

DIVESTING WHITE RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS: A RHETORIC OF COALITIONAL
WHITE RACIAL UN/LEARNING

By

Nicholas W Sanders

A DISSERTATION

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

Rhetoric and Writing – Doctor of Philosophy

2023

ABSTRACT

Divesting White Racial Consciousness: A Rhetoric of Coalitional White Racial Un/learning interrogates the literate and rhetorical dimensions of how white people with actionable commitments to racial justice disrupt white worldviews and practices to coalitionally advance antiracist futures. I use the term “un/learning” (punctuated with a forward slash to emphasize its dialogic and iterative nature) as a rhetorical and coalitional framework to describe how white people with actionable commitments to racial justice interrogate, deconstruct, and dismantle their socialization into white worldviews, policies, and practices.

Informed by anti-racist feminist, queer, and multimodal methodologies, I forward a pedagogical and administrative method to trace un/learning through key tenants of reflective, coalitional action, narrative reconstruction, and structural criticality. I designed what I coin a critical of whiteness multimodal methodology that offers a structured pedagogical experience for research partners to recover moments of un/learning and set goals for responsive coalitional action. I collected data through a three-phased process consisting of (1) artifact-based interviews, where research partners selected three material objects to story moments and reflections of their own un/learning, (2) multimodal artifact reconstructions, where partners create a multimodal artifact to reconstruct a key moment in their un/learning, and (3) and reflective interviews, where partners reflected on the meaning of their experiences of un/learning through an analysis of their multimodal artifact to articulate commitments for future coalitional action.

Findings illustrate (1) how research partners un/learn whiteness through literate acts that shift to embrace pluralistic consciousnesses, such as listening to decenter, interruption in spheres of influence, and reflective, coalitional action and (2) partners sought out concrete and abstract apprentices to develop, and eventually problematize, heuristics for white racial un/learning that

often moved from simplicity to complexity in their emerging orientations to antiracist knowledge and action.

I offer implications for administrative work that specifically onboards white people toward pluralistic worldviews and practices through an emphasis on complicating apprenticeship models and enacting literate and rhetorical practice. This study offers a framework to approach antiracist pedagogy, teacher development, and community engagement that centers criticality and invites students, faculty, and community members to develop critical habits to transform their practice. Such an analysis into un/learning can inform antiracist infrastructure- and capacity- building across higher education, and more specifically, in rhetoric and composition, that explicitly positions white people to develop un/learning infrastructures for divesting whiteness toward institutional transformation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No one accomplishes anything alone. I started my MA thesis acknowledgements with this quote from Leslie Knope. And, now, I feel this statement has only deepened and intensified. I'm leaving this dissertation, and this PhD, a different person than I was when I first moved to Lansing in 2018. I'm grateful for the community, friends, conversations, Zoom calls, coffee coworking sessions, and all the venting and dreaming along the way. Together, you all have not only helped me see this project through, but you've also challenged me to be a better researcher, teacher, leader, and, much more importantly, person. My heart is full of love and gratitude.

I have to start with thanking both my parents for their endless support, pushing me to see this PhD through, even when I was distracted and very tempted not to. Thanks for showing me how to listen, how to lead with heart and kindness, that your values are all that you have, and, most of all, that the only way to live in this world is to be, unapologetically, yourself. Mom, thanks for modeling feminist mentoring, advocacy, and teaching in action, always, and for your unabashed belief that literacy— and writing centers— can and do change the world. Dad, thanks for encouraging me to embrace curiosity and learning beyond the books, and, most of all, the power of a joke, a smile, and a quick comeback. I love you both. This PhD is as much for you as it is for me.

I'm thankful for my mentors, both on my dissertation committee and beyond it, who've led me to as grow as a scholar, a teacher, and a leader. To Bill: thank you for your guidance, for pushing me to make connections, and for reeling me in. To Trixie: thank you for showing me queer-feminist leadership at its finest, for checking in on me, for giving me the opportunities to lead, mentor, and build, for pushing me to see our work beyond the narrow stories we've been told. To April: I remember the conversation we had before I even applied to MSU, and each time

we've talked I felt an urgency for this work. You've taught me the power of self-care, of community, and of rethinking what we do and why. Thank you for leading to me Lansing— it has changed my life. To Julie: I've always felt seen and welcomed by you, from the moment I came to Lansing. Thanks for modeling inquiry as a practice of being. To Grace: thanks for your mentorship, your friendship, and teaching me long-term planning— I feel I've learned to administrate and program from the very best. To Karen: thanks for being my east coast solace in this midwestern place, for modeling, in word and action, accessibility, and for showing me new ways of thinking about WAC.

Of course, I've learned the most from my fellow grads who I admire so much. You've all heard and challenged me, and I'm thankful for it. Floyd, my academic partner in crime, I'm grateful for each conversation we have, from grad school to drag race. Your friendship has meant the world to me. Constance, thanks for always modeling care, thoughtfulness, for always hearing me fully (and I miss our cohort coworks and brunches so much). Bethany, each time I talk to you, I learn more about you. I admire you, your thoughtfulness, your questions, and your humor. I will miss our Olive Garden dates, and I am so lucky to have you as a friend. Amanda, thank you for coworking with me every Friday to get this project done, and for talking to me all about *National Treasure* films. I cannot wait to see the amazing things you do. Ja'La, you were my recruitment buddy when I first came to visit and have been a dear friend ever since. I miss working and laughing with you each week. Eve, thanks for welcoming me with an open heart to Lansing and WRAC. I've learned so much from you in all the spaces, from Beyond Insights to our antiracist pedagogy workshops. To Sharieka, Ruby, Stephanie, Tina: I am so lucky to be in community with each of you. I appreciate who you are, the work you do, your kindness, and I'm honored to be in community with you. To Echo: thanks for checking on me each day, listening

with full hearts, our Switch dates with Robbie and Bryce, and, especially, asking me all the hardest questions. I'm grateful, even 600 miles away, to have you as a best friend.

I'm thankful for all the places that have made me who I am— New York, Maine, Michigan. To friends I met at TRIO Upward Bound at SUNY Adirondack— Emily, Patrick, Kelsey, Chelsea — you've made a huge impact on me and my work (and I miss working with you all so much). To the writing center here at Michigan State— thank you for being a space where I could grow, laugh, and for all the popcorn. Thanks to the colleagues I've been able see grow and do great things— Colton, Aly, Justice, Bridget, Fatima, Savannah, and Stephen. I am rooting for you all! To the writing center at FMCC— thank you for showing me what I had to say mattered and for all the conversations with Mike, Courtney, Chris, Noah, and the laundry list of others. To Best Sellers Bookstore in Mason, where I wrote most of this dissertation, thanks for all the coffee, sandwiches, and conversation.

I'm thankful for the time, labor, and reflections of my seven research partners: Chris, Robert, Jane, Nicole, Miriam, Bianca, and Noah. Thank you for sharing your journeys with me, your fears and your hopes. I've not only learned so much about your un/learning, but I've been transformed by your vulnerability, reflections, and dreams, and I hope our field and institutions are too. Thank you.

Lastly, thanks to my partner Robbie for being my anchor, for listening to me read sections of my dissertation aloud and saying that it sounded good, even if it wasn't. The last thing I expected moving to Michigan was to find you— or as you would quickly correct to say you found me. Either way, I would not have gotten through this process without you. Thanks for believing in me, pushing me, humbling me, laughing with me, and making me whole. I love you, *gihiguma tika*, and I'm honored to grow with you.

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CHAPTER 1:
RADICAL IMAGININGS OF A DISCIPLINE NOT YET HERE:
WRITING STUDIES, WHITENESS, AND THE WORK AHEAD

We must imagine new worlds that transition ideologies and norms, so that no one sees Black people as murderers, or Brown people as terrorists and aliens, but all of us as potential cultural and economic innovators. This is a time-travel exercise for the heart. This is collaborative ideation—what are the ideas that will liberate all of us? **adrienne maree brown (2017) *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, pp. 18-19.**

Imagining is not merely looking or looking at; or is it taking oneself intact into the other. It is, for the purposes of the work, becoming.

Toni Morrison (1992) *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, p. 4.

This dissertation, I hope, can embrace what Lamar Johnson (2018), following Robin G. Kelley's (2003) work, the Black radical imagination, where "deep-seated love" shapes cultures "working toward liberation" where "teachers and students all have riots in their souls" (p. 121). Anchored in the Black radical tradition, radical imaginations dream toward illustrious futureworlds, beyond the current moment defined through violent interlocking systems of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, ableism, and so on. In adrienne maree brown's (2017) words above, this work requires time travel of the heart, towards a world we build together, where we are all liberated. Invoking radical imaginations means working consistently and concretely toward other worlds, by collaboratively ideating (brown, 2016), working toward accountable coalition (Walton et. al,

2019), and reimagining ourselves in pursuit of our collective responsibilities for justice (Johnson, 2017). In the words of abolitionist teacher-scholar Bettina Love (2019), imaginations are “not whimsical, unattainable daydreams, they are critical and imaginative dreams of collective liberation” (p. 101). Yet, as Ursula LeGuin (2004) reminds us, imaginations are dangerous. They’re subversive and provide grounds for hope, of creating desperately needed otherworlds. Imaginations are, as Morrison (1992) contends, a process of *becoming*.

Becoming, as a transformative practice, is at the heart of my project mapping white racial un/learning toward antiracist futures. As a queer white man who ostensibly benefits from whiteness, I am oriented to radical imaginations as a counter logic of white supremacy and one that dreams of collective liberation through a practice of love. Above, brown asks, “What are the ideas that will liberate all of us?” (p. 19). I might reply: the eradication of anti-Blackness, the dispossession, and de-credentialing of whiteness, a rewriting, and reconception of inherited narratives and practices that sustain historical and generational inequity. This radical imagination dreams forward to classrooms, institutions, and communities divested of whiteness, unapologetically centering Black and Queer futures. In this pursuit, we must work to co-make new worlds, to borrow from Maya Angelou and Eric Darnell Pritchard (2019), where we know better, and we do better.

Across this dissertation, I argue, following decades of calls by Black feminist activists and practitioners, that to imagine and enact these otherworlds, whiteness-- the structural valuation of white skin color that organizes modern society under global white supremacy (Leonardo, 2009, p. 92)-- must be divested by white people. The labor of antiracist structural dismantling cannot fall exclusively to our colleagues of Color, as it often does. In particular, I

frame divesting whiteness as a wicked un/learning problem,¹ thus a pedagogical, curricular, and administrative problem for writing and rhetoric studies. From this perspective, divesting whiteness must be considered a central disciplinary concern.

At the heart of this dissertation, then, is reckoning with and unsettling the dominant framing of whiteness both within and beyond the discipline of writing and rhetoric studies. This project seeks to (re)imagine pathways for dismantling and divesting whiteness, the racial frame and worldview of white supremacy, particularly by white people with actionable commitments to racial justice. I follow Black queer feminist analyses of the interlocking systems of gender, race, class, and dis/ability, among other structures of power, as a roadmap to dismantle white supremacy toward liberated futures.

In doing so, this transdisciplinary project critically examines the contexts and experiences that shape *white racial un/learning*. I use this term to describe how white people with actionable commitments to racial justice unlearn, deconstruct, and dismantle white worldviews, policies, and practices. Through a multiphased in-depth, multimodal critical whiteness interview methodology, I draw on central tenants from critical race theory, antiracist and multimodal pedagogies, and transformative learning studies to describe the myriad ways white people seek to un/learn whiteness in their personal and professional lives, not limited by profession, location, age, gender, or other identity categories. I am instead interested in contextually specific renderings of how white people who (1) identify as white, (2) are critical of their whiteness, (3) have a shift in their understandings of race, racism, and whiteness, and (4) can articulate actionable and concrete commitments to racial justice. By “actionable commitments to racial justice,” I follow Diab et al.’s (2012) heuristic for antiracist work to move

¹ Adapted from Rittle & Webber (1973)’s work on planning dilemmas, referring to complex ways problems cannot be easily solved, “only better or worse options” (p. 163)

from self-work to articulating commitments, and embracing dialectical thinking in engaging justice as a matter of habit. Actionable commitments to racial justice are articulated, enacted, and reflected to reckon with white supremacy in everyday practice and policy.

Acknowledging the wide range of contexts white people can un/learn and divest whiteness, and how they implicate and interact with other identity structures, my participants come from a variety of locations across the United States, including the American South, the Pacific Northwest, and the Midwest, and hail a variety of careers and professional work including governmental, non-profit, social work, and higher education careers. The concept of un/learning from two distinct perspectives: (1) un/learning as coalitional rhetorical action and (2) un/learning as challenging antiracist identification and apprenticeship.

First, research partners un/learn whiteness through literate acts that shift to embrace pluralistic consciousnesses, such as listening to decenter, interruption in spheres of influence, and reflective action. From this perspective, I examine the literate and rhetorical practices associated with un/learning, emphasizing that shifting worldviews implicate shifting practice. Such a coalitional model illustrates that research partners tend to move from internal interrogation of histories and participations to advocating change within their spheres of influence. This exploration of shifting habits elucidates how everyday literate practices that can guide the development of white antiracist consciousness.

Secondly, research partners demonstrate growing complexity in their orientations to antiracist knowledge. Partners sought out both concrete and abstract apprentices to develop, and eventually problematize, heuristics for white racial un/learning that often moved from simplicity to complexity in their emerging orientations to antiracist knowledge and action. research partners all selected one artifact written by a white person who engage racism critically in their lives in

scholarship, art, and activism. Partners often moved from simplistic schemata for antiracist action that prescriptively followed their apprentice toward more robust, complex, and flexible schemata for antiracist knowledge. This shift underscores how partners complicated relatively easy heuristics for antiracist action (e.g., often emphasizing a singular prescribed way to “get” antiracism) toward a more contextual orientation (e.g., reflexively responding and engaging in antiracist work based on context and needs).

This study offers a framework to approach antiracist pedagogy, teacher development, and community engagement that centers criticality and invites students, faculty, and community members to develop critical habits to transform their practice. My in-depth analysis of white people with actionable commitments to antiracism and racial justice invites us to reconsider the roles of materiality, regionality, emotionality, and onto-epistemology in divesting white racial consciousness: they call for interrogation of socialization, education, and un/learning; the structures that shape thought, reflection, and action; and the concrete implications for antiracist pedagogy, writing center/program administration, graduate student socialization, and faculty development. By examining the scenes, objects, and reflections of divesting whiteness toward radical antiracist ends, this dissertation forwards a rhetoric of white racial un/learning, offering an approach to understand how white people can restructure their worldviews, divest and un/learn whiteness, and coalitionally forward antiracist futures.

This introduction, in particular, sets the terms of this project by framing the divestment of whiteness as a disciplinary concern for writing and rhetoric studies. Through a theoretical foundation based in Black, queer feminisms, I illustrate that calls for divesting whiteness have been part and parcel of the discipline of rhetoric and writing studies for some time. I underscore that divesting whiteness is a disciplinary concern and has been for quite some time.

But first, entry points.

Entry Points

It is Spring 2015. I am nineteen years old, sitting in the writing center at Fulton-Montgomery Community College. This is my mom's writing center and has been since 2008. I sit on my phone, probably discreetly checking Grindr², and look up to a Black woman student entering the space. My mom is working with a student a few tables over. I can't remember with who or on what, exactly.

"Are you a tutor," she says, looking at me.

"Yeah," I say, "why don't you sit down and take out what you need help with." She sits and pulls out a literature essay assignment on *The Virgin Suicides* (Eugenides, 1993). It's for the second course in the general composition sequence. I notice green marks circling some grammatical mistakes on her draft. I look to her, "Peer review, eh?"

As we begin working through the essay, she is frustrated. She tells me how annoying and useless the course is. We clean up topic sentences and such. I remember how interesting her analysis was. As we work, I notice that her peer circled what I now recognize as habitual *be*, zero copula, and irregularized agreement (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 74), rhetorical and grammatical features of Black Language.

"Maybe," she tells me, "I should write more white."

We both are quiet.

I did not know how to respond, and I can't remember how that session ended or if she ever returned to the writing center. This moment set in motion a central learning about college writing and literacy. I began to realize that composition courses were not simply skill and

² A gay hookup social media application.

service-based courses, as they had been storied to me as a peer writing tutor. They were not the place to get the keys to the castle of higher education and, by extension, earn social mobility.

Instead, they propelled covert and overt racism. Even the prompt to correct grammar in a peer review, the legacies of literacy gatekeeping, particularly by white teachers, sustains itself.

I wondered, How could an open-access institution, such as a community college, so vehemently contradict claims of equity in the very practices of teachers and students alike?

