development as "baby steps." One of her first actions involved confronting her boss about needing to speak up about the racial trauma at the time. She then developed a program for antiracist training. She felt more comfortable speaking up in a classroom setting when a Black classmate was experiencing racism and having to read racist texts. With the help of another classmate, they got another class section with a different instructor (to avoid more trauma for the Black student at least).

> Because I had found my voice and was able to articulate some of these things in my previous work... it has allowed me to... feel more empowered and emboldened to speak up and speak out whenever I see those things happening.

Hannah noticed significant shifts in her understanding as a graduate assistant in a multicultural office. She saw the pain of microaggressions and the hypocrisy of using Black students to be sure diversity was represented in brochures:

> I felt embarrassed to be in this role and just now be seeing these deep systematic ways that my students were constantly being undermined and pushed to the side, except for when placing a spotlight on them was to the benefit of the institution.

She reflected on this and decided to commit to the following:

> constantly pushing myself to reevaluate the ways that I show up in spaces to try to be accountable for harm that I cause, to not speak over, or seek the spotlight in my work, but to amplify the work of the communities I want to support. These are all lessons I have learned and am learning from the missteps I make. Learning when I need

> to use my voice to speak up and when I need to be quiet and listen, learning how to take critique and feedback about the support I'm trying to offer and not get defensive… I continue to try to constantly think about what I have control over to create change and how I can support the work (that) people of color are already doing. What scholars am I amplifying in my research, writing, and syllabi? What policies can I work to change to make, what classroom or grading practice should I be changing in my own classroom?

Like the other participants, Ann also shared some learning experiences. For example, she shared an embarrassing moment when she had centered herself by telling a group of Black folks how her neighbors hated her because she was so vocal and had Black Lives Matter signs in her yard. A Black woman responded, "How do you think they feel about us?" She nodded in agreement and immediately pointed out that the woman was correct. Ann felt terrible for centering herself but wanted to name that there was always space for repair.

> I have to really just give myself the space to say, like, yeah, fucked that up. Just like I fuck up when I yell at my kids… but like my relationship with my kids isn't damaged because I yelled at them one night, you know, like there's always spaces for repair.

Comparing her centering of herself to a parenting mistake helped me understand. Both messing up as a parent and as a white person dedicated to antiracism feel terrible but can heal with time and proper effort. She mentioned a theme that she was noticing and wanted to provide some words of wisdom for everyone:

> You all made me think about how much of this work is failing forward. And because I'm really trying to offer a lot of grace for myself… is that we're in a space and place that's never been created before, and we really have no map for where we are or how we do this work... And so much of it is failing forward… We're always developing. I always say that

I'm in the process of becoming.

This is where the language of becoming was introduced. Ann and other participants had a more advanced notion of how they viewed the process of becoming. While they did experience imposter syndrome, they also pointed out what they gained. Hannah and Kathryn spoke about the rich and rewarding communities they witnessed and were invited into. According to Kathryn, these groups allowed people to be their authentic selves, nobody had to code switch, and everyone seemed more joyous, creative, and effective. She felt the idea of becoming helped her "radically accept the present… while still wanting to continue to improve."

Ann spent a lot of time explaining why the antiracist path was a "much better place to be and actually upholds the ideals that (most people) have." She wanted to be sure I was cautious about framing loss because we are losing something that is unhealthy, so it is not actually a loss:

> And so, there is loss, but there's so much gain, right? My children are healthier because of my orientations, regardless if that means that I have lost, is that they are stronger. Right? And there's a protectiveness that… I'm growing for them and teaching them to resist our patterns of brutality.

She used the smoker analogy, pointing out that smokers now seem to be an anomaly. People know it is unhealthy and quit. Ideally, this would also happen for those committed to antiracism; racists will become the anomaly. She then spoke about how "we have to resist the parts that pull us from our personhood." I took that to mean things that take us away from our values and who we are at our core.

> When we do justice work, that's a reclamation of our personhood, right? It's a reclamation of what's human in us because it's the reaching for others in their full selfhood and resisting the systems that pull us apart.

She spoke about how bell hooks wrote about love.

> And love, not as romantic love, but love as life, in connection with and for each other… And to really be anti-racist, we have to pull back and say, well, what does love require of us in this moment for ourselves and for others? And what is a path from this place forward… Who are we and how do we move forward in a path of love… So, I'm not even going to frame it... that we have to defeat harm. It's that we have to grow love.

She also introduced ideas like the third space and marronage. This was a really beautiful way to view the work and I could relate because that is what attracted me to the work of Matias (2016) who speaks about loving our students as our own. It aligned with my goal of improving the college-going experience for our students of color.

Relationship to the Literature. This advanced level of awareness made me think there may be more advanced stages of white identity for adults committed to this work voluntarily. white identity was discussed in chapter two. In its most basic form, the final stages of white identity involve taking responsibility, being open, actively confronting systemic racism, and having more authentic relationships with people of color (Helms, 1990; Okun, 2006; Tatum, 1992). While adults in this study do all of this in different ways, I had not read anything about the more advanced ideas of becoming in these identity models. I was grateful that participants in this study shared the ideas of creating a healthier life, love as a way forward, marronage, and creating a third space, and more free and open space. This all seemed more advanced than anything else I had read. It reminded me of discussions of liberation, but it seemed more possible or fruitful. Ann said:

> That's why I (wanted) you to name it as a place of… creation, because we are… (in) the process of forming a new river or changing a river's path. If there's a rock put in the river,

> the river is forced to move around it… But that rock becomes its own site. And so, I'm… Just trying to help you think about the… process of becoming.

Becoming may be a more advanced stage of white identity where there is more peace, liberation, and a healthier way of life.

Myisha T. Hill (2022) is a Black woman who, after the murder of George Floyd, created a presence on Instagram (called Check Your Privilege). She offers antiracist programming and has over 640,000 followers on her platform. She is the first author I have read to use the term becoming in this way. In her book, *Heal Your Way Forward*; she speaks to the isolating process and the need for healing to advance to a more liberating style of lifelong learning. She does not define becoming per se but includes it while explaining emotional vulnerability:

> It encompasses love, liberation, freedom, autonomy, empathy, self-compassion, and the practice of becoming. As you become a co-conspirator, you recognize that the master's tools no longer work for you, so you let go of isolation, perfectionism, and apathy and move into love, self-compassion, and empathy (p. 130-131).