I still wonder, but I know.

I credit this story as an early example of my awareness of the ways the teaching of writing is racially stratified and, itself a white supremacist project. This brief moment, and many others like it, represent one of my early entry points into the work that this dissertation engages. This was an important personal transformative moment for me. I began to understand literacy instruction in higher education as bound to gate-keeping practices, often perpetuated by white teachers, toward students of Color. I was implicated.

Another.

“At age 5, Tatiana is already enrolling in basic writing at Brick University,” my professor says.

It is Spring 2018. I sit in the last graduate seminar of my MA. It’s a research methodologies class, though it’s named something else. We, all white people, are discussing systems of literacy and access from a qualitative study by Anne Dyson (2013), where the language practices of Tatiana, a 5-year-old Black girl, quite literally are unheard by her white teachers. We are also looking at Mya Poe and colleagues (2014) disparate impact quantitative analysis of racialized enrollments of pre-credit basic writing classes. The results showed how

Brick City, the pseudonym of a university, disproportionally placed Black and Latinx students into their no-credit basic writing class, which merited legal recourse.

I think back to that student at FM. What's she up to now, I wonder. I think about how my AP Lit class not only got me out of basic writing but both Comp I and Comp II.

Back to the seminar. We are talking about the whiteness of higher education, and how pathways are determined. By design, the systems produce racialized outcomes. Inputs determine outputs. We pivot to thinking about Lee's (2013) study about gender and performance on national writing assessments. It showed that female-identifying students are more likely to score higher than their male-identifying counterparts.

"Think about it," he says. "Who do we socialize to like writing? Why do I give my daughter notebooks and their teachers compliment her handwriting? Who then becomes English majors, who enroll in graduate programs, teaching first-year writing? Who do these teachers reward? Compare the gender and racial demographics of the field. No reason to be surprised."

Positionality

These moments, and dozens of others, set the course for my guiding inquiry around the unlearning of whiteness and white racial divestment. These snapshots are foundational to my un/learning and my positionality that guides the decisions within this project. As a white queer teacher with commitments to antiracism, I continue to wonder what it means to understand the legacies of white supremacy, how white teachers are implicated in these legacies, and how to redress and reimagine the work of the discipline and education writ large. When examining the histories of our discipline and its practices, white writing teachers and administrators must

account for the ways the structures of white supremacy have shaped their/our bodies and practices and the profession of the teaching of writing writ large.

Further, these moments signal how my positionality shapes how I engage in this project, work toward coalitional goals, and participate in research. Like the scenes above, this project explores entryways for white people to reimagine ourselves, our commitments, and our practices in the pursuit of justice. These moments also underscore the messy, complex, and paradoxical nature of my positionality. As Rebecca Walton, Kristen R. Moore, and Natasha N. Jones (2019) noted, positionality “is a way of conceiving subjectivity that simultaneously accounts for the constraints and conditions of context while also allowing for an individual’s action and agency” (p. 63).

To engage in coalitional worldbuilding thoughtfully, ethically, and critically, positionality must be practiced to reflect on how systems of power shape individual action. In other words, by identifying the nexus of my identities, I draw attention to how systems of power have influenced how I navigate the world as a white-queer man, who benefits from white supremacy. Walton and colleagues (2019) describe positionality as a tool to reckon with the paradoxes contained in the historical and ideological constructions of identities. As they write, positionality “equips us to analyze the micro (i.e., the meaning of particular identity markers in particular combinations for a particular person within a particular context) within the macro-level social structure” (p. 66). In other words, positionality explain how our identities are shaped by systems of power and inform how we practice coalition as a methodology for social change.

Positionalities impact our worldviews, knowledge-making procedures, and so forth. Simply, how I understand who I am (and the experiences and social systems that forge who I am), not only informs what I know and how I move through the world but also shapes what

conversations I cannot speak on and what spaces I must not enter. Through this dissertation, I offer reflections on my positionality as a white person both committed to racial justice in pedagogy and policy, but further how it constrains my work as a white researcher studying whiteness. More specifically, I'm a white cisgender queer man, socialized through white supremacy and whiteness, a system and history I directly benefit from. I grew up and learned in predominantly white spaces, particularly in education. My parents are both working-class and college-educated: my mom is a community college writing center director, and my dad is a color engineer. My middle-class experiences compounded with my racial experiences to humanize my sexual identity. These intersections have afforded me the privilege of earning a funded graduate education. When I was 18, I came out as gay. Since 2020, I've been in a relationship with my partner, Robert, who is a Filipino man.

The positionality described here motivates the methodological and theoretical traditions I engage in. It also gives insight to my own journeys of un/learning, which demonstrates in shifting reading, writing, and thinking combinations, as I explicate in more depth in Chapter 3 for my research partners. Further, by focusing on Black queer feminisms as a theory and a method, this project also reflects my on-going un/learning. For instance, it emphasizes a shift in my research and writing practice to center those most impacted by systems of oppression. The concrete research practices are discussed in further detail in Chapter 2. Further, while this dissertation is not about my un/learning per se, I do hope that the vignettes and analysis provide cues to how this research project is part of my own un/learning, and how, through completing this project, I was challenged to re-understand my own un/learning.

Cruising Pro-Black Feminist Futures

Given my positionality as a white queer researcher with commitments to racial justice, I find it central to engage Black queer feminist scholars who theorize their experience at the structural intersections of anti-Black racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and dis/ability, among others. I find these frameworks integral to challenge structural inequity and focus on an analysis of anti-Blackness, since anti-Blackness is a global and cultural product of white supremacy. Thus, to disrupt these patterns across levels and domains, Black queer feminisms guide this project specifically. As a white researcher and scholar, I cannot be an expert in whiteness since I do not feel its generational, embodied, and psychosocial effects. It is therefore critical to follow the critique and interventions offered by Black queer feminists, especially in a study of white people by a white person.

Through this dissertation, I position Black queer feminisms as the North Star for divesting whiteness. Black queer feminist scholars and activists offer onto-epistemological frameworks that look toward radically transformed, pro-Black futures (Jones, Gonzales, & Haas, 2021). Black queer feminisms center the identities and experiences of Black women and Black queer people, shaped by interlocking structures of power, to work toward the destruction of oppressive systems to build better worlds. Functionally, Black queer feminisms:

- center the lived experiences and embodied knowledges of Black women and Black queer people as a logic of resistance, joy, and survival.
- provide essential critiques of social institutions, policies, identities, and actors that reproduce white supremacist, sexist, heteronormative, and ableist logics, policies, and values.

- work to build worlds not yet realized where oppressions have existed, but no longer exist, where the blueprints for Afrocentric queer-feminist futures are in the making in the present.
- Engage coalitional thinking to make change through collective action, positional awareness, and reflection.

Taken together, these moves offer, particularly given my positionalities, a heuristic for critique toward institutional and disciplinary transformation.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2017) describes Black feminism as “a rigorous love practice” set forth, in the ways we talk about it today, by the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977). “A Black Feminist Statement” richly captures the commitments to Black liberation, the value of Black women’s life, work, and happiness, and the specific position of Black women in a racist-sexist-classist-homophobic-ableist world, to transform it. The Combahee River Collective makes visible the ways Black feminism functions as a tool for political and social change, based on the lived experiences of Black women. Black feminists, they say,

are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based on the fact that major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions [for Black women’s] lives. As [B]lack women, we see [B]lack feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face. (Combahee River Collective, 1977, p. 232)

A cardinal assumption embedded in the statement is the acknowledgment that oppressions are linked, interlocking, and dynamic. Oppressions are not additive and discrete but are rather situated in, what Patricia Hill Collins (1990) has termed, a “matrix of domination.” As Collins

notes, identities are forged through hegemonic structural forces and the multiplicative relationships among (King 1988,) race *and* gender *and* class *and* disability. Famously, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined “intersectionality” to describe the ways interlocking and multiple social systems forge social identities, and their impacts, and how the “multidimensionality” (p. 139) of Black women’s experiences is reduced and ignored by “single axis” treatments of gender and race prevalent in law.

Through such a structural, multi-axis analysis of hegemonic power, Black queer feminisms have offered foundational theorizations of whiteness and white supremacy and the relationships among racial capitalism, hyper-patriarchy, heteronormativity, ableism, femme-phobia, and so on. Critically, Sara Ahmed (2004) has contended that any lineage of whiteness and white supremacy must be situated within the analysis of Black women’s lived experiences, who feel the visceral effects of whiteness (e.g., Lorde, 1984). Legal scholar Cheryl Harris (1993) has shown that whiteness, within an American legal historical framework, plays directly into a history of enslavement, anti-Blackness, and ownership. She argues that, in the eyes of U.S. law, whiteness functions as property. Because whiteness existed as a claim to freedom, status, and humanity, only predicated on the dehumanization of Blackness, whiteness as property reflects and protects the interests of white people socially and economically through the naturalization of whiteness as racelessness and as an inherent human. The power of whiteness as a codified “right” to property in a settler context, layered on a national context built on bondage, consistently reconstituted, and controlled the mode of racial production through claims of what ought to be considered real, true, and valid in legal contexts. As scholars in the Critical Race Theory (CRT) tradition of legal studies (Alexander, 2010; Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001) have demonstrated, critical investigations of the impact of whiteness and white

supremacy that proliferate into contemporary politics and legal procedures are critical to the work of dreaming and imagining liberated futures.

Such analytic schemas look toward the dismantling of the current status quo and imagine and work toward other worlds, often through maps, clues, and rituals embedded in the present. Social justice facilitator adrienne maree brown's work in *Emergent Strategy* (2017) and the Emergent Strategy Collective offers such a praxis. Following the Afrofuturist work of Octavia Butler, brown describes emergent strategies as an ethic and framework anchored in adaptive relationships, complexity, introspection, and collaboration that "leverage[s] relatively simple interactions to create complex patterns, systems, and transformations" (p. 24). Relatively small and adaptive practices can lead toward wide-scale, macro change and liberation. An example of a praxis akin to emergent strategy, drawing also from Black feminist thought, is la paperson's (2017)-- the avatar of K. Wang Yang-- *A Third University is Possible*. la paperson invites us to understand the decolonizing university, what hir³ calls "the third university," as already arrived, being made through the colonial institution. la paperson considers that there are agents, named scyborgs, who work to dismantle the colonial university toward decolonizing aims, through participation in the colonial university. Not an identity, but an agency of a structure and system, scyborgs are sites of colonial anxiety; they pick up the tools to seemingly support the values and missions of the university and yet do something more with them toward decolonial futures. Hir are "never a loyal colonist and can often be caught in the basement library, building the third world university" (p. 56).

As liberation frameworks, emergent strategies and scyborg theories insist that collaboration and coalition are central in enacting dreams of collective liberation. Coalitional

³ The "hir" pronoun is intentionally used in *A Third University Is Possible* to show that scyborgs are part of systems to change them.

thinking, a central corollary of Black feminist thought, insists that change-making is accomplished through collective action that is particularly responsive to action anchored in specific identities. Likewise, as technical communication scholars Moore, Walton, and Jones (2019) note, coalitions “can shift and change quickly and because they engage difference and different goals without rejecting them” (p. 135). Likewise, in our coalitional alliance model (Pouncil & Sanders, 2022), we show that the work of showing up for shared goals, especially in everyday moments, requires an awareness of positionality that leverages specific modes of engagement based on positional differences. Taken differently, through positional awareness, particular groups work toward the same goal (e.g., collective liberation), in distributed and decentralized ways. A historical example of coalition can be found in the politics and aim of the Combahee River Collective, where the collective would practice “interest convergence”⁴ with both Black men and white women. Through a reconstruction of identity, this provided these groups entryways into the broad struggles of the collective.

By framing Black queer feminism as a theoretical guide of this dissertation, several key practices and ideas emerge important for the current project: (1) emergent strategies as worldbuilding (e.g., leveraging small everyday actions for a widescale change); (2) coalitional thinking (e.g., building interest convergence across groups), and (3) intersectional positional awareness (e.g., critical reflection on constructed identities through unique intersections among systems of power).

⁴ Articulated by critical race theorist Derrick Ball (1980), interest convergence describes that racial justice is often used as a tool when it intersects with the material and political interests of white people. The Combahee River Collective used interest convergence to guide their coalitional work— finding shared interest with different groups of people, such as Black men and white women, that would advance their own cause. As a tactic, interest convergence shows how groups of people may find shared, though not fully aligned, politics for their organizing work.

Concretely, the Black feminist thought leaders surveyed here provide grounding for the current project in a variety of ways. First, a Black feminist orientation to white racial un/learning calls for intersectionality and positionality as a key practice in understanding coalition, and how disparate groups of people come to their work together toward change. Second, micro-actions can move toward transformed worlds, though those actions look different based on specific positionalities. Within the context of a study of white racial unlearning, these contributions not only frame methodological, theoretical, and historical dimensions of the project; they also insist that any investigation into white antiracism must critically follow Black queer feminisms.

Divesting Whiteness and Un/learning: Foundations and Key Terms

In his book, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, Black studies historian George Lipsitz (2006) notes that white people are, both individually and structurally, encouraged to maintain whiteness in politics, education, life decisions, employment, and so forth. Per Lipsitz, whiteness is an investment into the status quo, where white people continue to “buy in” to its political, social, and emotional regimes, revealing the complex ways socialization through white supremacy seeks to maintain social and political fictions of white supremacy and superiority. For example, after *Brown v. Board of Education*, which established racial segregation in education as unconstitutional in the United States, generational and historical structures of racial inequity became reified in politics of redlining, public funding, and so forth. Constructions of “good” schools (e.g., white, affluent schools) and “bad” schools (e.g., racially diverse and often under-resourced schools) maintain racial inequity through the white imagination that becomes enacted in policies such as redlining. Reactions to affirmative action by white people as evidence of “reverse racism” signals the ways white youth reconstruct and protect whiteness (access

Trainor, 2008), often by inverting narratives of the past toward a complete disavowal of ongoing structural racism.

The social order of white supremacy, “the racial contract” as Charles Mills (1999) calls it, is not simply emplaced but rather complexly and meticulously maintained even as the many faces of white supremacy transmogrify over time. As Lipsitz (2006) writes:

The possessive investment in whiteness is a matter of power, not simply of prejudice. Whiteness is more a condition than a color. It is a structured advantage that is impersonal, institutional, collective, and cumulative. Like all forms of racism, the possessive investment in whiteness exaggerates small differences in appearance to create large differences in condition. It concerns property as well as pigment, assets as well as attitudes. (p. viii)

Lipsitz’s conceptual metaphor casting whiteness as an investment is theoretically productive, linking histories of conquest, colonialism, and late-stage capitalism as driving forces for white supremacy’s omnipresence in the United States contexts. Moreover, the investment metaphor disentangles individual agency from collective agency, illustrating that white supremacy is much more than the imagined construction of a few bad outliers. While investing in whiteness is not monolithic for all white people, it does helpfully emphasize the structural as produced through the individual. The violence of whiteness continues because individual actors create and enact policies that protect the value of whiteness at the deliberate expense of people of color.

Given this understanding of whiteness, I feel it important to distinguish some key terms. Scholars have long described whiteness as distinct from, yet informed by white supremacy, and different still from white people. To clarify:

- **white supremacy** should be understood as the political and economic systems (Mills, 1998) that indenture people into logics, policies, laws, and institutions that valorize whiteness as “the mythic norm” (Lorde 1984, p. 116).
- **whiteness** is inherited by these laws, institutions, and histories that enable people with white skin to navigate them with relative ease, accumulate generational wealth, and are often placed in positions of power.
- **white people** occupy whiteness through socialization in white supremacy systems and voluntarily participate in sustaining whiteness and white supremacy.

It is key to note that these terms, and that whiteness, white supremacy, and white people, while linked, are not synonymous. Their definitions, and the relationships among them, imply a particular onto-epistemology for white people. Specifically, an underlying theory of agency underscores that while whiteness and white supremacy are structurally and individually maintained systems of domination, it is not fatalistic: white people, even when socialized through a simulacrum of whiteness, have agency to disrupt their socializations for justice.

Alternatively, because whiteness is an investment, a buying into a worldview, reality, and dispositions of the status quo, it also can be divested by white people. Specifically, **divesting whiteness** recognizes that there is no such thing as “good white people.” Instead, it realizes that all white people benefit and perpetuate histories of white supremacy, describing the myriad of ways white people can deconstruct and dismantle white-centered policies, practices, beliefs, and values. Divesting whiteness occurs through learning, unlearning, and action that humanizes Blackness. Divesting whiteness compels white people to recognize that they are socialized into white supremacy and that socialization can be disrupted and dismantled. While there are no easy

guidebooks or templates for divesting whiteness, it often entails a shift in the understanding of the world and your place in it. Divesting whiteness requires:

- Developing critical understandings of yourself as a white person, the histories it implicates, and the consequences for Black people it has in your life.
- Un/learn from the histories, theories, and experiences of Black people while not placing more emotional and intellectual labor on Black people.
- Pay Black people for their work, labor, and education.
- Materially and economically advocate for and invest in pro-Black leadership, policies, and knowledge.
- Work with other white people to unpack the meaning and consequences of whiteness and white supremacy.
- Articulate actionable and concrete commitments to racial justice following Black activists, educators, and theorists.⁵

While this list is not exhaustive, it represents a shift in onto-epistemology from protecting whiteness to challenging it. Divesting whiteness requires ongoing reflective action that intentionally and materially challenges structures of white supremacy. While divesting and un/learning are linked, they are certainly not the same thing. While un/learning may lead to divestment, un/learning is not *ipso facto* divestment. In other words, un/learning— the challenging of white worldviews and policy through enacting coalition— is an important step toward divestment.

⁵ This paragraph and the one before have been adapted from a short-video entitled “[Decentering and Divesting Whiteness](#)” I wrote and recorded as part of *Bias Reduction in Medicine-Leadership: Developing an Antiracist Praxis for Confronting and Reducing Racism and Anti-Blackness in Hospital Leadership* series

In this dissertation, I focus specifically on un/learning as rhetorical and literate action that provides a variety of pathways for eventual divestment. I focus on un/learning to honestly show how un/learning impacts daily action, that may (or may not) eventually lead to divestment. Further, I did not want to position any authority in naming divestment, particularly as a white person who doesn't feel the full effects of whiteness. In this way, I do not claim white racial divestment because of my positionality, while realizing that un/learning is a key part of the long-term goal of antiracist work. I felt, also, claiming divestment reinscribes the "feel good white person" narrative that does not correspond with measurable antiracist action.

Locating and Critiquing Whiteness Studies

Emerging from Critical Race Theory (CRT) during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Ball, 1992; Crenshaw, 1989; Harris, 1993), critical whiteness studies (CWS) developed as an interdisciplinary field focused on critically analyzing the structures and identities of whiteness. Peggy McIntosh's (1992) often quoted and critiqued piece "The Invisible Knapsack" reflects, by and large, much of the contributions of whiteness studies around white privilege. The story it tells is relatively linear: white people are unaware of their participation in white supremacy and therefore we need to think more about our privileges, the assets we carry with us in our "invisible knapsacks." Foundational scholars in the field of whiteness studies, such as Ruth Frankenberg (1993) and David Roediger (1991), center a white epistemology to capture how white people became white and their awareness of their whiteness. In years since, scholars have used whiteness studies as a framework to analyze white people's learning about racism, particularly in the field of education (Lensmire et al., 2013; McIntyre, 1997).

Like CRT, CWS does not signify a single theory, method, or discipline, but vaguely participates in analyzing whiteness for supposed antiracist disruption. While CWS is certainly

important to this dissertation project focusing on the ways white people with commitments to racial justice seek to divest whiteness, this project is not fully allied to CWS for several reasons.

First, many of the central claims in the genealogy critical whiteness studies offer a neoliberal mythology around “good white people” and thus erroneously conflate racial awareness with antiracist epistemology. This critique is certainly not new. Sarah Ahmed’s (2004) essay “Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism” argues that whiteness studies inflicts a kind of narcissism by attempting to render whiteness visible when “whiteness is only invisible to those who inhabit it” (p. 1). The catering to whiteness, and white epistemology, is evidenced by the variety of declarations that whiteness studies scholars make, such as: *I must be seen as white; I am racist; I am ashamed of my racism; racist people are ignorant*. These declarations are not radical antiracist actions and instead are evidence of a non-performance, saturated by liberal “good white people” discourse.

The intended outcome of these “declarations,” or what Diab and colleagues (2016) call “confessional narratives” (p. 20), protect white people's feelings and imply antiracist action from a discursive performance. As if to say, “I am white and therefore I am a good white person who *gets it*.” Such framing, Ahmed argues, implies that the action of the speech act necessitates antiracist performance. It, Ahmed contends, does not. Relatedly, as Diab et al. (2016) note, “there is nothing inherent in these narratives that leads narrators and interlocutors from narration to transformation, from conjecture to policy making, from problem-posing to solidarity-building” (p. 22).

Such foci on white racial awareness signals a conflation between conceptual learning represented in “confessional” or “declarations” and antiracist praxis. Ahmed writes, “Studying whiteness can involve the claiming of a privileged white identity as the subject who knows. My

argument suggests that we cannot simply unlearn privilege when the cultures in which learning take place are shaped by privilege” (para. 40). The epistemology of whiteness is well documented here, as learning about concepts of whiteness does not necessarily correspond to an embodied, antiracist knowledge. Indeed, the re-centering and re-turning to white subjectivity in CWS functionally demonstrates how beholden whiteness studies is to white epistemology characterized by “individualism, competition, positivism, rationality, logic, and objectivity; scientism; and dualism” (Paxton, 2010). These structures ultimately undercut racial justice initiatives, because of the narcissism of whiteness embedded in white epistemological commonplaces.

CWS’s entanglement to white epistemology and, by extension, the stagnation of coalitional racial justice participates actively in sustaining white supremacy and anti-Blackness. Cheryl Matias and Colleen Boucher (2021) have called to reframe critical whiteness studies to a critical study of whiteness and return to criticality that particularly decenters white epistemology in whiteness studies and better captures the effects of white people’s worldviews, actions, and identities on Black communities. They forward a framework with three central claims for what they coin as a “Black whiteness approach” (p. 3):

1. Avoid drawing from a white epistemological standpoint
2. Give scholars of color their due
3. Go beyond white racial epiphanies (p. 3)

In many ways, such a critical study of whiteness focuses on what’s at stake in the divestment of whiteness by white people, and the harm that whiteness causes to Black people. Disrupting the “knapsack phenomenon” (Matias and Boucher, 2022, p. 3) and the non-performatives of declarations can better address the urgency of divesting whiteness, moving CWS away from self-

adulation (Yancy, 2008). In many ways, Matias and Boucher answer Ahmed's critique and, in particular, center Black epistemology in the anchoring points for the study of whiteness. Ahmed contends that whiteness studies must be in direct conversation with Black feminist foremothers who have critiqued whiteness and called for coalition to transform the world.

The critiques of critical whiteness studies surveyed above demonstrate that CWS struggles to substantiate the antiracist projects of Black liberation. Locating CWS within this series of tensions-- between white narcissism and anti-Blackness, learning and embodiment, and declaration and action -- is key for both the methodological decisions discussed in Chapter 2 and the theoretical framing below. Instead of explicating findings about white racial learning from whiteness studies, given the reasons outlined above, I focus on the learning mechanisms of whiteness from Black feminist critiques of social, historical, and political structures, and those scholars who directly engage in these conversations. Secondly, these critiques of the field are integral to recognizing that conceptual awareness of whiteness theories does not necessarily translate into antiracist action. This tension informs the current study by insisting on (a) recentring Black experiences and epistemologies in both research design and delivery and (b) insisting on rigor in the study of un/learning and realizing embodied un/learning is critical to the work of divesting whiteness.

Entry Point: The Language Statement

I am standing in front of the writing center staff leading a professional development activity on language and white supremacy. It's part of our writing center's newly codified language justice policy, following a legacy of Black scholars' activism for challenging white discursive policy over the last half-century. At its core, the statement challenges the idea that a single "standard" English is the only communicative norm welcome in the academy. This policy

seeks to champion racial and gender justice by recognizing and honoring the multiple languages, pronouns, and identities of today's students, inviting a reconsideration of how teachers, curricula, and policy privilege standard conventions that gatekeep low-income, first-generation, multilingual, and students of color.

Floyd, Stephanie, and I developed a curriculum for our staff for close to 100 undergraduate and graduate students. We're drawing on *English With an Accent* (2012), which Dr. Baker-Bell used in her Black Language course Floyd and I both took the semester before.

We're talking about language ideology— how social institutions reassert dominant ways of valuing white-centered ideas. The conversation goes to white supremacy.

“But is it white supremacy to write professionally?” one of the graduate students asks, “I am just trying to understand.”

I'm annoyed, but I take the question in earnest. We're talking about structural phenomena that the writing center needs to disrupt. I think they're listening. Later on, they tell us that they've changed the way they grade.

It's at this moment, I came to realize what we were asking for was more than a simple reframing of the relationships between language and power; instead, it meant an unraveling of our teaching and tutoring practice, our identities as “good writers” and “helpers” that directly reckoned with our socialization into white supremacy. What the language statement represented was a challenge for white people who have benefitted from notions of the standard and whiteness, who were realizing, possibly for the first time, were implicated in linguistic violence.

From this reflection, I wanted to, for my dissertation, better understand this process of un/learning so that I could accurately onboard people, in particular white people, into justice-centered work. I thought the context was specific because what was at stake was an unraveling of

the white paradigm so critical to un/learning. In other words, the language statement was a place where I realized, as a teacher, that what is needed is spaces for un/learning to redress the harm of white-centered practices. I wanted to know what that process could look like.

Divesting Whiteness as a Disciplinary Concern

Given the experiential and theoretical traditions I honor above, I join a chorus of scholars calling for writing and rhetoric studies to interrogate, reckon, and divest the legacies of white supremacy. I argue here that the field has delivered consistent calls to dismantle whiteness over the last half-century. As an enduring critique of disciplinary racism, Carmen Kynard (2015) has called writing and rhetoric scholars to interrogate the taken-for-granted values of the field saturated by white supremacy. In her article “Teaching While Black,” Kynard (2015) critiques the field’s misplaced emphasis on racial progress, analyzing the “tangled webs of authorizing, credentialing, and sanctioning” (p. 2) where faculty and students of Color must navigate white spaces, theories, and institutions that are physically and symbolically violent. She writes,

Racism, institutional and structural, is not about some kind of general and generic racially divided world somewhere out there over the rainbow. There is never any moment when racism is subtle or exists as some kind of fine mist that is out there but that I cannot fully see on campus. We need to stop talking about racism and institutions this way in our writing and to our students. Oppression could never work if it were invisible, unarticulated, or unfelt by those it targets” (p. 9)

Given this, she calls for the field to pay attention to the local instantiations of white supremacy:

We need what LaNita Jacobs-Huey has described as the natives “gazing and talking back” in ways that explicitly interrogate the daily operation of white supremacy in our field and on our campuses rather than more performances of psychologically-internalized

black pain for the white gaze (a practice that garners white attention and consumption, but never social change). I am not talking to or about those scholars seeking celebrity status, acceptance, or more face-time; this is work that requires you to make people uncomfortable. Some folk gon need to get called out. (p. 14)

Foundationally, Kynard links the histories of white supremacy to the work of the field, as an everyday occurrence. Following Sylvia Wynter (1994), she calls that whiteness and white supremacy is a social fact of the discipline and must be interrogated and dismantled. Kynard's call, though not the first, and certainly not the last, reveals an important narrative of divestment in the discipline, in our classrooms, scholarship, conferences, mentoring politics, and so forth.

Situating the field's reproduction of whiteness requires scholars and practitioners alike to recognize that whiteness is an investment for white people, and, for writing and rhetoric studies, implicates a history of control and normativity. Timothy Barnett's (2000) call to better understand whiteness within English studies interrogates the multicultural education movement during the 1960s and 1970s at the University of Michigan and University of Washington. Developing AnaLouise Keating's (1995) work on deconstructing race in literary studies, Barnett shows how central practices of English studies, particularly those based on "particular forms of rationality" (p. 11) common in close reading, text selection, and pedagogical commonplace, recenter understandings of whiteness *vis-a-vis* appropriateness and emotional control. "It is important," Barnett urges of white writing teachers, "to locate our own roles in relation to 'whiteness' ... Instructors need to examine with students the ways 'whiteness' relates to linguistic and material power in ways that do not shy away from the personal... [to] convey the political and discursive nature of identity" (p. 33). This analysis of whiteness within the English

classroom signals an early consideration of divesting whiteness, or at the very least, recognizing whiteness and its effects in the English classroom.⁶

Barnett's observation and invitation to white teachers is complicated by historical and theoretical white supremacist structures the discipline invests in. Foundationally, Toni Morrison's (1992) *Playing in the Dark* argues that whiteness is intensely embedded in constructions of American literature and was unable to extricate racial hauntings in its contemporary politics. More recently, in rhetorical studies, Darrell Wanzer-Serrano (2019) argues that historical structures of rhetoric studies "have privileged white methods, white theories, white voices, and (at the end of the day) white able-bodied cisgender men" (p. 470) which reassert white normativity, thus ensuring an underrepresentation of scholars of color. He continues, "The cost of living near the House of Rhetoric is erasure of ourselves, which only further underscores the need for a wholistic antiracist reexamination of rhetorical studies" (p. 471). Such an antiracist intervention within rhetorical studies, he notes, requires either leaving 'rhetoric' behind or fighting against the "modern, Western, colonial, anti-Black, racist structuration of rhetorical studies" (p. 471). Antiracist intervention(s) into rhetoric's structures invites a conversation about the divestment of whiteness as a structural codification of its disciplinary work. As Lipsitz (2006) demonstrates, whiteness is an investment sustained by individual and collective action. Antiracist interventions into disciplinary structures require a challenge to the very architecture of our disciplinary work. Further, Barnett's critique of

⁶ Concerns around the issues of whiteness described by Barnett threads complex conversations around "race" in literary history and criticism. Scholars like Toni Morrison, Zora Neal Hurston, Henry Louis Gates contend that white male gaze constituted and reified "Americanness" through anti-Black literary functions to "articulate and imaginatively act out the forbidden in American culture" (Morrison, 1992, p. 66), including stereotype economy, dehistoricization, and fetishization.

whiteness in English studies reveals contemporary and long-standing conversations of divesting whiteness as a critical juncture for rhetoric and composition, in the pursuit of antiracist futures.

These calls for white racial divestment toward antiracist disciplinary futures are certainly not new. Critiques of “whiteness” and “white supremacy” sprinkle the pages of flagship rhetoric and composition journals since at least the 1960s. For example, James Sledd’s (1969) article aptly titled “Bi-dialectism: The Linguistics of White Supremacy,” interrogated bi-dialect language pedagogies as a racist production, “initiating children into the world of hypercorrection, insecurity, and ‘linguistic self-hatred’” (p. 1309). Analogously, Smitherman’s (1995) history of language politics and pedagogies in *College Composition and Communication*, illustrates that, from the inception of the discipline, scholars have fiercely debated language pedagogies, particularly as they intersect with issues of race, power, and identity. Situated at the height of the twentieth-century civil rights movement, Ernece B. Kelly’s (1968) moving call, after the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., asks, familiarly, why the lack of Black representation at the CCCC convention. Simultaneously, she urges her white colleagues to divest whiteness and anti-Blackness in themselves, students, and colleagues. As she says,

Others of you must work to understand the terrible depth of the racism that rages through this land, and must find out where it has touched you. It’s imperative-- if it’s not too late-- that you work, really work to undo the damage you have done in trying to reshape the Black student in your own image.

Even now, perhaps those of you who do not teach Black students can influence the biased thinking of your white students, your white colleagues. And I say perhaps only because it may be too late for them too. (p. 107)

In the vein of Kelly's beautiful call of composition teachers, years later, Frederick Stern's (1974) piece "Black Lit., White Crit?" in the context of literary criticism, offers a progressive portrait of positionality and call for coalition for antiracist aims. As he notes, "[the white critic's] responsibility is to win his own people-- the white, racist world-- to understanding of racism and its role in *our* lives" (654) to "reduce the racism which has profoundly damaged our vision" (p. 658). Notably, across these scholars during the 1960s and 1970s, deep understandings of positionality and white racism, both on the streets and in classrooms, served as a springboard into disciplinary calls to understand racism, dismantle white supremacy, and divest whiteness.

It is difficult to discuss calls to divest whiteness and antiracism in the discipline without understanding the key roles of language justice. Foundationally, the 1974 resolution *Students' Right to Their Own Language*, affirms "students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language," (p. 19) thereby challenging deficit frames often applied to multilingual students. Indeed, *Students' Rights* may also be read as a call for white racial divestment in English departments, around values and attitudes around language. As the statement reads,

We have also taught, many of us, as though the 'English of educated speakers,' the language used by those in power in the community, had an inherent advantage over other dialects as a means of expressing thought or emotion, conveying information, or analyzing concepts. We need to discover whether our attitudes toward "educated English" are based on some inherent superiority of the dialect or on the social prestige of those who use it. We need to ask ourselves whether our rejection of students who do not adopt the dialect most familiar to us is based on any real merit in our dialect or whether we are actually rejecting the students themselves, rejecting them because of their racial, social, and cultural origins. (CCCC Language Committee, 1974, p. 21).