This quote speaks to me as saying there is something beyond the final steps of white identity (responsibility, being open, actively confronting systemic racism, and having more authentic relationships with people of color). Hill (2022) speaks to the isolating process and highlights the need for healing in order to advance to a more liberating style of lifelong learning. I see her work aligning specifically with the adults in this study because while some of them seem to be aware of this advanced stage or healthier way of living, they are not quite there yet because they are still dealing with the "isolation" (subtheme of being a betweener) and "perfectionism" (which I am associating with imposter syndrome which is a subtheme of becoming). It seems participants could still work on moving "into love, self-compassion, and empathy" (p. 131). Becoming may

have the potential to be a more advanced stage of white identity where there is more peace, liberation, and a healthier way of life.

Summary

This chapter explained what antiracism meant to the participants and discussed two major themes of becoming and being a betweener. Being a betweener is an extremely emotional experience where the participants felt they were living in between different worlds; they were more advanced than their white friends but would never truly understand the world of their Black friends. Subthemes included isolation, lacking a sense of belonging, and needing/wanting a space to process some of the emotions involved without harming people of color. Participants supported some of the research on undergraduates (emotional and loss of relationships) but differed in that they seemed to have more intense descriptions of lacking support and seemed more thoughtful or self-aware than undergraduates.

The theme of becoming is "a means of evolving, a way to reach continuously toward a better self" (Obama, 2021, p.419) that involves a deeper understanding of how things could be with true liberation. Becoming had subthemes of imposter syndrome and practice makes progress. Imposter syndrome was experienced at every stage in the process, but participants remained committed because they could not envision stopping the fight for equality. Participants noticed an improvement over time which I called "practice makes progress," which helped them reduce harm by avoiding repeating mistakes. This progress may mean there is a possibility for more advanced stages of white identity that include more peace, liberation, and a healthier way of life. The next chapter provides summarizes this dissertation and concludes with implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION

This final chapter will provide a summary of this dissertation, discuss implications for research and those committing to antiracism, attend to the need for additional research, and conclude with some final thoughts.

Problem and Rationale

This research study focused on answering the question: "What do white women in higher education experience as they commit to antiracism?" Previous research on antiracism and white identity relies heavily on the experiences of undergraduates (Schooley et al., 2019). This study prioritizes the experiences of adults committed to this work voluntarily. I focus on women in higher education because they are considered more likely to relate to oppression and make up a large majority of the workforce interacting with college students daily (hooks, 2004; Love, 2019; Matias, 2016; Rothenberg, 2004). Research on traditionally marginalized or ignored student populations explains that white people, and white educators, do not understand the depth to which they cause harm (Kendi, 2017; Love, 2019). Love (2019) goes as far as to say that all white teachers need racial therapy to reduce this harm. While she does not define racial therapy, research points to the importance of self-reflection as one way to advance in antiracist practices (Hill, 2022; Jones, 2022; Love, 2019; Obear & Martinez, 2013; Ortega et al., 2018; Tatum, 1992). As a white educator who has interacted with thousands of students, listened to their stories, and heard the painful experience of continuous microaggressions, I can attest to the importance of reducing harm and improving the college experience for Black students and other traditionally ignored populations. William Smith (Smith et al., 2007) coined the phrase racial battle fatigue, and many scholars have addressed how these microaggressions lead to dangerous and permanent intergenerational health issues for Black students (Degruy-Leary, 1994; Love,

2019; Matias, 2016; Oluo, 2019; Smith et al., 2007). Ladson-Billings (2006) adds that we cannot address the racial achievement gap until we finally address these racist practices, which she calls the root of the problem.

With this dissertation, I attempt to amplify previous research from Black authors and hold white people, myself included, more accountable. Gillborn (2005) highlights how ignoring everyday acts of racism is more dangerous than the overt acts of hate from the KKK. I call this whiteness and define it as the tendency for white people to center white people (or white ways) as the norm, downplay racism or the depths of racism (Leonardo, 2009), and respond with emotionality when racism is discussed (Matias, 2016). Research on whiteness and white identity (Helms, 1990; Okun, 2006; Tatum, 1992) is clear that even as white people progress, they can quickly revert to less advanced ways of thinking mainly because the values of white supremacy are ingrained in us. Antiracism (Kendi, 2019) is a lifestyle of working towards equality and one way that white people can commit to learning, unlearning, and working towards change.

Overview of Methods

This study utilized narrative inquiry to share the experiences of four white women who work in higher education and were vetted by a popular Black antiracist educator as deeply committed to antiracism. After meeting the women, I asked them to participate in three data collection forms. First, they reflected on their experiences with race, racism, and antiracism from youth to adulthood. Then we met as a focus group to discuss these experiences, and finally, each participant was interviewed individually. I also kept memos of each interaction to provide additional data. After reading the reflections and the transcript from the focus group, some themes and subthemes that were identified. After carefully reviewing the themes, I noticed repetitive commonalities within the themes and labeled them as subthemes. Participants

confirmed these ideas in the individual interview and provided nuance to refine and name the themes and subthemes. All data were combined to create individual and chronological stories for my interactions with each participant.

Key Findings

Two significant themes characterized the experiences of the participants in this study. The first theme of being a betweener was a way for participants to navigate the challenging emotions they experienced. They felt they were living in between different worlds where they could no longer relate to the majority of their white friends, but understood they would never truly understand the world of their Black friends. Subthemes of being a betweener included isolation, lacking a sense of belonging, and needing/wanting a space to process some of the emotions involved without harming people of color. Every participant honored the fact that they would never be able to fully understand the Black experience due to their limited view of being a white person who has always lived a privileged life. They also spoke about receiving messages from family and friends that made them feel like they did not fit in with white people. Finding support on their antiracist journey was difficult because they did not want to cause harm to their Black support system, and their white support system was often disappointing or proved themselves unqualified. This made participants feel isolated during this process, and they felt they needed a space to process their role in reproducing racism without causing harm to their loved ones who are Black or less privileged than themselves.

The participants in this study both supported and contested research presented in chapter two. Participants described their experiences as an emotional process and they did experience a loss in relationships or quality of relationships. Participants saw the focus group as a great space to process emotions without harming people of color which supports research on white affinity

groups as well. Aspects of this study that were not represented in the literature relate to the nuances of the adult experience compared to the undergraduate experience. Adults seemed to have more intense descriptions of lacking support, appeared more self-aware, and some even felt a sort of responsibility or pressure to teach other white people and defend people of color.