I draw attention to this consideration of language ideology (Baker-Bell, 2020; Lippi-Green, 2011; Rosa, 2016; Young, 2009) within the hallmark resolution to emphasize the inherited and ideological frames which *SRTOL* actively attempted to disrupt and challenge. The reframing from language as a transmissible “essence,” as early linguists contend, toward a sociohistorical, phenomenological approach, considering readers' values at play when they engage texts, displays the ideological commitment toward justice that language justice inherently centers. The Resolution’s call to name and deconstruct language varieties that hail “social prestige,” toward a linguistic-informed education around language varieties, while in Kynard’s (2011) words “always imagined never fully achieved” (p. 74) remains a core charge of the discipline for language and racial justice.

Language justice then was never solely about language but instead participated in the wide range of social identities, attitudes, and fields, and their everyday consequences, at play in the work of what Inoue (2019) calls *linguaging*. Years since the 1974 resolution, Black language scholars like Carmen Kynard (2011), April Baker-Bell (2019; 2020), Lamar Johnson (2021), and Staci Perryman-Clark (2012), among a laundry list of others, have theorized the effects of epistemic injustice (Godbee, 2017), noting that racial violence in the classroom is no different than those of the streets. Understanding linguistic violence, these scholars have offered counter-curricula, counter-pedagogies, and counter-histories⁷ challenging the white supremacist framing of language, teaching, and learning. For example, in *Vernacular Insurrections*, Kynard (2011) re-historicizes composition and literacy studies from the history of the Black arts movement, Black protest traditions, and historically Black colleges and universities which have been central to composition’s history and its understandings. A beautifully detailed historical portrait of the

⁷ I use the qualifier “counter” intentionally to situate a Black radical tradition that challenges the status quo and offers counterstories of the work of the discipline.

discipline's central concerns of language justice, pedagogy, activism, and access in higher education, from a Black radical tradition, reveals the struggle for racial justice in classrooms and programs and engages a long history of protest activism in and out of the classroom. Kynard demands "a historical and political dispossession and knowledge for transacting with structural racism, the history of education in the United States, and the racial subordinator of communities of color" (p. 247). Indeed, such a political and historical disposition have been modeled by Baker-Bell's (2020) Black language pedagogy, centering Black language as a curricular commonplace, Johnson's (2017) racial haunting methodology and pedagogy that excavates racial hauntings towards healing, Pritchard's (2019) call for community-accountability in publishing practices, among others. Across these examples, Kynard's call for a political and historical understanding that drives the work of antiracist futures must also be understood as models for divesting, and in many cases healing from whiteness.

Given the critical legacy of language justice in the discipline's antiracist interventions, Asao Inoue's (2019) *CCCC* chair's address specifically calls for white writing teachers and understanding the ways they embody whiteness in their dispositions, particularly around language. As he says,

You perpetuate White language supremacy in your classrooms because you are White and stand in front of students, as many White teachers have before you, judging, assessing, grading, professing on the same kinds of language standards, standards that came from your group of people. It's the truth. It ain't fair, but it's the truth. Your body perpetuates racism, just as Black bodies attract unwarranted police aggression by being Black. Neither dynamic is preferred, neither is right, but that's the shit—the steel cage—

we're in. The sooner we can accept this fact, the sooner we can get to cutting the bars.

(457)

Inoue develops Max Weber's (1930) sociological concept of the iron cage, which explains the individual participation in social systems based entirely on rationality, toward what Inoue calls the steel cage, demonstrating how racism is persuasive and inhibits how we experience reality from the vantage point of its targets. He calls white teachers to acknowledge the histories of white teachers in colonial and linguistic violence, in ways to move forward. Inoue's call here is perhaps some of the most disciplinary visible critiques of whiteness and explicitly calls for the divestment of whiteness in the teaching corps of writing and rhetoric. Inoue's explicit linking between language and whiteness, especially on the discipline's main stage, aptly calls, in a similar fashion to Kynard (2011), toward a historical consciousness of understanding white supremacy in the fields of rhetoric and writing.

In *I Hope I Join the Band*, Frankie Condon (2012) explores, critiques, and imagines how white antiracist activists— particularly those within the fields of rhetoric and composition— engage meaningfully, deliberately, and mindfully in antiracist learning and antiracist activism. She described the complicated issues surrounding antiracism definitionally: "The work of antiracism has never been merely intellectual, has never been only pedagogical, have never depended exclusively on rationality, on logos" (p. 6). Demonstrating antiracism as anything but easy or comfortable, she also underscores how antiracist epistemologies are implicated with and by ethics (our relationships with who we care about) and morality (our relations with those we do not care equally of) (p. 9). Further, Condon considers complicated issues of white people engaging in antiracist activism. White people often engage in performative antiracism, and whiteness studies is often interested in cultivating white people as "good white people." She

then, critically engages white people's learning, particularly around challenging the "good white person" trope often implicated in white antiracism. As Condon writes, "White antiracist epistemology needs to begin not with our beliefs (including our belief or the intimation of belief in our own innocence), but with our individual and collective awakening to that which we do not know, with our reach toward "the art of seeing the unknown everywhere, especially at the heart of our most emphatic certainties"' (p. 26). Condon's book represents the complexities around the epistemology of antiracism in contrast and tension with the epistemologies of whiteness. Condon models and theorizes key practices of antiracism and also calls us to always challenge, disrupt, and disturb the "good white person" narrative that is quickly reproduced via antiracist movement work. Condon's work not only provides a helpful framework for antiracist movements and practices but specifically provides methodological considerations around storytelling for white antiracist people.

From the history and conversations reviewed here, the divestment of whiteness in the discipline of writing and rhetoric is certainly not a new call. Examples from language justice campaigns, critical whiteness approaches, and counter pedagogies and histories of the field reveal the enduring call for divesting whiteness. As Inoue (2019) and Condon (2012), both call for a decade apart, whiteness and white supremacy must be reckoned in both the personal lives of the white teachers of the profession and in the ways that the discipline's practices, policies, and structures invest in whiteness. From Sledd's critique of bi-dialectism to Smitherman's history of *Students' Rights* to Inoue's call into white writing teachers, divesting whiteness has been called for, though perhaps not through the language of investment/divestment.

The Current Study

Given the experiential frameworks of Black queer feminisms alongside enduring calls for divesting whiteness within writing and rhetoric studies, this current project contours what I call *white racial un/learning*. Guided by Black queer feminist insistence on transformation through everyday ritual, white racial un/learning offers an approach, to how white people with actionable commitments to racial justice seek to unlearn their worldviews, reckon with whiteness, and concretely challenge white supremacy in their life and work. This dissertation narrates seven white people's experience un/learning whiteness through a designed learning experience that centers narrative and reflection in three phases: (1) a semi-structured artifact-based interview, (2) multimodal reconstruction activity, and (3) a semi-structured future-facing reflection. The present study works to understand and map the moments, artifacts, and trajectories to describe how neo-abolitionist white people come to un/learn about race and racism and how these encounters shape their orientations and individual theories of practice, with implications toward writing and rhetoric including antiracist writing teacher development, writing pedagogy, and administration. In this spirit, I am guided by brown's (2017) question in *Emergent Strategy*—not what, but how? Orientations, in Ahmed's (2006)—how white people redirect their energies toward justice—are precisely at the heart of this inquiry.

My inquiry into the un/learning of whiteness by actionable white antiracists is neither an uncritical recentering of whiteness nor a blueprint toward mythic “good white people” (Sullivan, 2014). Instead, this inquiry seriously, and critically focuses on the experiences that foster a divested white racial consciousness that has implications for writing programs, writing centers, community literacy work, and so on. I focus on the moments of un/learning, particularly by

white people who have transformative understandings of themselves, follow and listen to BIPOC activism, and articulate concrete and actionable commitments to racial justice.

Because this dissertation is an act of disruptive dreaming, it is a point of departure for institutional intervention and not an end in and of itself. To quote Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* (1947), "The end is in the beginning and lies far ahead" (p. 5). Taken another way, the "end" of this dissertation works as one of many beginnings. It hopes to provide maps and models to shift unit cultures around antiracism, articulate un/learning models for white people following Black radical thought, and cultivate accountability, policy, onboarding, and professionalization structures that challenge white supremacy covertly and overtly in the discipline, in higher education, and our communities.

Population of Interest

Given the aims of this current study, I felt that contemporary models of white antiracism and white racial unlearning within rhetoric and composition, and the academy more generally, are insufficient, and instead require a more robust, contextually rich, rendering of white racial un/learning. Because the academy is limited by conservative frames (Greenfield, 2019) and bolstered by race-neutral politics (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), it is key to look beyond the threshold of the academy to understand and interrogate these models of divested white racial consciousness that might inform future interventions. While one of my partners is a retiring faculty member, her work closely examined white antiracism and she directed a social justice institute for several years. Additionally, different contexts, such as community organizing, local government, and healthcare reform, can also provide insight into performing effective value-based and evidence-based interventions. For this reason, I did not limit my partners by profession to engage the wide

range of contexts that shape divested white racial consciousness but also acknowledge the ways those contexts specifically inform each case.

This project features seven research partners who identify as white and can articulate actionable commitments to racial justice, who specifically are outside of the discipline of rhetoric and writing. I use the term research partner throughout this dissertation, adopted from Grace Player's (2021) article "Color of My Name." This language seeks to reject traditional boundaries between researchers as all-knowing and instead insists on co-knowledge collaboration approaches between partners and researchers.

First, white people with actionable commitments to racial justice reflect most closely what critical education scholar Zeus Leonardo (2009) describes as "neo-abolitionist whites," a revisiting of abolitionist white people like Viola Liuzzo, James Reeb, Meg Segrest, and Anne Braden, who vehemently fought against racial injustice in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Like Lipsitz (2006), Leonardo (2009) believes that white people do not need to invest in whiteness and can labor toward antiracist futures. In this vein, neo-abolitionist whites are "neither ally enemy, nor ally, but a concrete object of struggle ... undoing the self they know and coming to terms with a reconstructed identity, even an abolished one" (p. 186). Even though this language points to transformation, struggle, and un/learning, all key concepts for the current study, "neo-abolitionist whites" are coded in high academese and not accessible to a broader public audience. Bringing this language to include "actionable commitment to racial justice" concretize the study and provides a gesture to Rasha Diab and colleagues' (2016) essay "Making Commitments to Racial Justice Actionable." In this piece, they argue that actionable racial justice work must move beyond and "disturb" racial confessional narratives toward actionable racial justice in intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional domains.

There are several layers of complexity regarding research partner identification. Specifically, how partners describe their identity may differ from their practices. For example, not all antiracist white people might consider themselves “antiracist,” even though their practices and beliefs might align. Of course, the exact opposite might be true.⁸ White people might consider themselves antiracist however uphold white supremacy and play “the good white person.” While discussed more deeply in Chapter 1, as a theoretical concern, and Chapter 2, as a methodological concern, it’s important to note how identification and performance inform this population.

To clarify, this project defined white people with actionable commitments to racial justice as people who:

- Identify as white;
- Are critical of their whiteness and its meaning;
- Have had a shift in how they understand racism; and
- Can articulate actionable commitments to racial justice.

These criteria were established to clarify the recruitment procedure both in a screening survey and screening interview. The selection method is described in further detail in Chapter 2.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed:

1. What are the moments and artifacts of white racial un/learning?
2. What encounters, artifacts, disorientations, people, places, etc., have shaped these trajectories of development?

⁸ This sentence also appears in Chidi Anagonye’s thesis from *The Good Place*, of which I watched repeat episodes far too many times in the writing of this project.

3. How do these un/learning moments contribute to commitments to racial justice, both present and future?

Significance

The findings of this study are essential if we are to unseat whiteness and realize antiracist universities (Law, 2017) and publics. As Ray (2019) argues, organizations are racialized through processes and foundations credentialed by and through whiteness, thereby restricting agency and resources among racial groups. To redress the credentialing of whiteness and ontoepistemologies invested in race-neutral university politics propelling structural harm, the findings of this study can inform future interventions by articulating models for divested white racial consciousness. This study, then, helps administrators, teachers, students, and practitioners fashion curricular and professional interventions that disrupt and dismantle whiteness through institutional practices and policies, professional development, graduate school administration, teacher development, and so on. Because transformation by way of racial consciousness-raising is the end goal, developing robust models for white racial un/learning can move concretely toward deeper interventions in structurally inequitable systems.

Chapter Overview

Divesting White Racial Consciousness: Toward a Rhetoric of Coalitional White Racial Un/learning offers a transdisciplinary inquiry into the un/learning artifacts, moments, and reflections of white people with actionable commitments to racial justice. Chapter 2, “Disorientation as a Queering Un/Learning Praxis: Introducing a Critical of Whiteness Multimodal Methodology,” situates disorientation in transformative learning studies alongside queer methodologies as a critical component to un/learning and shifting consciousness. I forward a critical of whiteness multimodal methodology consisting of four tenants: criticality as a habit of

un/learning, racial storytelling as a method and pedagogy, multimodality as a knowledge-making activity, and disorientation as reflective action. I outline my method for data collection consisting of artifact-based interviews, multimodal reconstruction, and future-facing reflective interviews.

In chapter 3, “‘I am un/learning, but not un/learned’: The Literate Acts of white Racial Un/Learning,” I showcase how un/learning whiteness reflects a shift away from white supremacist worldviews that ultimately affect partners’ reading, writing, thinking, and being practices. This chapter chronicles six literate acts of un/learning within a coalitional framework: (1) listening to decenter, (2) interruption in spheres of influence, (3) accountability of past harm and commitments to change, (4) internal interrogation of socializing narratives and identities, (5) recurrent goal setting for future coalitional action, and (6) witnessing to manage structural inequity.

Framed by disciplinary conversation around literate apprenticeship, expertise, and rhetorical identifications, chapter 4, “‘I do it, but I don’t call myself doing it’: Troubling Expertise, Apprenticeship, and Identification in white Racial Un/learning,” highlights the complex ways research partners sought out mentors in un/learning whiteness through shared identifications with white antiracist people. My analysis reveals the ways partners initially sought simple understandings of “the work” that became increasingly complex, flexible, and uncertain through experiences of un/learning.

Lastly, in chapter five, “Infrastructuring Un/learning as a Matter of Habit: Administrative and Programmatic Implications and Invitations for Writing and Rhetoric Studies,” I turn to writing center and writing program administrators to consider the pedagogical, administrative, and institutional possibilities for un/learning as a matter of institutional habit. I end by arguing

for community-based and coalitional approaches to institutionalize un/learning toward justice-centered institutional politics.

CHAPTER 2:

QUEERING UN/LEARNING THROUGH DISORIENTATION:

INTRODUCING A CRITICAL OF WHITENESS MULTIMODAL METHODOLOGY

Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground ...

The point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do— whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are enough for hope.

—Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (pp. 157-8)

Introduction

As William Banks, Matthew Cox, and Caroline Dadas (2019) observe in their introduction to *Re/orienting Writing Studies*, “Research is always about orientation, about how (and why and even to what extent) the researcher turns toward the objects, participants, or contexts to study” (p. 3). For Sara Ahmed (2006), orientations direct our embodied and intellectual pursuits, explaining how we inhabit space and direct energy toward others (p. 3). As Banks and colleagues (2019) argue, much of our disciplinary research follows what Ahmed considers as the “well-trodden path,” that “becomes simply a way of life, or even an expression of who we are” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 19). In queering our research frameworks and practice, Banks and colleagues (2019) challenge us to interrogate “heteronormative orientations” undergirding our research commonplaces, and, more deeply, call us to “‘explode’ our working theories of research methods and methodologies” (Banks et al., 2019, p. 5).

Following suit, this chapter participates in a kind of queering of qualitative research that emphasizes disorientation as a praxis for white racial un/learning. As captured previously, this project seeks to better understand how white people with commitments to racial justice un/learn traits of white supremacist culture and work to engage advocacy and solidarity within their spheres of influence. Given the dynamic embodied, rhetorical, and emotional foci of this project, this chapter demonstrates that disorientation can serve as a productive epistemological, methodological, and pedagogical framework to chart moments of un/learning, and more insidiously, un/becoming, an unraveling of a stable, certain white-centered worldview. To do so, this chapter forwards what I call a *critical of whiteness multimodal methodology* (CoWMM) that specifically features disorientation as a guiding praxis. In such naming, I heed Matias and Boucher's (2022) challenge of Critical Whiteness Studies to push against research focused on narrow white racial epiphanies and instead center on how whiteness impacts communities of color. As I show below, research methodologies and their accompanying structures of knowledge must be critically disrupted toward an antiracist methodological practice.