The second theme that characterized the experiences of the participants in this study was becoming which is "a means of evolving, a way to reach continuously toward a better self" (Obama, 2021, p.419) that involves a deeper understanding of how things could be with true liberation. Becoming involves the subthemes of having imposter syndrome and improving with time (which I called practice makes progress (as opposed to practice makes perfect). Imposter syndrome was experienced at every stage in the process, but participants remained committed because they could not envision stopping the fight for equality. Similarly, everyone was able to reflect and see how they advanced with time (even after making mistakes that they felt awful about). These corrections helped them reduce harm by avoiding repetition of mistakes.

Becoming also involves a more advanced way of viewing the commitment to antiracism which includes more thought, dedication, and beliefs about how our lives improve with the liberation of others (of all). In this advanced stage, participants did not view the process of antiracism as having experienced loss but as gaining a healthier life, a better way forward, for themselves and their children. They spoke of creating a new way of living, a new space, one full of love and equality. They spoke of growing love and being a better ancestor for future generations. These more advanced ideas seemed to indicate that there may be more advanced stages of white identity that include more peace, liberation, and a healthier way of life. This would make sense because previous research focuses heavily on undergraduates and these participants are adults with more experience and more capacity for critical thinking. Participants

seemed to have more intense descriptions of lacking support, appeared more self-aware, and some even felt a sort of responsibility or pressure to teach other white people and defend people of color.

Recommendations for Committed Antiracists

Participants in this study were very vulnerable and shared their stories to normalize some of the more challenging experiences in the commitment to antiracism. While these white women all worked in higher education, some of the recommendations can be applied to all white people working in any field. It is important to recognize that some white people may just be starting their commitment to antiracism and others may have more experience. Antiracism involves a level of humility where even the most experienced person could benefit from revisiting this list to serve as a reminder to live in accordance with the values of antiracism. This list includes a combination of participants' recommendations and my reflections based on our experiences at this time. In this section, we are giving recommendations directly to the reader (most likely a white reader).

Here are some of the things participants either recommended or wished they had known earlier in their commitment to antiracism:

- Work: The commitment to antiracism is important work and hard work. You will make mistakes and that is ok. We learn from those mistakes. The goal is to reduce harm. Love (2019) talks about the importance of white people addressing this before they can truly love Black people (she says white educators should undergo racial therapy before teaching children of color).
- Emotionality: Everyone is different, but it is common to experience a wide range of emotions in the commitment to antiracism. Some participants felt extreme grief of losing

relationships and others were happier to have a more rewarding environment surrounding them. You may find comfort in reading the stories of others to normalize this experience (see chapters four through seven). You may even feel motivated or encouraged when you see how they have advanced on their journey (participants in this study said they benefitted from hearing the stories of other group members).

- Grief: Similar to the participants in this study, you may experience grief or disappointment in your white friends, family, or coworkers for things they say or do (or what they do not say or do). Hill (2022) believes grief can stunt our growth so we need to address that emotion. “If as a white person, you continue to deny the space for your grief on this journey, you will continue to perform, perpetuate, and polarize yourself in your soul’s work” (p. 50).
- Find Support: Most participants were in therapy and involved in antiracist groups or communities. One participant spoke about how this is an isolating process by design so we have to actively search out communities of support to remain living in alignment with our values.
- Honest Reflection: Participants in this study did a lot of self-reflection. Ann explained: “We also have to tell ourselves hard truths. Right? That... we are causing injury at times.” “I think that's sort of a necessary first stop, like in the journey of like acknowledging these things are harmful and problematic and I want to stop doing them. And I don't want to be seen as someone who is harmful. I want to be seen as someone who is trustworthy.”
- Read and Reflect: Hannah felt most white people did not understand how genuinely and slowly they should proceed with learning about antiracism: “So for me, it's more like the advice is like read as much as you can, learn as much as you can… There are so many

different types of resources that can help you." This dissertation's reference page is full of helpful resources. My mentors stressed the importance of understanding how whitewashed our history has been taught to us; Appendix A provides an overview of what I learned, but I recommend reading these authors on your own as you may have different takeaways than I did.

- Pay Black Educators: Hannah said: "You should not just walk in and introduce yourself to random Black people and make them teach you about racism." There are Black people who do this work and you can pay them for their services. I will share some of the Instagram profiles of people who have taught me: angeljonesphd, ckyourprivilege, arborandwood, thereclaimed, blairimani, nikolehannajones, berniceaking, laylafsaad, divestingfromwhiteness, carolinejsumlin, theantiblacknessreader, yari.mercedes, raquelmartinphd, liberation.lab, chrisemdin, theconsciouslee, lemmeeducateyou, callmeshivy. You can also search the phrase antiracism and find many other helpful accounts.
- Take Action: Ann said that antiracism "is the action. It's also the embodiment of the practice so that it's not just something that we think about intellectually or theoretically, that it's a lived experience for us, for me." We should learn all we can AND take action. I would love to take what I have learned and expand it to help more white educators commit to antiracism, stay committed, and create better campuses for our Black students and students from traditionally ignored backgrounds. To me, this would involve staying in the background to support the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion offices. If this is setting up chairs for an event or speaking to white people individually to invite them in, I am happy to do that for the cause.

- Intrinsic Values: Participants spoke about how we should be doing this work for intrinsic reasons, as opposed to doing the work to be considered "one of the good whites."
- Authentic Relationships: Hannah wanted to stress that we should do all of our learning and then let relationships form naturally. "And so my first advice would be like, do all of that (learning and being authentic) *and* be in community in places it feels natural like yes being can be like find places where community exists that you want to be a part of." She explains the intrinsic rewards that meant the most to her. "These beautiful communities that I was able to become a part of and create… are really what helped me learn and brought me joy. And these are like deep, deep friendships. People who I'm in group chat texts with where we talk every single day and travel the world together."
- Service and Joy: Ann valued the relationships that developed out of service. "That really resonates with me because I'm thinking about the times in my life that I have worked or aligned myself through service to others and those being some of the most rewarding relationships and communities that I've been a part of… But also like just part of a truth about the world is that finding joy or cultivating joy, we really have to do that for ourselves because we can't lead other people to something we've never seen or experienced… and so we have to, you know, we have to have a joyful practice or a practice for ourselves that that is true before we can, you know, bring others into it.
- Listen and Decenter Yourself: Rachel stressed the importance of listening: "Stepping back and listening, being an active listener and realizing that like this isn't about you… And… listening to understand where your place is and how that differs depending on where you are and what your setting is." "I think being very conscious of not centering yourself and just being a good listener and being willing to take a lot of feedback and feel

uncomfortable. Feeling uncomfortable isn't great, but it's like, you kind of always have to be uncomfortable in this work, you know?"