This chapter, then, has three aims. First, drawing on critical race and post-modern theories, I offer a critique at the level of disciplinary methodology, showcasing the residual positivist frameworks that constrain our disciplinary imagination, a reinscription of what Banks, Cox, and Dadas' dub as "heteronormative orientations." Second, I introduce four key tenets of a CoWMM: (1) criticality, (2) racial storytelling, (3) multimodality, and (4) disorientation. Informed by interdisciplinary conversations including transformative learning studies, multimodal rhetorics, and queer-feminist antiracist pedagogies, these tenets help operationalize critiques of empirical research and whiteness by challenging the epistemic foundations in which research happens. Third, I outline my procedures for data collection, involving a three-phase

interview protocol operationalizing CoWMM: (1) an artifact-based interview, (2) a multimodal artifact activity, and (3) a reflective future-facing interview. I end this chapter by drawing on my research partner's reflections throughout the process to investigate the utility of a CoWMM as a praxis of disorientation with pedagogical, programmatic, and administrative potential.

Importantly, CoWMM represents a contribution to disciplinary methodological practice to trace white racial un/learning, which is inherently an investigation of epistemological disruption and re-orientation—indeed, a problem for rhetoric. Because methodology is intrinsically linked to epistemology, CoWMM enables researchers, teachers, and administrators to capture, both in story and reflection, an unraveling of a stable, white-centered worldview through key practices of story, reconstruction, and reflection. As I argue, such methodology functions, theoretically and practically, as a matter of pedagogy: bi-dialectic processes of learning, teaching, narrating, and reflecting that uncovers and recovers pasts, which ultimately works toward actionably transformed futureworlds.

Disorienting Method/ologies

In “Is There a Feminist Method?,” Sandra Harding (1987) delineates between method, methodology, and epistemology as linked but differentiated. As she explains:

- A research method is a “technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence” (p. 2)
- A research methodology “is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed” (p. 3)
- Epistemology is the structure of knowledge, answering questions “about who can be ‘knower’ (can women?); what tests beliefs must pass to be legitimated as knowledge?” (p. 3)

Distinguishing between these oft-conflated terms showcases how larger structures of knowledge-making and legitimization afford and constrain frameworks, data collection, and analysis.

Patricia Hill Collins (1989) explains that processes of knowledge-validation “reflects the interests and standpoint of its creators” (p. 751) in which “the taken-for-granted [white male] knowledge ... is ... permeated by widespread notions of Black and female inferiority” (p. 752).

As Collins points out, such epistemology is imbued with deficit-based metanarratives credentialing traits of white supremacy based on elements of what Paxton (2010) calls the white racial paradigm: “individualism, competition, rationality, and objectivity” (p. 123). Carolyn Miller (1979) concludes that positivism “is the conviction that sensory data are the only permissible basis for knowledge; consequently, the only meaningful statements are those which can be empirically verified” (p. 612). Put another way, the construction of knowledge, anchored in positivism, presume stability of knowledge and reality that can be, by nature of positivism, objective— a finding that has been troubled by humanists and rhetoricians for quite some time. Yet, such framing must be understood as white-centered epistemology that credentials knowledge through sensory data as anti-Black, as Collins points out.

If we understand epistemology as the foundation of our theories of research, then our research activities, anchored in the white research paradigm, often covertly and overtly reassert anti-Blackness. Rhetoric and composition are certainly not excluded from these kinds of positivistic knowledge-making regimes. In *Making Knowledge in Composition*, Steven North (1987) topologies four models of inquiry for composition research: (1) experimentalists who generalize “laws”, (2) clinicians who examine traits, (3) formalists who build models, (4) ethnographers who share community narratives. North notes that many of these camps of inquiry sustain modernist impulses to conceptualize knowledge as a fixed, unchanging construction

consistent with positivism. As Banks and colleagues (2019) observe, the methodological consciousness of the field, in particular through the “empirical turn” in writing studies, has been ways the field legitimizes its knowledge-making practices aligning with neighboring social science disciplines. Such descriptions of the field’s knowledge-making regimes neglect, perhaps intentionally, the contributions of scholars and practitioners of Color in the historical and methodological practices of the discipline (access Ruiz, 2016).

Further, post-modern critiques interrogate the foundations of knowledge-making at the level of worldview. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) explains that metanarratives are stories that are told and retold that give cultures purposes and meanings. Through retelling these metanarratives, we continually construct and validate a particular version of history, building upon those metanarratives. Lyotard describes the metanarrative of the Enlightenment, where “the hero of knowledge works toward a good ethico-political end--universal peace” (p. xxvi). This narrative, Lyotard explains, insists on the validity of institutions. Through metanarratives, we legitimize the structures and fixtures of that discourse. Histories of the West rely on the retelling and rebuilding of these metanarratives to ensure the re-interpolation of dominant ideology and epistemology. In other words, as we build on previous metanarratives, this act structures and legitimizes white, masculinist, heteronormative ways of knowing and transmitting these values via metanarratives.

Indeed, exposing these metanarratives that reconstitute, and seek to sustain, white epistemology showcases how knowledge-making is always an act of narrative. Critical race theorists have foundationally sought to disrupt master and grand narratives that recenter whiteness at the expense of communities and epistemologies of color. Aja Martinez’s (2014) “A Plea for Critical Race Theory Counterstory” exemplifies the need for counterstories in rhetoric

and composition, arguing counterstory serves as a resistant logic to white supremacist, majoritarian narratives anchored in deceit and deficit. As she writes, counterstories can “intervene in research methods that would form “master narratives” based on ignorance and assumptions about minoritized peoples ... [and] ... counters other methods that seek to dismiss or decenter racism and those whose lives are affected by it” (p. 83). Counterstory, then, participates in the kinds of epistemological and methodological disruption, required to unseat singular, reductivist, and positivist credentials of knowledge-making, and, instead, champions a pluralist understanding of knowledge and reality.

Disciplinarily, for example, critical race and queer interventions in our research practices have challenged the stability of the ways we construct our research paradigms. Carmen Kynard’s (2011) *Vernacular Insurrections* offers a powerful counterstory of the historical arc of composition, tracing origins to Black protest traditions from the 1920s onward instead of English B at Harvard University as the grand narrative asserts. Likewise, Iris Ruiz’s (2016) *Reclaiming Composition* offers, from the perspective of a compositionist of color, a “cultural recovery” of the histories of Latinx activism in the foundational histories of composition. In *Race, Rhetoric, and Research Methods*, Lockett and colleagues (2021) show how research methodologies are tethered to white supremacy and offer their collection to “interrogate how race affects how we see, talk, write, and attempt to produce institutionally recognized scholarship about human beings, their arrangements, how they learn, and how they communicate” (p. 29). Wonderful Faison and Frankie Condon’s (2022) collection in writing center studies, *CounterStories from the Writing Center*, offers counterstories to critically interrogate how writing center studies reproduce the white racial status quo. As these interventions, among others, indicate, our field’s

methodological imagination must be disrupted and disoriented to advance antiracist, antiablist, and transformed future worlds.

Indeed, as these scholars point out, there is a key possibility to reimagine our praxis that does not depart from race-evasion and instead addresses a foundational responsibility to disorient our practices and frameworks anchored in injustice, toward justice. By naming, critiquing, and developing a praxis that is responsive to analyzing systems of power, methodological challenges to the “stock story” or “majoritarian narrative” can productively promote epistemological plurality, needed for the discipline. As Ahmed (2006) describes in *Queer Phenomenology*:

Disorientations involve failed orientations: bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape, or use objects that do not extend their reach. At this moment of failure, such objects “point” somewhere else or they make what is “here” become strange. Bodies that do not follow the line of whiteness, for instance, might be stopped in their tracks, which does not simply stop one from getting somewhere, but changes one’s relation to what is “here.” (p. 160).

Put differently, the kinds of disorientations needed in qualitative research in rhetoric and composition ought to challenge our preconceived notions and inherited metanarratives of the “well-trodden path” frequency in our methodological traditions. By changing our relationships to the work we do, we invest in humanity-driven research, consider and enact reciprocity, and consider how rhetoric and composition can champion a more just and equitable world.

Introducing a Critical of Whiteness Multimodal Methodology

Hillery Glasby (2019) calls for queer methodologies to embrace failure and ambivalence to “destroy notions of a secure, stable future” and “disrupt ties the field has with composure and order” (p. 29). In this vein, I offer a Critical of Whiteness Multimodal Methodology (CoWMM)

as a subversion of traditionalist research paradigms that impose clarity, linearity, and logic as *de facto* practices of research. Instead, CoWMM unapologetically reframes research practice as pedagogical acts. It deliberately challenges frames of expertise by engaging learning as an embodied, reflective event, in a complex ecology of memory, place, space, and being. In doing so, this methodology celebrates what Jack Halberstam (2011) terms *queer failure*, a practice queer people develop across their lives to challenge the heteronormative, capitalist mechanisms of success. As Halberstam writes, “Under certain circumstances of failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may offer more creative, more cooperative, and more surprising ways of being the world” (p. 2). Failure, in this sense, resonates with Ahmed’s (2006) claims that disorientations are vital to reimagine the white heteronormative lines, which enduringly shape our praxis.

CoWMM hinges on criticality, reflection, story, and action that invites white people to critically interrogate their own experiences of un/learning. In particular, CoWMM operationalizes four key tenants. CoWMM:

- centers criticality— analyzing intersections of power, privilege, and oppression towards personal and collective transformation— as a core habit of un/learning
- employs racial storytelling as a pedagogical and methodological tool to interrogate identities, histories, and epistemologies of whiteness and white supremacy
- invites partners to reconstruct experiences of un/learning through multimodality, reflection, and materiality
- challenges white-centered commonplaces in qualitative research in research design, interview questions, and partner response, in particular, how whiteness and white supremacy impact communities of color

Notably, these tenants not only frame the core assumptions and goals of a CoWMM but also highlight its pedagogical qualities. In other words, research is not conceptualized here as story mining, but as a process of participatory learning, both for researchers and partners.

Criticality as Habit of Un/learning

At the heart of CoWMM is the practice of criticality, particularly in the ways that researchers and partners examine their experiences and worldviews— as products of participating in systems of power. Influenced by critical feminist antiracist pedagogies (Baker-Bell, 2020; Johnson, 2021; Kynard, 2011), I frame criticality as a practice of habit within CoWMM. In their book *Fashioning Lives*, Eric Darnell Pritchard (2017), drawing on Paulo Freire and Sojourner Truth, explains literacy is a practice of social justice and identity formation and affirmation. They cite Freire’s definition of reading as including both textual productions and the cultural and historical contexts of those productions. In an interview between Freire and *Language Arts* (1985), he explains that “reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world..... [W]e can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work” (p. 19). This kind of reading and re-writing is a cornerstone of Gholneshar Muhammad’s (2018) four-layered equity model. She defines criticality as reckoning with power and privilege, to transform the status quo by honoring the perspectives and experiences of communities of color. As she writes,

Criticality is the ability to read print and nonprint text with a lens of understanding how power, oppression, and privilege are present... understand[ing] the ideologies and perspectives of marginalized communities and their ways of knowing and experiencing the world ...Criticality goes beyond deep thinking and intellectualism to

also teach youths to understand power, inequality, social justice, and oppression in systems and relationships. (p. 139)

Such foci into the ways systems of power and oppression participate in experiences, meanings, and identities are also consistent with Matias and Boucher's (2021) challenge to restore criticality in Critical Whiteness Studies research that particularly engages the impacts and effects of whiteness, particularly on communities of color.

In their essay “Toward a Critical Whiteness Methodology,” Corces-Zimmerman and Guida (2019) offer a framework for enacting criticality in methodological design, particularly in higher education research. They offer five tenets of a critical whiteness methodology framework:

1. Whiteness and white supremacy are at the core of the U.S. system of higher education and must be resisted and subverted
2. A CwS research praxis is and should be a space for the challenging of oppressive systems and ideologies.
3. White researchers have a responsibility to interrupt whiteness at all phases of the research process
4. Whiteness has rhetorical, emotional, and epistemological implications for the ways white research structure data collection
5. Regardless of intentions, white researchers will always be complicit in whiteness and must take whatever steps to minimize this complicity

Such a framework participates in Muhammed's (2018; 2020) frameworks for centering an interrogation of power, privilege, and oppression toward transforming teaching and learning practices. By developing habits of criticality, the entire research process, under CoWMM, is a site of contention, challenging whiteness within our research paradigms. In this way, criticality is

both the content of interviews but also is embedded in the design of the research experience writ large.

Racial Storytelling as Method and Pedagogy

I draw on Black feminist and BlackCrit understandings of storytelling to describe how partners must use story to critically interrogate white supremacy, whiteness, and anti-Blackness. Delgado and Stefaniec (1995) describe CRT's commitments to storytelling used to counter and resist positivist knowledge-making regimes. In particular, CRT has employed and theorized counterstories as a way to disrupt dominant narratives (access Martinez, 2020, for an in-depth treatment of counterstory in rhetoric and composition). Within Black feminist theory, storytelling is used as a tool for survival, resistance, and joy. Baker-Bell (2017) describes Black feminist-womanist storytelling as a "method for *collecting* our stories, *writing* our stories, *analyzing* our stories, and *theorizing* our stories at the same time as *healing* from them" (p. 531).

I begin here by defining how storytelling has been used and theorized in CRT and Black feminist traditions to honor the rich, complex, and intersectional uses for storytelling as a lived experience, as a methodology, and as a theory. However, and an important however, by offering these definitions, I do not mean to say that this methodology takes or "builds on" these traditions (access Cooper, 2015, for a critique of this move of "building on" Black feminist thought by white scholars and non-Black scholars of color). Instead, I seek to honor the embodied work of theorizing storytelling while recognizing the ways white people engage and tell stories, even in a critical tradition, have different aims. White people do not need to learn to survive through white supremacy and whiteness will often use storytelling as a way to reinscribe dominant narratives and worldviews.

In “The Racial Hauntings of One Black Male Professor,” Lamar Johnson (2017) describes racial storytelling as a methodology and pedagogy to excavate past, present, and future selves for racial healing and racial justice. Johnson writes,

Racial storytelling illustrates how my racial encounters from the past situate themselves in the current moment and still haunt me today. I deploy Gordon’s (1997) conception of haunting to describe and illustrate how the past shapes the present and how the past and present structure the possibilities of the future. It is the racial storytelling of these hauntings that can lead us to an understanding of ourselves and to feel empowered and free. Further, racial storytelling allows us to confront our racial hauntings and to work against our own miseducation while moving toward liberation and self-actualization. (p. 479)

Johnson’s methodology of racial storytelling insists that interrogating our racial ghosts are critical for transformation and self-actualization. Racial storytelling also implicates conversations between pasts, presents, and futures. Importantly, Johnson describes racial storytelling as having different aims for folks of color than white folks. He writes:

white people are the ghosts—your protection of whiteness and the protection of your white privilege are the things that produce these racial ghosts that lead to our (people of Color’s) racial hauntings. Moreover, to truly do justice-oriented work, white people have to engage in this process of racial storytelling because it can help lead to true self-actualization. (p. 483)

Put another way, Johnson’s methodology of racial storytelling helps uncover racialized pasts and ghosts, analyzing these stories within interlocking systems of power and their impacts on folks of color. Likewise, focusing on a critical interrogation of whiteness for white folks that moves

beyond racial epiphanies is leveraged by racial storytelling that is critical of the impacts of whiteness on people of color (access Matias & Boucher, 2021, for a discussion of this kind of criticality for whiteness studies), while also honoring the intellectual and emotional labor of scholars of color for such methodologies and pedagogies.

Multimodality as a Knowledge-Making Activity

Multimodality refers to how a cultural and material production engages multiple modes of making (e.g., visual, tactile, textual, audio, embodied) (Arola, Shepard, & Ball, 2014; Haas, 2007; New London Group, 1996; Shipka; 2011), which represent complex, often pluralistic, onto-epistemologies. The second tenant of a CoWMM notes that making, materiality, and multimodality enable researchers and their partners to reconstruct and reflect on concrete memories, events, and their accompanying meanings. This tenant is informed by artifactual literacies (Pahl & Roswell, 2010) alongside video literacy methodologies (Halbritter & Lindquist, 2012) to showcase the epistemological productivity of multimodal making and artifact-based inquiry, particularly when in concert with criticality and racial storytelling.