- Admitting Faults: Participants felt it was important to be willing to admit faults or that you were in the wrong. One person phrased it as: "How much dexterity or ability do people have to reflect on themselves? Or humility. How much humility do people have? And I am more apt to move toward people who have more grace and humility for others." Having humility was a trait that allowed this person to form more genuine relationships.
- Addressing Resistance: As you progress on your antiracism journey, you may find it difficult to be around people who disagree with you. People who disagree with antiracism are not always open to hearing what you have to say. Ann and I have some advice that may help. One thing that worked for me was to say something like "I used to think that too until I read this article about…" When I felt I needed to be more courageous, my therapist helped me develop this response: "I disagree, but you know already know that" (sometimes I would add "so I am curious why you brought that up."). Ann provided this advice that she got from my advisor "to listen and… wait before speaking and then often to phrase or think of things in a question or in an offering... he really coached me in my discourse... in my engagement with other people. And so that is a practice I've learned." She also shared advice from her therapist about not having to respond. Instead, you should "just be rooted in where you are… And then just refuse to engage that fight so that you can remain embodied in your space, but also curious about what's happening around you."

Reflecting on this study, I feel it is important to share three additional items about the research process itself. First, even vetted antiracists make mistakes. Second, our commitment to

antiracism should be apparent at all times. Finally, these participants were all white researchers so I think it is important to discuss harm reduction when conducting research interracially.

People committed to antiracism may feel a sense of comfort in knowing that these educated, more advanced, and vetted women made mistakes and struggled with imposter syndrome. These mistakes and experiences were not only mentioned throughout their stories but were also witnessed within the interviews as well. Early in the group interview, someone had referred to traditionally ignored populations as non-white, and we all (myself included) continued to use that phrase for the rest of the meeting. I do not know why I did not mention it at that moment, or why I repeated it at one point, but by not naming whom we were talking about and calling them "non-white," we inevitably centered whiteness, which we are trying to avoid in antiracism. I let participants know that I noticed this when we met in the individual interview and we all acknowledged needing to improve in that area.

Another important note is that it was unfortunately very difficult to recruit participants for this study. When I sought out white women who worked in higher education that were committed to antiracism, Dr. Jones and I were confident that we would find many people who fit this description. Between her extensive network of people working towards antiracism and both of our networks in the academic community, we felt confident this was an easy task. We were both surprised to learn that this was not the case. Dr. Jones mentioned this was interesting because it could mean that white women are not doing the work outside their commitments. Now, difficulty finding committed antiracists may be because everyone in higher education is being asked to do more with less time, but this could be an issue of antiracists who check out when the workday ends or when the diversity committee is not around to provide recognition. This implies that white women should make sure that they are committed to the work all of the

time, especially if they are educators who work in higher education because we lack that training. Chapter one speaks to the lack of training that college professors have in teaching diverse populations and how that can shock students when they get to college (DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2019). We should be proactive in harm reduction and attempt to change ourselves and our surroundings so our students are not exposed to racism or assimilating to white ways of being.

Finally, all of these participants were white researchers. The topic of reducing harm as a white researcher came up in our conversations so I would like to address this. If you are a white researcher studying race, it is imperative to study humanizing research that focuses on reducing harm and building relationships of mutual care and respect (Paris & Winn, 2013; Ventura & Wong, 2020). We have a moral duty to refuse participation in causing harm (Tuck, 2009; Ventura & Wong, 2020). Before conducting race-related research on traditionally ignored populations, you should self-reflect and consider all other possibilities. This is also inspired by Bettina Love (2019) and her recommendation for all white educators (read researchers) to undergo antiracist therapy, so they can genuinely help our Black students do more than just survive.

Future Research

Conducting this research has highlighted the need for additional research in three main areas of white identity, using expert nomination while studying sensitive topics, and more of a personal interest in survivors of abuse committed to antiracism.

One area that needs more attention is the possibility of advanced stages of white identity for adults committed to antiracism. With only four participants vetted as being more committed, it is possible that these advanced stages were only apparent in the people in this study. I am curious if the findings would be replicated with the analysis of a larger group of more committed

individuals. Having more advanced stages sounds promising, but it does not mean that white people in these more advanced stages are perfect. white identity is not a linear improvement model. You may be at the highest level in one situation and towards the bottom in another, but to acknowledge that there may be a higher level of advancement is pretty exciting (and something to work towards).

A second area of research involves the recruitment of participants. This area has two research questions. I've already mentioned that it was difficult to find participants for this study. Why was it so difficult to find participants who both worked in higher education and were committed to antiracism outside of higher education spaces (are white women in higher education not doing the work after hours)? The second question involved the nomination process. Does the expert nomination process allow for more efficient rapport between the researcher and participant? Participants in this study were nominated by Dr. Jones, who they respected and knew. While they did not know anyone else in the study, they knew Dr. Jones had high standards and this was a space in which they would be comfortable speaking freely and being vulnerable without that previously developed relationship. Participants reported disclosing information they may not have otherwise shared and felt a lot of trust in the group. In the first meeting they were sharing stories about racism, abuse, and sexual assault. The expert nomination process could be an effective way to build more efficient trust between the researcher and participant while studying sensitive issues like these.

Lastly, Ann and I had intense conversations about being survivors of abuse, what that taught us, and how that may be related to our commitment to antiracism (see chapter 7). We spoke about being able to read people because we have had to do that our entire lives to survive. We either feel safe or unsafe around people. I am curious how this may relate to the antiracist

experience. Are white survivors able to empathize more than other white non-survivors? Does this make them more likely to work towards antiracism? Are we more cautious in this work? Ann and I had different responses to abuse; she fought back, and I accepted it and isolated myself. Does this make antiracists who are survivors feel more isolated when around white people of harm, or are they encouraged to fight back? While we were only two people in a group of five, these questions intrigued me.

Conclusion

As an academic, I hope that this research, and the stories of these participants, will add depth to the current scholarship on the final stages of white identity. As an activist, I want to normalize the challenges that come with the commitment to antiracism in hopes that white people continue the fight for equality without pause. I believe white people working in education must do more to create a better educational experience for traditionally ignored populations, which will, in turn, create a better environment for everyone.

Self-Reflection

This dissertation has taught me that white people have a very limited view of race relations. We do not have a well-trained lens, and many of the things we do (without thinking) hurt our Black friends and friends of color. What if I told you that these friends may not even try to correct you because it is not worth their time? They are being too nice and avoid confrontation because you could be defensive or not even take time to correct it. The good news is that by committing to antiracism, you can learn from these experiences and improve. We are untrained in this area and must work hard to undo what society has reinforced. This takes practice, and this takes community. I struggled at parts of this journey. Being in community with those who share my values and hearing that they also experienced difficulties normalized the process and helped

me feel less alone in this work. This is important work. Our loved ones who are Black should not be dealing with this. I think of my Black teammates, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. I love these people, their families, and their babies, and I want to do everything I can to make the world a better place for those I love.

Lessons From Participants

The participants in this study have taught me that white women working towards antiracism really feel alone in this process (it was not just me). The focus group was a healing experience where I saw these strangers share an almost immediate bond and feel relief in hearing that others shared some of their experiences. It was stressed that white supremacy culture wants us to feel alone in this work. We get so many messages from white friends (or even family) calling us radical, extremist, or conspiracy theorists, that we need supportive relationships, and we need community to feel grounded in this work. The participants also taught me that we need to balance pushing ourselves but allow for lots of grace; we should just keep being a rock in the river. We also need to stay humble because, as advanced as we may be, we can easily slip back and make mistakes (and we will). Finally, this group provided me with hope. These advanced notions of becoming and creating a better life was a beautiful message that aligns with my goals of antiracism. I am so grateful to have met these amazing women.

For The Reader

In summarizing what I want the reader to know, it is important to name that we have the power to create change. Antiracism is about action. white supremacy culture wants us to believe we do not have that power and are alone in this journey. white people, myself included, must work hard to learn and unlearn. This includes pushing ourselves out of our comfort zones and intensely reflecting on why we do what we do and think what we think. We can process some of

this with our critical white friends; however, we should always be in community with Black antiracist educators because we have too limited of a view to trust that we will be able to learn without centering whiteness or white ways of being. Finally, if you are white, you probably live in a predominantly white neighborhood, and most of the people you invite to your house are white. If these white people are not actively doing the work to learn and unlearn, then the messages you hear may make you feel that you are different or alone. Please work to be in community so you do not have to feel alone. You can contact me or start with outstanding Black antiracist educators like Dr. Angel Jones or Myisha T. Hill. I am grateful for their work, their patience, and their brilliance!

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APPENDIX A: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Appendix A provides a brief overview of some of the things a committed antiracist may learn including the history of race, the role of immigrants in this history, and the hidden curriculum of whiteness which speaks to the coded languages used throughout history and today to prioritize whiteness.

History

Most people are usually aware of the terrors involving white people's involvement in Indigenous genocide and Black enslavement. However, critical scholars also point to the role of white people in creating and continuing the elitism that accompanies racism. Kendi (2017) and Painter (2010) highlight the concept of superiority originating in the church, where competing religions were criticized and considered inferior. They stress that this was reinforced in the schooling systems created to teach white men to become religious leaders. The authors recognize that the attention to teaching white men about their superiority reproduces white supremacist values. Kendi (2017) explained how white elites controlled education and pushed an agenda that enhanced white superiority and justified enslaving Black people. He discussed how the narratives transitioned from religious curse theorists (the belief that God was punishing evil people by giving them darker skin) to climate theorists (the belief that people with darker skin colors could lighten their skin to the preferred white color if they moved to a cooler climate), to natural slave theorists (the belief that it was natural for Black people to be enslaved), to polygenesis (the theory that different races came from different species), to social Darwinism (the justification being that Black people were stronger and therefore more fit for labor), to gene analysis which irrationally justified that the minimal "0.1% genetic difference between humans must be racial… Segregationists had produced new ideas to justify the inequities of every era" (p. 475). He highlighted the biases of *scientists* that published these ideas in respected (white) journals, further promoting the false and racist ideas of the superiority of white people and the inferiority of Black people.

Immigrants

Immigrants were also judged and placed into groups indicating their superiority or inferiority. Most immigrants with white skin were viewed as superior, and those deemed inferior suffered abuse (Kendi, 2017; Painter, 2010; Roediger, 2018). White people loved being associated with superiority and did not want to risk losing it; perhaps not surprisingly, some immigrants adopted racist ideas to further distance themselves from the inferior immigrant group (Kendi, 2017; Baldwin, 1984; Bell, 2005; hooks, 1992; Painter, 2010). Roediger (2018) explains that the US treated immigrants so poorly (pay differences, racist taunts, lynchings, etc.) that it was in their best interest to join in on the racism so that their group was less affected. The Irish, Jews, Italians, and low-income white people were considered part of the inferior groups (Kendi, 2017; Painter, 2010; Roediger, 2018). Bell (2005) highlighted the powerful nature of racism and the fear of association with the inferior group. He claims that most white people ignore what is in their best interest to keep that association with superiority. A historical example is the low-income white workers who would turn down paid jobs because the jobs were associated with inferior class and race (Bell, 2005; Roediger, 2018). The intersection of class and race strongly influenced the association with superiority and inferiority.

The desire to be associated with the upper class was evident not only in social situations

but also in the law and government. Immigrants had to prove in a court of law that they were white (Haney Lopez, 1997; Harris, 1993; Kendi, 2017; Roediger, 2018). This brought about many challenges and inconsistencies, mainly because being white was not a term that was defined; immigrants just had to prove that they were not Black (Kendi, 2017). The courts adopted several subjective standards to determine whiteness, like the one-drop rule, biased testing of white American ways of being, or simply relying on biased judgment sold as "common knowledge" as to who was considered white (Haney Lopez, 1997; Kendi, 2017). Scholars point to these subjective standards as the precursor for the courts and the government defending, supporting, and perpetuating white supremacy (Kendi, 2017; Painter, 2010).