In Pahl and Rowsell's (2010) book *Artifactual Literacies*, they argue that everyday objects and artifacts are imbued with memory and affect which represent complex commitments, communities, and identities. In making this claim, they tell us that using such objects can be powerful tools and representations of literacy learning—situated in tightly coupled assemblages between place, space, memory, and identity. As they write:

individuals are positioned in multiple intellectual, cultural, historical, artifactual, and spatial pathways, and when these pathways are operationalized through teachers and students, they guide what gets learned. In other words, meaning is not fixed in texts, but rather practices and exchanges are socially and culturally mediated. (p. 64)

Thus, artifacts and the dialogic process of social and cultural meaning-making can participate in rich renderings of selves, experiences, and reflections.

Using artifactual literacies as a methodological base, Halbritter and Lindquist (2012)'s methodological essay develops a four-phase video-interview methodology that operationalizes discovery as part of the process of narrating and constructing literacy sponsorship. In offering such a framework, they reframe the qualitative impulse to report knowledge from data sources and instead imagine a narrative methodology where "researchers learn[] to learn-- not from the research but also *through* it" (p. 173, emphasis in original). Halbritter and Lindquist suggest that, because narrative data is good to understand something socially meaningful, scenes of interviewing can be "intentionally arranged in a sequence of other such encounters" (p. 175). Approaching research as *pedagogical*, they propose an intentionally scaffolded interview sequence with four phases using video interviewing to "render multiple representations" (p. 176). They propose the following four phases: (1) personal histories artifact-based interview, (2) scenic interview, (3) participant-generated data, and (4) field documentary (p. 175).

These phases center video as a tool for data gathering, which, in addition to providing deep multi-representations of data, helps relinquish the narrative control researchers have in transcribing and reconstructing partner experiences. As they write:

Though the footage we collect is most certainly marked, significantly, by our collecting and editing choices, sharing it with others does not require our acts of transcription—or even description. That is, sharing that footage—especially in highly indexical, un- or minimally edited forms—*does not require us to speak for our participants*. And those video products have enabled us to show actions and interactions

that we would otherwise be required to describe in alphabetic text. (p. 184, emphasis added)

Halbritter and Lindquist's (2012) use of video footage challenges alphabetic-dominant forms of literacy, which, for their inquiry into literacy sponsorship, was key in both the argument they were making and the method/ologies they were developing. Employing video data challenges how researchers and scholars represent their participants by approaching video footage as multiple forms of data-- as records of conversations and components of narrative texts (pp. 175-76). In other words, multimodality as a research method for interviewing can provide multiple perspectives documenting what learning is happening at a research scene, enable participants to speak, and not be spoken for, and serve as useful media to track learning.

In the context of studying white racial un/learning, Halbritter and Lindquist's description of a multi-phase video-based interview, in conversation with artifactual literacies, supports the objectives of the project in several ways. First, as a methodology, understanding interviewing as pedagogical and abductive supports learning of both partners and researchers by centering story and reflection, central CRT themes. Second, because the object of inquiry in this study centers on embodiment (e.g., whiteness, racism, etc.), video footage more explicitly tracks these experiences with race and racism and the material dimensions of human experiences. Notably, this is much more useful and productive than disembodied texts (artifacts, interviews, conversations) from transcription. Fourth, and lastly, multimodal recreation can be a productive pedagogical activity, when scaffolded intentionally, and epistemologically productive.

Disorientation as Reflective Action

Guided by antiracist pedagogies in rhetoric and composition, transformative learning studies, and queer methodologies, the final tenant of a CoWMM operationalizes the practice of disorientation for criticality, un/learning, and reflective action. While not inherently a radical practice, disorientations “creat[e] a feeling of distance” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 166) and are places of reimagining the common sense, dominant narratives of knowing and moving through the world. Sarah Ahmed’s (2006) *Queer Phenomenology*, describes disorientation as a practice of, and in no way compulsory to, queerness. As she notes, “Disorientation could be described here as the ‘becoming oblique’ of the world, a becoming that is at once interior and exterior, as that which is given, or as that which gives what is given its new angle” (p. 162). Such a new angle from disorientation produces an uncanniness—known things becoming strange. Within a queer critique, disorientations offer new ways of registering proximity to bodies and, simultaneously, trouble compulsory orientations such as whiteness, heterosexuality, and capitalist mechanisms embedded in reproduction (e.g., sexual, materialist, ideological).

Aligning with Ahmed’s queer critique of phenomenology, disorientation moments have been theorized in transformative learning studies as an integral practice of transformative moments of learning. Patricia Canton (2016) defines transformative learning as “a process of examining, questioning, validating, and revising our perspectives” (p. 18). Transformative learning was popularized by Mezirow who called transformative learning a way to make problematic frames of reference “more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (p. 18). Under the umbrella of Mezirowian transformative learning, disorienting dilemmas serve as the linchpin for the process of interrogating individual perspectives toward inclusive frames of reference. Transformative learning tends to have several

uniting characteristics: (a) a moment of disorientation, (b) critical self-awareness and reflections, and (c) "discourse," a dialogic process of reflection. Cranton notes that transformative learning is voluntary, self-direction, relational, and based on experiences. Drawing on Mezirow's (1978) theory of transformative learning, Roberts (2013) synthesizes disorienting dilemmas as moments that challenge adult learners' worldviews and stocks of knowledge, which begin a process of interrogating the world that might affect frames, reference points, and ontologies characteristic of transformative learning. Similarly, Dirkx (2012) argues disorienting dilemmas, as articulated by Mezirow, can also be seen as "manifestations of the unconscious compensating for the one-sidedness of the ego in one's life" (p. 120). Put another way, within transformative learning, disorienting events describe the events that shift our perspective and instigate interrogation of worldviews toward transformative, pluralistic ways of apprehending the world.

Lastly, such disorienting events, and their accompanying reflection, can be operationalized toward actionable commitments to un/learning and action. In rhetoric and composition, for example, Rasha Diab and colleagues' (2016) oft-cited antiracist pedagogy piece, "Making Commitments to Racial Justice Actionable" offers a framework for reflection based on antiracist action. They argue to move beyond simple and often self-serving confessional narratives frequent in white antiracist work, toward meaningful and sustainable racial justice work. They argue that actionable racial justice work must move beyond and "disturb" racial confessional narratives toward actual and actionable racial justice. As they note, "Antiracism is not a one-time deal: we are here with each other and with others to learn, to recommit ourselves, and to work toward making our commitments actionable in our lives. We strive, therefore, to confront our individual and collective fears and responsibilities" (p. 26). They call us to consider actionable commitments in three complementary domains of intrapersonal,

interpersonal, and institutional. By showing that racism is always both global and/as local and personal and/as political, the chapter proposes actionable ways involving coalition and self-work to advance antiracist movement work within the institution.

As captured through this final tenant of a CoWMM, disorientation functions as a framework for un/learning anchored that invites reflective action. By braiding together queer critique, antiracist pedagogy, and transformative learning, this tenant shapes the ways we approach disorientation as a productive un/learning activity, anchored in not only reflection but reflective action.

CoWMM in Action

CoWMM operationalizes criticality, multimodality, disorientation, and racial storytelling as core tenants that enable partners and researchers to frame research as a practice of pedagogy. For my dissertation project, out of the tenants described above, I developed a three-phase interview protocol, amended from Halbritter and Lindquist's (2012) multi-phase video-based interviews used for literacy narratives. I focus on abduction, pedagogy, and narrative to inform a three-phase interview process. Departing from Halbritter and Lindquist's (2012) method, my objective was to design a pedagogical experience that enables both me and my participants to:

- name and describe the forces that shape orientation(s) to white racial un/learning,
- compose a learning artifact that reconstructs shifts in orientations,
- and (c) reflect and assign meaning to the experience to (a) and (b) as it relates to current or future teaching/professional practices.

Figure 2.1: Overview of Critical of Whiteness Multimodal (CoWM) Interview Protocol

Overview of Critical of Whiteness Multimodal (CWM) Interview Protocol	
Phase 1: Artifact-Based Interviews	
<p><i>Learning Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • name and describe the forces that shape participants' orientation to antiracism • tell stories about those forces to understand such forces further, • deepen these stories with details from life-history questions 	<p><i>Learning Activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will be instructed to bring 3 objects that were significant in their learning around race and racism • Questions will center on the stories of those objects, and their contexts, supplemented by additional life history questions
Phase 2: Learning Artifact Creation	
<p><i>Learning Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflect and draw connections between artifacts and their contexts • consider and share additional details, stories, events, and agents from Phase I • reconstruct a disorienting moment in their learning in a form of their choosing (e.g., written story, map, video, artwork, etc.) 	<p><i>Learning Activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will be assigned to reconstruct a disorienting moment in their learning in a form of their choosing (e.g., written story, map, video, artwork, etc.)
Phase 3: Artifact-Based Interview & Future Reflection	
<p><i>Learning Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review, respond, and discuss the learning artifact composed by the participant • reflect and draw connections between experiences (e.g., the event's being narrated and the experience of narrating) • identify how the learning represented in the artifacts, video, and conversations have shaped practices, methods, and methodologies in the participant's professional lives • engage in forward-facing reflection about these experiences 	<p><i>Learning Activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will talk through their project and reflect on the meaning of these experiences in relationship to Phase I and II • Participants will be asked to consider themes across their three interviews, consider their practices in their work and life, • Participants will set goals for themselves in the future

Selecting Research Partners

Selection Criteria & Identification

The object of inquiry for this study— white racial un/learning— is increasingly complex given embodied, historical, and ideological dimensions of whiteness and white supremacy in the United States. Further, how partners identify themselves proved to be challenging. In particular, I resisted naming research partners as “antiracist white people” since that identification could be an act of performance contributing to “good white people” mythologies (Ahmed, 2006; Sullivan, 2014). For example, white people might take on an “antiracist” identification and might not perform such actions in ways consistent with antiracist consciousness. At the same time, white people who do enact and engender such a consciousness might not be privy to the title or naming of antiracist.

Therefore, to minimize performative identifications, I used the following language to explain the project: “white people with commitments to racial justice or antiracism.” This intentionally sought to disentangle antiracism from an identity category and instead focus on the commitments, and implicitly, actions of engagement. Additionally, I developed a selection criterion, illustrated in **Figure 2.2**, as a filtering mechanism for participant selection.

The selection criteria described in **Figure 2.2** was developed as a filtering mechanism for partners in this project.

Figure 2.2: Research Partner Selection Criteria

Category	Description
Identification as white	Participants should identify and name themselves as <i>white</i> and articulate the meaning of their whiteness.
Change in worldview	Participants should have shifted/ing understanding(s) of individual and structural racism and whiteness
Coalitional & Actionable Commitments to Racial Justice	Participants should articulate concrete commitments to racial justice following calls/activism from Black Radical thought
Critical of Non-Performatives	Participants should be critical of simple expressions of “wokeness” and “diversity and inclusion”

Recruitment and Initial Informal Conversation

Partners were recruited through a snowball sampling method and convenience sampling through direct invitation and circulation through my networks. I created an infographic (access Appendix B) for folks in my network to circulate. Importantly, the infographic included a study description, selection criteria, and compensation information.

Interested partners completed a screening survey via Qualtrics. The Qualtrics survey included seven questions, aligned with the above selection criteria:

- Name
- Email
- Do you identify as white?
- What are your concrete commitments to racial justice?
- Contact information for other possible participants.

After screening responses based on alignments with the criteria above, select potential partners were invited to a short 15-minute informal conversation about the goals of the project,

basic life history questions, and informed consent (Appendix F). During this process, we also discussed compensation for participating in all parts of this project: a 100 USD honorarium and a 150 USD donation to an organization that advances racial justice. Introducing Research Partners

Through this process, seven research partners were selected. While we will learn more about them across this project, **Figure 2.3** represents an at-a-glance profile of the seven research partners.

Figure 2.3: List of Partners, Pronouns, Occupation, and Regional Location

- **Bianca** (she/hers) social work graduate student with a focus on community engagement. Located in Midwest United States
- **Chris** (she/hers), a retiring faculty member in Women and Gender Studies; biographer of social justice and white antiracism. Founder of the social justice campus office, and led as director for more than 10 years. Located in the Southern United States
- **Jane** (she/her) antiracist learning and development specialist at a non-profit. Located in Pacific Northwest United States
- **Miriam** (she/hers) social work graduate student with a focus on anti-oppression. Located in the Midwest United States, originally from the Western United States
- **Nicole** (she/hers) director of a city government financial literacy office. Located in Midwest United States
- **Noah** (she/hers) social work graduate student with a focus on maternal healthcare. Located in Midwest United States
- **Robert** (he/him) operations coordinator of a city government financial literacy office. Located in Midwest United States

Phase 1: Artifact-based Interview

During the first interview phase, partners were invited to bring three artifacts to tell the story of the moments, meanings, and contexts of their un/learning journeys. Artifacts, as Halbritter and Lindquist argue, are “things that represent their past, present, and future selves” which “come preloaded with stories about why they were selected, why they are important, and the roles they play” (p. 189). From this point of view, artifacts help surface complex stories,

pedagogical dimensions of the interview scene with an emphasis on invention, story (see Seidman, 2007, pp. 87-88), and context.

The aims of this first phase interview are to:

- name and describe the forces that shape participants' orientation to antiracism,
- tell stories about those forces to understand them further,
- deepen these stories with details from life-history questions.

Through this first phase interview, I was guided by the concept of *abduction* for semi-structured interviews, since each conversation will look different from participant to participant based on the artifacts they share. An initial set of questions about artifacts follows, intended for participants to tell stories about their histories:

Tell me about this artifact. Why did you choose to share this artifact with me today? What story does this tell? What's missing from that story? What other people were with you? What place did this happen? What do you think about that now?

During these stories, I follow Seidman's (1991) advice to "explore" (not "probe" at) initial responses (p. 83), particularly around learning more details to contextual these stories. The list represents categories of life-history questions that may organically appear during our conversation together.

The goal of these follow-up questions is to place stories within the larger contexts and arcs of partners' lives. Particularly important is understanding how racial identity is shaped by regional, economic, religious, gendered, and historical forces. Accordingly, I believe these questions can activate those details as they may relate to the broader narrative of development and the stories "preloaded" in these artifacts.

Figure 2.4: Artifacts Selected by Research Partners

Partner	Artifact #1	Artifact #2	Artifact #3
Chris	Seventh Grade Year Book	<i>Between the Wall and Me</i> , by Anne Braden	Coffee Cup
Robert	<i>White Lies, White Lives</i> by Maurice Berger	<i>Unequal Childhoods</i> by Annette Lareau	<i>Indigenous Peoples History of the United States</i> by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
Jane	Donuts	<i>The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill</i>	<i>White Fragility</i> , by Robin Di'Angelo
Nicole	Pillowcase	Roller-skates	<i>Incident At Oglala</i> Roger Ebert
Miriam	<i>A Book of Mormon</i> (Children's Book)	Scrapbook	Picture of kids playing with Black dolls
Bianca	Dorm Room	Open Access Racial Justice Content	<i>Dying of Whiteness</i> by Jonathan M. Metz
Noah	Lipstick	Interview with Lauryn Hill	Statue from Jamacia Hill

Phase 2: Learning Artifact Creation

The guiding objective for phase one was to make space for participants to name and story their un/learning of whiteness. In the second phase, partners were invited to reconstruct a foundational moment around un/learning in a multimodal form. With the medium up to them, they were invited to reconstruct a significant moment, event, or experience that shaped their orientation toward un/learning-- based, perhaps, on the first interview. Their learning narrative could include specific details of the events being storied and present-day reflections of the/those event(s).

The objective of creating a learning artifact is to provide space to reconstruct a significant moment in the participant's learning. The prompt reads:

Thinking back on unlearning whiteness, I would like to invite you to compose something that tells the story of a significant moment, event, or experience in your development in a form or mode of your choice- a video, podcast, short story, a comic book strip, Tik Tok, collage, etc. Your project can be as long as you like and can look different based on what you'd like to tell and why you'd like to tell it.

I am especially interested in specific details of the events you describe at the moment (e.g., where you were, what other people were there, what did people say, what did you feel and think) but also a reflection, in the present, about that event.

You could consider questions like: What do you think and feel about this now? How does this fit into the story from our first meeting? Why is this event, moment, or experience significant?