Hidden Curriculum

Many authors speak to the coded language used by the courts and our government to promote racism and white supremacy (Omi & Winant, 2005; Anderson, 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2017; Leonardo, 2009). These code words help whiteness by maintaining the status quo, white privilege, and domination (Harris, 1993). Leonardo (2009) says we should focus on exposing the codes of white culture so we can unlearn and dismantle the hidden curriculum of whiteness that is all around us. The code words involve the rhetoric of reframing unacceptable terms to something more acceptable. For instance, politicians would claim to be tough on crime but only increase police presence in Black segregated neighborhoods. Anderson (2017) discusses Nixon's Southern strategy, which intentionally sought out the vote of racist Southerners by coding his racist stance on crime, education, and public housing with careful phrases not to appear racist. The author refers to this as legalized racial discrimination, and many scholars point to coded language to maintain inequities in schools, housing, employment, voter suppression, law and order rhetoric, and the prison pipeline we witness today (Painter, 2010; Kendi, 2017; Lipsitz, 2018). Lipsitz (2018) connects this to the present day citing a "disproportionate vulnerability to police stops, frisks, arrests, and killings, to mass incarceration and the collateral consequences of a criminal conviction" (p. xxvii).

This section highlighted historical events that shaped and maintained the social construct of race. I discussed various iterations and ways that society constructed race, how white people benefitted from this construction, and how race and racism have changed throughout time. All of this stresses the elitism and superiority that influence racism. It is essential to be aware of the history of race and racism, the poor treatment of immigrants, and the hidden curriculum of whiteness as we proceed on our antiracist journeys.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT SURVEY

The purpose of this study is to share the experiences of four white women who work in student-facing higher education positions and are deeply committed to antiracism. By sharing their stories, I hope to normalize their experiences so others do not feel as isolated and continue their commitment to antiracism.

Participants were emailed a list of possible meeting times and asked to complete this survey: https://forms.gle/BFLjW1zYEARfnZDAA.

Here is what participants will read when they access the survey:

> The purpose of this study is to share the experiences of white women who work in student-facing positions in higher education and are deeply committed to antiracism. You have been nominated by Dr. Angel Jones and her associates as someone who meets that description. I want to share your experiences so other white antiracists in training can relate to some aspect of what you have been through. In addition, I hope to normalize some of the struggles to encourage continued commitment to antiracism. If you are willing to participate, please complete this survey, and I will contact you shortly.
>
> Email
> Name
> Pronouns
> Phone number
> Do you identify as a white woman?
> Do you (or did you) work in a student-facing position in higher education? (Select other if you would like to explain)
> Current Institution
> Current job title
>
> Checkbox with Yes/No/Maybe responses:
> Have you experienced any of this while on your antiracist journey:
>
> - Dramatic change in racial thoughts, actions, and/or beliefs
> - Seeking therapy or self-awareness training or self-improvement or healing
> - Isolation or taking time away from others for a lengthy time (possibly months or years)
> - Attaining more education / doing research (formal or informal)
> - Doubting yourself or questioning superficial relationships
> - Lack of trust in self or others
> - Feeling deceived or angry about not learning about the true history
> - Less committed family or friends making you feel like you are crazy or radical
> - Reflection on higher education and systemic racism (maybe considered a possible career change)
> - Other experiences you are willing to share:
>
> Are you available to meet once to learn more about the study? After that, we will meet

once a week for three weeks (this will most likely be in September or October, but meeting dates are flexible - feel free to list when you can or cannot meet).

APPENDIX C: INTRODUCTORY MEETING

This was the script that I followed for each introductory meeting.

Hello! My name is Daune Rensing, and I am working on my dissertation for my Ph.D. I've been working with Dr. Jones for about a year, and she offered to lead a committee to find five white women who work in higher ed that she would qualify as "dedicated to antiracism."

Basically, I'm doing a qualitative study using narrative inquiry to share the stories of what adults experience while they voluntarily dedicate themselves to antiracism. I want to normalize the challenges so people at every stage of the process feel less alienated and are encouraged to stay in the fight.

The study has 3 parts (all virtual), starting with a written personal reflection of your experiences with race, racism, and antiracism throughout your life. This is inspired by Bettina Love who talks about educators needing deep reflection and racial therapy so as to reduce the harm to their students. I will send you questions/prompts to guide you. It doesn't have a maximum on pages or words, but it should have a minimum of at least 1000 words. You would have over two weeks to write this so you have time to think and reflect. I'm hoping to have this before we meet in October if possible.

The second part is a focus group to discuss experiences and discover if there are commonalities or unique experiences. This is scheduled for Thurs, Oct 13th from 11am-1230pm (EST).

The study will end with a 90-minute individual interview to ask any final questions and wrap things up.

Your identity will be masked, and if you do not want the others in the group to know who you are, I would just ask that you select a pseudonym/pen name for the zoom call.

If you agree to participate, I will send you the consent form and the instructions for the reflection as well. (Discuss reflection to see if they have any questions.)
Please feel free to contact me at any time and let me know if you have any questions.

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Reflections of White Women Committed to Antiracism
Researchers and Titles: Dr. John Dirkx, Professor; Daune Rensing, PhD student
Department and Institution: HALE in the College of Education at Michigan State University
This dissertation is being conducted by Daune Rensing under the supervision of Dr. John Dirkx at Michigan State University. If you have any questions, please contact Daune Rensing at dmr@msu.edu. Dr. John Dirkx may also be contacted at dirkx@msu.edu.

Brief Summary
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain the risks and benefits of participation including why you might or might not want to participate, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to discuss and ask the researcher any questions you may have.

This qualitative study will seek to share the in-depth stories of four white women who are deeply committed to antiracism. I am specifically interested in what the participants experience(d), the emotions involved, and how they navigate(d) and cope(d) with those emotions. I would like to invite you to this study because you have reported having some common experiences. If you agree to participate in this study, the extent of your participation would include writing an autobiography (or conducting this as an interview), one group interview, and one individual interview. These interviews would not exceed 90 minutes. The interviews will be transcribed, and you will have an opportunity to view the transcripts to make edits or corrections.