This second phase follows Seidman's (1991) description of second-phase interviews as interested in detail through narrative reconstruction. In drafting this phase, I understand stories as inherently meaningful and that the act of telling a story is also meaningful and part of the process of learning (and therefore pedagogical). This phase also challenges the interpretive authority of the researcher, encouraging participants as agentive, in reflecting and making meaning of their previous responses. Instead of the researcher interpreting, textualizing, and reconstructing "data" based on what the researcher feels is most meaningful, the participant shares in that meaning-making process and determines what is meaningful to them. Additionally, I use reflection and

reconstruction intentionally through pedagogical scaffolding by (a) revisiting initial responses, (b) assigning meaning to those responses, and (c) deepening the responses through narrative reconstruction.

As a pedagogical support, I also provided partners with a brief guide for working with user-friendly image, design, and video applications. I also met with partners to brainstorm their making project, while emphasizing the process of making– and the act of arrangement and reflection– was important to deepen their arc of un/learning in the first interview. As captured in **Figure 2.5**, partners selected to arrange a learning artifact most meaningful to them.

Figure 2.5: List of Participants and their Phase II Learning Artifact Creation

Partner	Making Artifact
Chris	Annotated Historical Timeline
Robert	Infographic
Jane	Poem
Nicole	Card Game
Miriam	Poem
Bianca	Comic Strip
Noah	Artistic Expression

Phase 3: Reflection and Goal Setting

In the two phases described above, the general goal involves participants and the researcher to collaboratively learn, story, and reflect on the forces which shape an orientation to race and racism. The third phase served as a moment of synthesis-- of both the historical experiences and the experiences of storying-- across the three interview phases. The third interview focused on the making artifact as the object of inquiry and then “zoomed out” to address larger questions about themes of their un/learning, action in their professional work, and un/learning action goals for the future.

The aims of phase three are to:

- review, respond, and discuss the learning artifact composed by the participant.
- reflect and draw connections between an experience (e.g., the event’s being narrated and the experience of narrating).
- identify how the learning represented in the artifacts, video, and conversations have shaped practices, methods, and methodologies in the participant’s professional lives.
- engage in forward-facing reflection about these experiences.

Third-phase interviews were scheduled for one hour and included three distinct categories of questions: (1) reflections on making artifacts, (2) connections to interview #1 and professional work, and (3) goals for the future.

This third phase interview brought together research practices of narrative and reflection to continue the research practice of having participants name their learning. However, this final phase asks participants to reflect back and cast forward to understand how their experiences, both as they exist in a pastness and as they are reconstructed via narrative, shape their practices,

thoughts on professionalization, and their own personal and professional goals moving forward. This phase's design explicitly engages tenants of criticality and racial storytelling. Additionally, through this process, I make a pedagogical argument I make here is that racial learning is an ongoing process over time that critiques and challenges whiteness and white supremacy (both in explicit and insidious ways) and involves continual goal setting.

Data Analysis and Member Checks

All interviews were recorded on Zoom. I used the application Otter.ai to transcribe audio recordings and then read through each for clarity and correctness.

Through the collection of data, I employed an iterative process of thematic analysis, following a two-cycle coding procedure. I adapt Saldaña's (2013) work as an approach to capture thematic ideas in interviews and making artifacts. Additionally, I depart from grounded theory's emphasis on data saturation via coding. Instead, I used coding as a tool to conceptualize the meanings, reflections, and actions of un/learning. Following Saldaña's (2013) advice, I see coding as a heuristic "a method of discovery that hopefully stimulates your *thinking* about the data you have" (pp. 39-40). During first-round coding, I employed a descriptive word or phrase to capture each partner's understanding of their un/learning. I did not count the number of codes because I was more interested in the ideas that emerge across these stories, rather than the number of times they appear.

I compiled a spreadsheet with separate tabs for each partner with descriptions and examples as header rows. After identifying themes, I pulled each sheet into one and then reorganized my spreadsheet around similar themes. **Figure 2.6** example first round descriptive codes.

Figure 2.6: First-Round Descriptive Codes

Name	Description	Example from Data
Robert	Awareness Past Selves were in process	You don't wake up one day, you're like, Alright, I'm done. I learned it all. You know, like, like, Yeah, I thought I understood this book, for the most part, the first time I read it, and like the paper we had written on it, whatever. It is, like a process. And it doesn't necessarily have an end. And it's gonna kind of like, not go like this. It's gonna, like go like that back and forth. And so it was just a good reminder that yeah, this is a constant learning process.
Chris	Danger of relaxing into white privilege	. And just as it's such a white life, and I don't want that life, I really don't want that life. And I've worked my entire adult life to avoid that kind of monoculture. racially speaking, it's not that it's a monoculture every by every indicator, but I think just because of the way that I grew up, it's very important for me to not be surrounded by too many white people at all times.
Jane	Naming Good White Person Mythology	white coalition building is like, wanting to be the good white person in the room. Sure. And I think like, pretending that you know the most, and that you're here to, like, you know, just dunk on every other white person that doesn't understand things in the same way that you do is also a performance of whiteness. And so I think that that just like when we're talking about CCO, I just see that as being such a barrier to like true coalition building.
Miriam	Moving from Simplicity to complexity	But that's exactly what I wanted to display is like, simplicity, complexity, and then a stance of not knowing so that I can then take in more, right, more, more information and more learning.

Based on these codes, I then printed out this spreadsheet and began to group descriptive coding around a unifying thematic idea with highlighters. Through this process, I defined four principal themes linked to one descriptive code. **Figure 2.7** showcases these four key themes.

Figure 2.7 Four Themes with Links to Descriptive Coding

Theme and Description	Links to Descriptive Coding
<p><i>Un/learning Moments:</i> Narrating lessons, ideas, and/or threshold concepts that illustrate research partners articulating their approach to un/learning whiteness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor of Black folks and other folks of color in learning about racism • Needing to hear about racial justice from white people • Whiteness can never be fully felt by white people • Un/learning can never be fully complete • “I’m learning. I am not learned.” • Using whiteness to analyze current events/politics • Small minor actions are the ways open consciousness • Emotional versus intellectual learning • The labor of white people learning about racism, whiteness, anti-Blackness often is perpetuated on Black folks and folks of color • Racism is felt differently in local contexts throughout its history • For parents, being aware of the socializing influence of parents/home
<p><i>Interrogating Histories:</i> Critically reckoning and re-orienting stories, ideologies, and values from socialization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early awareness that racist discourse and policies are enacted in close proximity (e.g., family, community, and work) • Naming previous actions as shameful or uncomfortable (“I can’t believe I did that”) • Awareness of Black intellect, challenging limiting mythologies of Blackness
<p><i>Grappling with and Disrupting Current Participation & Spheres of Influence:</i> Critically reckoning with how research partners currently participate in white supremacist systems while also using their sphere of influence to disrupt it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of spheres of influence in enacting antiracist action • Institutionalized white supremacy and antiracist action • Disrupting socializing power in parenting and policy
<p><i>Developing Actionable White Antiracist Identities:</i> An awareness of how partners identify and act in anti-racist ways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners naming themselves white anti-racist • The desire for models, texts, and media of positive white antiracist (that are critiqued after they’ve been used) • Paradoxes of white antiracist people aren’t visible for good reason (e.g., decenter, it’s not about them, etc.) • Usually, a moment where these models had gone wrong or shifted in perspective accompanies a critique of the model • Awareness that “roadmaps” for white people are paradoxical because whiteness is often the roadmap under white supremacy • The need for more white folks to develop antiracist consciousness

Additionally, via email, I conducted member checks around these themes. I wrote to each partner represented in the chapter to ask them if these themes accurately reflect their un/learning. Through back and forth, I clarified language to best represent them. Further, during the copyediting stage of this project, I invited partners to make any changes to their words to ensure they were being accurately represented.

Looking Ahead

In this chapter, I develop a critical of whiteness multimodal methodology that offers a pedagogical approach to engaging the complexity of un/learning. My study design included a three-phased interviewing protocol consisting of artifact-based interviews, multimodal reconstruction, and reflective action interviews. Through such a framework, I enact three central tenets: (1) criticality, (2) materiality/multimodality, and (3) reflective action. Interviews and artifacts were coded in a two-phase analysis process, where descriptivist codes were categorized into four key themes: (1) un/learning moments, (2) interrogating histories, (3) grappling with and disrupting spheres of influence, and (4) developing actionable white antiracist identities.

Through this process of coding, I developed thematic focuses for chapters three and chapter four. In the next two chapters, I offer an analysis of these themes in two facets:

1. The literate and rhetorical practices of un/learning of research partners
2. The mechanisms of identification in developing un/learning knowledge and action

CHAPTER 3:

“I AM UN/LEARNING BUT NOT UN/LEARNED”:

CONTOURING THE LITERATE ACTS OF WHITE RACIAL UN/LEARNING

In the previous chapter, I outlined a critical of whiteness interviewing method/ology hinging on criticality, narrative reconstruction, and reflective action. Such a methodology invited research partners to critically story and reflect on the meaning of their experiences of un/learning whiteness. Through fourteen interviews with seven white people with actionable commitments to racial justice, spanning multiple locations and professions, I learned about the textured lives, stories, and reflections of my research partners. Complicated combinations of region, work, religion, and socialization fashioned encounters, artifacts, and reflections about whiteness, anti-Blackness, the status quo, and difference. Further, these seven partners illustrate the contextual and rhetorical sites of white racial un/learning. They demonstrate the contextually specific factors which afford their dialogic, life-long processes of learning and un/learning.

This chapter showcases the literate acts constituent of white racial un/learning. That is, I frame un/learning as a series of emergent discursive practices, including but not limited to speaking, knowing, believing, and writing dispositions, which invariably accompany the unraveling of stable, whitely (Fyre, 2001) ways of being and knowing. Focusing on concrete material and ideological practices productively illustrates the unraveling and unbecoming characteristic of this kind of development. As I argue, explicating the literate acts of un/learning represent complex shifting terrains of knowledge and being, that develop pluralistic and often distributed ways to challenge whiteness as discursive, ideological, and material.

In doing so, this chapter pushes against monolithic and singular pathways for white antiracist development. In this spirit, my analysis of literate acts seeks to capture the specific

contexts of white racial un/learning while simultaneously offering space for critical interrogation, from the perspectives of research partners, of how these experiences inform white racial un/learning and impact folks of Color.⁹ As Matias and Boucher (2022) have called for, whiteness studies must decenter white epistemological perspectives and analyze how whiteness impacts Black communities and other communities of Color. To this end, I offer these contexts of un/learning from a consciousness development perspective that challenges the oft narcissistic and self-adulating work of whiteness studies by balancing how much un/learning enacts violence of whiteness on Black communities and communities of Color. Importantly, I contend similar to Inoue (2019), Condon (2012), Diab et al., (2016), that this work requires a shift in consciousness and worldviews, but is never linear, easy, or complete.

This chapter argues that white racial un/learning can be represented through emergent discursive practices. When systems of values, identities, and worldviews shift, individual practices shift and change with them. Thus, examining how these emergent literate practices operate, provides insight into individualist un/learning reflection and action.

In what follows, I outline six literate acts associated with white racial un/learning and map them on three cycles for coalitional engagement: inward reflection, outward action, and upward coalition. I first offer a theoretical return to literate action as ideological work that is composite in the development of individual white racial habitus. Second, I map six literate acts into three cycles of reflective action. Last, I offer a discussion of the roles of coalition and the development of shifting routines that works toward antiracist futures.

⁹ While I seek to capture the contexts of each participant's life and stories, it's also key to recognize these contexts are shaped through interlocking systems of race, gender, location, sexuality, disability, and so on. These systems do not impact each partner in precisely the same ways, and their impact on communities of Color are far more felt.

Situating Literate Action

In this chapter, I draw on literate action as a theoretical framework to explain how individuals' reading, writing, and thinking combinations reflect deeper epistemological commitments. I do so to focus on a dearth of disciplinary knowledge to foreground my analysis of literate practice in shifting onto epistemologies. In other words, I frame un/learning as a constituent of shifting and emergent worldviews with corresponding literate practices. Drawing on Bazerman's (2013a; 2013b) two-volume work on literate action in conversation with Inoue's (2016) discussion of the linguistic, material, and performative elements of white racial habitus, I showcase here three conceptions to guide my analysis of literate action to transform individual onto-epistemology: (1) as the development of thought and consciousness, (2) as an ideological project, (3) as maintenance of social order.

Writing and rhetoric scholars have long identified the connections between literacy learning with identity and consciousness development. Drawing on Vygotsky's (1986) sociology of language, Bazerman (2013b) describes literate activity—accompanying symbolic, communicative acts—as modulating complex societal forces with individual practices and worldviews. For Vygotsky, individual ways of thinking, acting, and being are constituted through linguistic and symbolic action. Bazerman's analysis of Vygotsky illustrates the machinations between languaging acts and consciousness development, even as specific languaging acts are not *ipso facto* consciousness. Through affective and embodied discourses, individual interiority becomes developed by way of symbolic acts repurposed across context: “not by direct importation of a language symbol or ideological system, but because the [literate actor] first interacts with language in the course of activity and then redeploys that language as a part of self-regulation in tasks including [their] own interaction with others” (p. 32). Bazerman's

discussion of Vygotsky showcases the ways communicative acts become repurposed across the lifespan; literate acts—acts of reading, writing, and speaking—are composite to the specific values we carry with us across our lives.

By using the language of others, individuals participate in a process of, what Bakhtin (1982) calls, ideological becoming: “the process of assimilating our consciousness to the ideological world [of others]” (p. 341). With echoes to Bazerman’s uptake of Vygotsky, Bakhtin’s conception of becoming through the language and literacy acts of others represents deeper commitments to specific worldviews. In this way, literate acts are constitutive of individual frames of knowledge and action. For the current project, focussing on literate acts as a kind of ideological un/becoming illuminates shifting onto-epistemological terrains, that in particular develop pluralistic—and often distributed—ways of being and knowing that seek to challenge whiteness as discursive, ideological, and material.

Analogically, scholars of New Literacy Studies (2010) have contended that literate activity always carries ideological freight: bundles of worldviews and identities undersigned through specific literate practices within the economies those practices maintain. Notoriously, Brain Street (1994) critiques dominant constructions of literacy as “autonomous” and “neutral” and forwards the ideological model. Framing literacy in this way—as ideological—necessarily links cultural and social action toward specific literate events. Street contends that “versions of [literacy] are always ‘ideological,’ they are always rooted in a particular worldview and in a desire for that view of literacy to dominate and marginalize others” (p. 78). James Paul Gee (1989) similarly describes Discourses as “ways of being in the world; they are forms of life that integrate words, acts, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities” (pp. 6-7).

Black feminist literacy researchers have complicated NLS to focus on the ways literacy is used by Black communities and Black women to resist and survive through hegemonic structures of power. Richardson (2002) develops a framework to understand Black female literacies that engage strategic silence, protection, and service as integral to the lived identities of Black women and Black mothers. Likewise, Pritchard (2017) showcases the myriad of ways Black queer people use literacy to challenge heteronormative social structures. They coin the term *restorative literacy*, to capture how Black LGBT people subvert the power of normative literacy in pursuit of self and communal love (p. 33). Researchers in this vein of literacy studies have demonstrated the ways that literacy not only is an ideologically situated cultural production but more specifically, can be retooled and refashioned for liberatory aims and goals. Put together, the varied reading, writing, speaking, and knowing combinations of literate action are webbed to systems of power and simultaneously shape the political and social development of individual actors.

Inoue's (2016) work on antiracist assessment ecologies further showcases how the development of worldviews informs what he calls, following Bourdieu, white racial habitus. As he writes,

[habitus] construct whiteness as invisible and appealing to fairness through objectivity. The structures are unraced (even beyond race), unconnected to the bodies and histories that create them. They are set up as apolitical, and often deny difference by focusing on the individual or making larger claims to abstract liberal principles, such as the principle of meritocracy. These structures create dispositions that form reading and judging practices, dispositions for values and expectations for writing and behavior. (p. 48)

Inoue's book-length treatment of white racial identity emphasizes the ways that global ideological structures inform how individuals participate in reading, writing, and judging practices. These practices, in sustained and intentional manners, reflect deeper onto-epistemological commitments about the world. Thus, consciousness both affords literate practice, just as literate practice develops consciousness.

As captured above, literate action— that is, combinations of reading, writing, speaking, listening, knowing, and acting combinations— develops individual people's perceptions and actions because they carry ideological baggage and participate in maintaining recurrent structural patterns. When situated in the white worldview, these acts reconstitute and maintain whiteness as a category of political power and domination. However, as I contend here, any set of literate acts are ideological— and carry specific “figured worlds” (Street, 1994) maintaining a specific way of knowing and being. Through this logic, shifting consciousness that is necessarily transformative means that emergent literate acts represent an unraveling of stable conceptions of self, knowledge, and action.