All participation is voluntary, meaning that there is no legal or formal obligation to participate. The risks are minimal in that I am not applying any intervention in this study, and your name will never be used. Only those of us in the group will know your name; otherwise, I will apply masking techniques to protect your identity. You are encouraged to sign into the Zoom meeting using your pseudonym. Similar to other antiracist groups, you may experience some discomfort as we continue to interrogate some of the struggles of this process. Please understand that I view this group as people who are working to improve the system and create change. I see the work as a vital step in the process and something that can normalize some of the hardships and help people feel less isolated. Regardless of your participation in my research, I am honored to have shared these conversations with you.

If you agree to participate, the interviews will be recorded, and all recordings will be stored in my password-protected computer. As soon as I have transcribed the recording, I will destroy the recordings and work only with the transcribed documents. I will code all the documents for data collection. As a reminder, your identity will be masked, but if there are parts of your story that you do not wish to have quoted, please let me know and we can refer to you by saying “there was one participant who said…”. Please also know that you may stop participation at any time without penalty or judgement.

Documentation of Informed consent.
Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____ _____

Signature Date

APPENDIX E: PROMPT FOR AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I will meet with participants to explain the study, sign the consent form, explain that they should log into the meetings using whatever pseudonym they would like to use, and introduce the autobiography portion. The purpose of this autobiography is to explore participants' lived experiences without the influence of group members or individuals. In theory, it serves as a form of racial therapy (Love, 2019) as they reflect on their experiences which will also be helpful because they are thinking about their experience before we meet. Once participants send me their autobiography, I will send them the introduction of this dissertation in case they are interested in reading that. I would offer this to build a bond with the participant, so they know I am not asking them to do something I have not done myself. Hopefully, this builds trust as we proceed throughout the study.

For the autobiography, participants will be guided by the following statement and only see the information below:

> The purpose of this reflection is to explore the lived experiences of participants. You are being asked to write a memo about your early experiences with race, racism, and antiracism until now. You will write about what led you to commit to antiracism and provide examples of any challenges you faced. I hope these stories can help other committed antiracists by normalizing some of the experiences that one may go through. I plan on sharing my reflection as well if you are interested. I can send that to you after I receive yours. The other participants will not see your story unless you share that on your own.
>
> You have three options to complete the reflection:
>
> 1. Write it.
> 2. Audio record it.
> 3. Meet with me to discuss it.
>
> In writing your reflection, please focus only on stories that relate to your views on race, racism, antiracism, or your journey as an antiracist ally, accomplice, or co-conspirator. The questions below are meant to guide your responses:
>
> - Are there any life experiences that offer insights into your views on race, racism, antiracism?
>   - Explain how your views may have changed throughout your childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.
>   - Research points to antiracists recalling the first time they noticed historically marginalized communities being treated differently. Have you experienced this? If so, please explain.
>   - If you have, in what ways have you experienced or witnessed oppression?
>   - How do your life experiences influence your thoughts on being an ally, accomplice, or co-conspirator in the fight against racism?
> - Explain the experiences that led you to learn about antiracism.
> - Explain a few of the more challenging things that you went through on your antiracism journey.
>   - What was the most challenging aspect for you?

- What were the emotions involved?

Your responses to some of these questions may overlap or not feel very clear and that is ok. This exercise is intended to assist your reflection of your journey towards antiracism, act as a form of antiracist therapy by analyzing your own experiences and prepare you for our conversations ahead. Everyone will have approximately ten days to complete this reflection, and while there is no maximum on the number of pages, reflections should be at least 1000 words. I look forward to reading your reflection!

NEXT STEPS:
Our group meeting will take place once I have the reflections. If you could get the reflection to me by Oct 7th, I would like to meet on Thursday, Oct 13th.

Please note that our group meeting will start with everyone introducing themselves and talking about what being antiracist means to them (in case you want to prepare ahead of time – I know some people do not like surprises).

APPENDIX F: PROTOCOL FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

The purpose of this focus group is to ask some broad questions regarding the four participants' experiences while committing to antiracism. I chose to do a focus group because participants may remember more events while hearing others speak, and they may tell their story differently in the presence of other people. There is also an element of camaraderie and healing in knowing others are not perfect or have struggled as we have.

The meeting should take about 90 minutes.

1. Welcome everyone! I know we have already met individually, but as a reminder, I am Daune Rensing and I want to thank you for your continued participation. The reflections were so insightful. Thank you for sharing those.
2. Before we get started, I have some basic guidelines for the group and then we will do some introductions:
    a. Because we are in a group, I cannot guarantee confidentiality today, but I ask that everyone keep the information shared to themselves. This means not sharing the identity of the attendees or what anybody else says within the group.
    b. Being here is voluntary and everybody has the right to pass on a question. There are no right or wrong answers.
    c. Throughout this entire process, I will not be using your real name but instead a pseudonym of your choosing. I will use all information to inform my conclusions but will not use your pseudonym if you do not want something tied to your story. For instance, if I did not want my abuse connected to my pseudonym, I would write that "one participant was abused."
    d. I would love for today to be very interactive, but sometimes it can be challenging if everyone is talking at once so just keep that in mind (I may ask you to repeat something if I cannot hear you).
    e. Is there anything else you'd like me to keep in mind during this process?
3. Ok, I've asked each of you to come prepared with a little statement about what antiracism means to you so let's have everyone introduce themselves and talk about what you've prepared.
4. Thank you! Out of curiosity, what made you all want to participate in this study?
5. I'm going to ask some questions that may have already been shared in your reflection, but it may bring up some conversations within the group.
6. What got you into antiracist work?
7. Explain your antiracist support system. (Who did you go to when you had questions or when you were feeling low? Who did you look to for support?)
8. What were the most challenging aspects for you (on your antiracism journey) and how did you cope?
9. What motivated you to stay in the journey despite these challenges?
10. What were some things that facilitated your growth?
11. What were the rewards, joys, or moments of excitement?
12. What advice do you have for those in similar situations on their antiracist journey?

Thank you for your participation. I will send you the transcript as soon as it is finished, and you

will have one week to make any necessary corrections or adjustments. Remember, I will use all information to analyze everything but will not use your pseudonym in referencing something that you do not want to be tied to your story. I can simply say that "one participant said…" if you prefer I not use your pseudonym. The final step is the individual interviews so I will see you then! See you at your final interview!

APPENDIX G: PROTOCOL FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

The purpose of this interview is to collect any additional data from the participant that has yet to be expressed. The following is a script from one of the individual interviews.

Thank you again for participating in this study. I have absolutely loved getting to know you! I've been so impressed with everyone and love the intentionality in the words people use and the recognition of privilege - it's been an honor to chat with you all.

(Here is where I usually complimented them specifically for something they added to the study.)

Today I have way too many questions - some of these responses may be short or may not have a response and that is fine too - I'm just getting a little background.

1. What you've thought of this process so far. How has this experience been for you? What did you think of the focus group?
2. In that focus group, was there anything you wanted to add or clarify that you felt you couldn't discuss with the group?
3. Was there anything that surprised you or did any topics bring up thoughts, feelings, or emotions that you were surprised about?
4. (Here is also where I asked specific questions to help clarify something they had said or to gain more knowledge about their story. Examples are below.)
    a. Can you explain your role more? What are your student interactions like (you seemed to light up when you spoke about your students)?
    b. You were quiet in the focus group but that doesn't seem to be your personality – what was happening for you?
    c. You nodded in these instances; were you agreeing with the person or showing your support?
    d. People seemed to talk about loss… Did you read beforehand that you would experience loss?
5. What qualities tell you that someone is committed to antiracism or on a similar level as you? (If short on time: I'll list what I thought about you all and you can add to it?)
    a. Maybe :
    b. More willing to admit faults or in the wrong (uncomfortable laughs at racist jokes, recognizing Black students feel used for diversity promos)
    c. Noticing poor messaging received from society
    d. Noticing privilege
    e. Aware of problematic ways of whitewashed history
    f. Understand our view is restricted
6. Were there any instances that made you feel stuck in your journey?
7. I want to focus on the why. What is your why - in terms of why do you fight for antiracism?

8. What themes did you notice in our conversations? I want to confirm I'm on the right track… (then I share what I felt the two main themes were):
    a. Practice makes progress – Constant imposter syndrome throughout the process and questioning role - how do I do this? Should I be doing this work? Progress is being made even if you can't recognize it. When you look back in time, you'll see how much you have grown.
    b. Betweeners – It is a painful / isolating process with little support from other white people. We don't belong in the crowds we used to hang out in (because we disagree with their lack of values or lack of sense of urgency. Family can be a large cause of pain - religion and values were mentioned because we are supposed to care for others (mention parents specifically). It's hard to feel close to people who don't care. At the same time, we don't fully belong in the communities we wish to fight for (because we will never know what it is truly like to experience their life). We also experience pain from knowing we cause harm to POC we love and respect (we have a limited/restricted view as a white person).
9. I want to point out some things that I noticed as a researcher. This is supposed to be an advanced group but we still:
    a. Centered whiteness by saying "not white" instead of BIPOC or POC.
    b. There were conversations of being a "good white" versus the work needing to be intrinsic (how does that relate / not contradict)
    c. We talked a lot about overt racism but didn't name that covert can be the most dangerous - microaggressions as death by a million tiny papercuts (it seemed we had an awareness of this but didn't name it)
    d. Nobody spoke up when a participant was talking her Black co-researcher disagreeing about how to proceed… Have you found yourself here where you and a colleague of color disagreed on research due to racial impact?
10. What aspects of your experiences would you want excluded or handled more subtly?
11. Any pseudonym preference or location?
12. Do you have any more to share that I haven't asked about or is there another question I should have asked?
13. Do you have interest in meeting as a group in the future? Are you ok if I share everyone's email so we can stay connected? Feel free to say no or think about it longer, but I thought I would ask since people seemed interested.

Thank you again for your participation! I will send you the transcripts once I complete them. You will have one week to make any necessary adjustments or corrections. As in the group interview, please let me know if you prefer I do not use your pseudonym and prefer I speak about your experience in general ("one participant said…").

I have a little gift I want to send to you. It will be emailed next week. There is a Black bookstore in town that only sells books written by Black authors, so I want to support that. You can buy a few books and pass them on or keep them for yourself. I thank you for your time and energy that

you put into this project. I think this will really help others on their antiracist journey. Please let me know if you are interested in working together on any antiracist projects or events. Thank you again!

APPENDIX H: EXAMPLE OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This chart shows the identified themes, descriptions of the themes, and examples of how each participant mentioned that theme.

Final Themes:	**Becoming**			**Betweener**	
Themes:	Imposter syndrome	Practice makes progress	Isolating	Lack of belonging	Space
Description:	insecurities mentioned	refleciton to improve	painful process	no longer fit in with white friends	need space to process
	mention imposter syndrome	recognize growth after mistakes	lack of support	never understand Black experience	odd processing with less privileged
	question their value	recognize healthier to live	diminished relationships	pressure to manage both groups	guilt for taking breaks
Examples:	I'm not enough/doing enough.	Realized she was being a white	Said it was very isolating.	Felt those interested in antiracism	Being with this group of women
K	I haven't shifted enough.	savior. Prison work forced her to	She was often called	were POC but couldn't be her	seemed to provide K with grace,
	Who am I to say this?	confront biases. Recovered fast	names and told to stop.	flawed self without harm.	confidence, and normalized feeling
		after compared to a Karen.			imposter syndrome.
R	Constant imposter syndrome	Mentioned taking baby steps.	Called out family for not	Mentioned feeling like the only	Felt connected to people in this
	and questioning what do I do	Found her voice and felt future	caring. "How does this	white person who would speak up	group and saw it as a way to
	now? How do I pursue this?	conversations were easier.	align with your religous	and felt pressure to deliver. Felt she	prevent burnout.
	Should I not be pursuing this?		beliefs?"	needed to ask if ok to speak up.	
H	Am I teaching the right way?	Seeing students be undermined	Mentioned "relationships	Can't discuss interracial relationship	Spoke about this being a place to
	Am I the right person in this	made her push to "reevaluate the	that have been strained or	with white friends and family. Said	share emotions and challenges of
	space?	ways that I show up in spaces."	lost" for doing this work.	she doesn't "belong in any space."	the work.
A	This is what I've committed	She mentioned centering herself,	It's really painful because	White people called her a bleeding	Provided support by speaking about
	my life to and I'm f-ing it up.	failing forward, and becoming	I do think this work is	heart and an N-word lover. She	shifting the center of the bell curve,
	Maybe I shouldn't be in the	which had many examples.	alienating and isolating by	mentioned not experiencing the	the boulder not being one persons to
	academy. Who am I to be		design for white people.	same world as Black people.	carry, being a rock in the river, and
	doing this work?				not picking up the rope.