Un/learning and/as Coalitional Action

In many ways, un/learning represents committed coalitional action. I approach coalition from Black, queer, and feminist perspectives on social change that emphasizes collective action, which leverages positionality, influence, and action in distributed ways. As other scholars have noted (Chávez, 2013; Reagan, 1983; Smith, 1985;), coalition is a way of thinking about identity and positionality to create and enact alignments for social change. The Combahee River Collective's “A Black Feminist Statement” (1975) explicitly names alignments to different groups to enact progressive social change. Indeed, I consider Audre Lorde's invitation in “Uses of Anger” an important call for coalition that centers the needs of Black women for white women

to coalitionally dismantle systems of power. From this perspective, coalitional thinking motivates the work of un/learning that seeks to restructure white worldviews to engage social change in responsive, emergent, and critical ways. As Walton and colleagues (2019) assert:

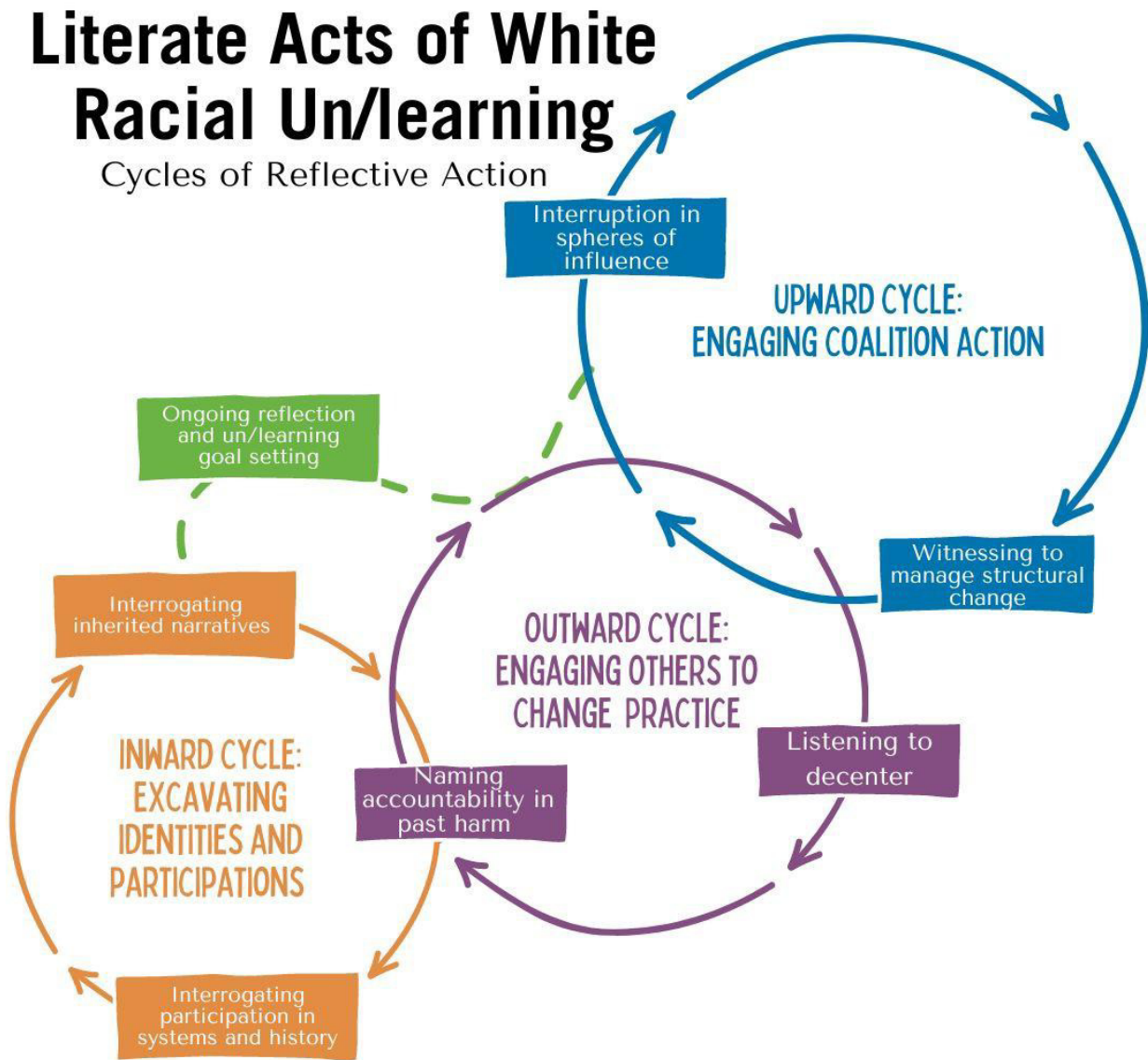
We assert that coalitional thinking and inclusive coalitions are necessary for change because they can shift and change quickly and because they engage difference and different goals without rejecting them. An intersectional coalition for TPC responds to oppression without prescription, assuming the complexity of activism, power, and domination. (p. 135)

Because un/learning must engage a similar “complexity of activism, power, and domination,” I map six literate practices to Pouncil and Sanders' (2022) heuristic for coalitional action.¹⁰ I do so to offer a thinking tool (and not a generalizable model) about un/learning that engages multiple cycles and levels of reflective action. We originally developed this heuristic as a rhetorical framework for technical communication scholars to acknowledge how differentiated identities engage reflection and action toward shared goals, through a movement from internal introspection to external collaboration.

Literate acts of white racial un/learning are natural complements to our heuristic because both account for the varied factors that actors must consider when they work together for justice-centered futures. Specifically, I adapt our original heuristic that included moments of inward reflection (i.e., unpacking identities), outward reflection (i.e., making meaning of shared and different identities), and upward action (i.e., working together based on identity reflections) (access figure 3.1).

¹⁰ Drawing on Black feminist scholars, our work situates coalition as engaging positionality for shared goals. Additionally, this kind of reflection, moving from individual to intentional action, represents conversations about “self-work” in antiracist pedagogies, feminist and queer rhetorics, and transformative learning studies

Figure 3.1: Cycles of White Racial Un/learning



Since we originally were speaking to both Black and non-Black technical communicators to engage justice in personal and professional spheres, this adapted heuristic centers coalitional action similar to our original model. Specifically, it consists of three simultaneous cycles with a throughline of ongoing reflection across them:

- **Ongoing reflective action**, where partners make sense of learning and set future un/learning goals, across each cycle
- **Inward cycle:** Partners excavate identities and participations within systems and histories of power and control
- **Outward cycle:** Partners shift their routine practices to engage pluralist worldviews
- **Upward cycle:** Partners engage in deliberate coalitional action to disrupt ongoing systematic inequity

Given partners' differentiated moments and reflections of un/learning, I situate these emerging discursive practices as both individual and collective: there may not be total alignment in how partners enact each practice, given how they may be at different places in their un/learning arcs. Yet, they do spotlight how shifts in primary discourses are accompanied by emergent and flexible practices and pluralistic worldviews. To be clear, these cycles are not linear, but an iterative process fundamental to un/learning via reflective action.

These cycles are also not systematic or universal: they're a thinking tool to visualize the kinds of shifts in consciousness that are necessitated through un/learning, as observed in my research partner's stories. Because this kind of un/learning is never finite or complete, such a visualization is one way to map these literate acts as part of an ongoing, and shifting cycle that engages work at, and between, self, others, and system levels.

As I argue, when partners un/learn, their changing ways of knowing are accompanied by changing literate and rhetorical acts. In what follows, I outline six literate acts enacted by research partners, representing their shifting ways of being and doing through un/learning. These acts highlight how un/learning involves movement from singular to plural worldviews that are

accompanied by emergent and flexible ways of writing speaking, thinking, and being through language and action through each cycle.

On-Going Reflective Action

Across coalitional un/learning cycles, research partners returned to moments of their “past selves” (Johnson, 2017). In doing so, they named where they’ve been— understandings and practices that have foundationally changed through their continuous un/learning. Because un/learning is ongoing and infinite, reflections on partners' past histories, ideologies, and practices guide goalsetting for future reflective action. Through these returns, partners set ongoing goals for their next un/learning steps. A key component to the critical whiteness multimodal methodology I developed was intentional loops for reflective action, where partners not only made sense of their experiences but, more urgently, created plans for future un/learning and action.

In final-round interviews, for example, I asked participants to explain how they plan to continue their un/learning to actively move toward further accountability and social change. Nicole’s reflection illustrates a change in how she perceives and acts in the world. She admits it has been a short period of time to engage in the work: “You haven't been here very long. And you're still not where you want to be? Right? Like, yeah, I'm learning. I am not learned. I'm really recognizing it took 49 years to get to a place where I'm even willing to admit how hard it is. ” Nicole captures how these returns to previous understanding are important for research partners to set deeper, more accountable un/learning goals.

Jane, for example, describes her goals to center slowness and centering the experiences of Black and Brown voices in how she seeks to embody her work. As she says, “I want to embody the things that I'm learning and stay malleable to what I'm doing now. I want to evolve from

here, learning a new language, adopting new ways of understanding race dynamics.” Jane’s reflection of pushing toward new possibilities of engagement, of challenging stable worldviews is central to her goals as she deepens her sustained engagement through un/learning. For Jane, destabilizing her perceived stability showcases, dually, her orientation to pluralism and, that such an orientation can never be fixed or “natural”-- it must be actively maintained through a combination of listening practice, interrogation of inherited narratives, and reflective, coalitional action.

Similarly, Chris, who at the time of our interviews was in the process of phase-retirement as a WGS faculty member at R1 University in the Southern United States, offered a reflection about her un/learning in the next phase of her life. She told me that her next steps require her to intentionally cultivate communities that challenge “white flight,” where retired people move to all-white spaces. Because Chris was moving, she felt the need to bring together her community work with her teaching work. “There is such an incredible dearth of white antiracism there,” Chris tells me. “I could see myself teaching, just in other ways– whether it’s offering workshops, teaching a non-credit course, or establishing a reading group.” She also explains that she’d like her un/learning to “less political, more spiritual, holistic approach to white antiracism.”

Reflective action, as described here, occurs across the three cycles of coalitional un/learning. Importantly, these kinds of reflections move from more simple (such as realizing racial inequity) to more complex (such as engaging spheres of influence in action). Reflective action becomes a key iterative component to un/learning across the lifespan, and goal-setting as a practice of coalitional un/learning fosters such reflection, in the community, that is specifically oriented to local contexts and spheres of influence. For example, Robert’s goals un/learning are focused on his work with local government financial empowerment initiatives, just as Jane’s are

focused on breathing antiracism into her leadership development at her non-profit. To contrast, Chris' reflection away from her professional context reveals just how key and critical reflective action is to the next steps that are accountably engaged.

Inward Cycle

The inward cycle of un/learning focuses on individual recovery of their social identities—and how those social identities participate in broader systems of power, such as white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism, and heteronormativity. Pouncil and Sanders (2022) explain, “Inward critical reflection challenges individuals to engage questions about their identities, their worldviews, and ways of knowing that interrogate taken-for-granted truths” (p. 287), which enables “collaborators and allies to critically understand how their worldviews and ways of navigating the world have been shaped by systems of power” (p. 287).

Antiracist scholars have contended that unsettling racist structures begin with what Diab and colleagues (2016) call “self-work” or what Johnson (2017) describes as “soul work,” where individuals analyze their own social identities that have been afforded by systems of power. This work of interrogating identities has become relatively commonplace in Teacher Education (access Matias & Mackay, 2016) and has been used as entry points in the development of antiracist consciousness development (Tatum, 1997). As Inoue (2016) contends in his work on antiracist assessment, white worldviews are forged through repetitions that maintain “structuring structures” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72) of whiteness: “We speak, embody (are marked materially), and perform our racial designations and identities, whether those designations are self-designated or designated by others” (Inoue, 2016, p. 43). Those repetitions become embodied to constitute *white racial habitus*, formed through linguistic, material, and performative iterations, inherited

by participation in social systems. Ultimately, white racial un/learning bends those recurrent habits to challenge the ongoing production of white racial habitus

Interrogating Inherited Narratives and Participations

Consistent with antiracist practice, research patterns interrogated their own socializations and the ways they were apprenticed into white dispositions of knowing and being. Chris, for example, reflecting on her primary education in a newly integrated Georgia primary school, explains how early moments of racial difference— and the impact of racial difference— served as an opening for the interrogation of her identity. Yet, what distinguishes partners in their analysis of their social identities is how those identities have been formed through systems of power. Diab and colleagues (2016) warn that “confessional narratives” are not productive avenues for the development of antiracist consciousness because they end at the confession. Instead, those confessional narratives must be challenged by placing those individual instances in the context of broader machinations of power.

Jane’s reflection illustrates the rhetorical and literate work of analyzing the immediacy of racism in local contexts. Such acknowledgment, however, moves beyond confession and toward how Jane analyzes the world around her. Jane recalls experiences with her mom, Mary, dating a Black man, Terry, in a white rural town in Oregon. She recalls Mary and Terry going to the movies in their small town and everyone staring at them. Jane wonders if her mother fully understood the ways white racism was operating in their relationship, the ways in which a white town was predicated on, and enacted anti-Blackness. Jane remembers conversations of Terry navigating being called the N-word in a community basketball tournament. “I just remember it being a really big deal,” Jane tells me. “For the first time, I realized that there is not the same set of rules for everyone.”

She recalls her mom and Terry having very different feelings about the film, *Losing Isiah* (Gyllenhall, 1995). In this white savior film, Khaila Richards, played by Halle Berry, is depicted abandoning her son, and a white woman social worker, Margaret Lewin, played by Jessica Lange, adopts Isiah. When Khaila is released, an ugly court case over adoption progresses, and the judge overturns the adoption of Khaila. After, Isiah has a public outburst and Khaila asks Margaret to step back into the relationship.

In their conversation between Terry and Mary after the movie, Jane remembers vastly different experiences and feelings about *Losing Isiah*. “Isiah needs to be back with his mom. Those are his people. This baby needs to be aware of his racial identity and community,” Terry would say. Mary didn’t agree and was insistent that “this other white woman keeps him safe.”

Jane’s portrait explains ways in which racism and anti-Blackness are embedded in her immediate familial contexts. Such an awareness of the immediacy of racism in her family structure is made visible by her extended family dynamics involving Terry and her family’s moves to make him uncomfortable. Jane is also aware of Mary’s emerging racial consciousness, and the ways in which color-evasive logic saturates how Mary constructs her bi-racial relationship with Terry. As she tells me, “Mary took me as far as she possibly could in terms of being critical about race.” Cues from the immediate contexts of Jane’s extended family become a core component of Jane’s antiracist praxis— particularly in the ways she excavates her family histories and “the strong woman archetype” linking their complicatedness to systems of power. In our conversations, Jane repeatedly described the need to re-analyze the inherited narratives embedded in local contexts, including her family and her profession as a social worker. Jane explains she’s had to reckon with the folklore of the strong woman archetype inherited through her family mythos. She describes the need to analyze those narratives as a recurrent practice.

Through her analysis, Jane comes to understand a legacy of white savior ideologies in her family and also in the profession of social work. As she explains, “It is so disorienting to be like, oh, all of these people that I love and care about are also complicit in it.”

Robert, who works in local government, similarly analyzes the inherited narrative surrounding this body as cis, white man. He tells me about a writing assignment for his undergraduate degree in public policy. He is given a writing assignment paired with the book, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* by Annette Lareua (2011). Robert is instructed to analyze his childhood through the lenses of class and race.

In his research assignment, Robert recalls a pivotal moment when he was 14 years old. He is a freshman in high school. “Me and my buddy, I don’t know what it was,” Robert tells me. “I think we just wanted to see if we can get away with shoplifting or prove that we are smarter than people.”

Robert thinks he turned his life around. After all, he finished high school, attended a well-respected research university, and earned a good job. “I was very much the hero of my own story,” Robert says. Through writing the research assignment, Robert realizes the invisible forces at play that disentangled his sole-actor hero story. “I was a 14-year-old white kid from an upper-middle-class family and the well-to-do suburbs with plenty of like, youth resources,” Robert tells me. “These opportunities were put in front of me to make sure that didn’t happen again.”

Notably, Robert’s reflection is not fashioned from the life event itself, but as Jane, un/learning occurs through a practice of critically interrogating his participations. Placing his experiences in conversation with racial and class frameworks enabled Robert to more clearly name and interrogate his systematic participation.

Robert is able to unravel an inherited hero narrative of which white supremacy often authors of white men. Such stories depict fully determined and individualistic actors, devoid of any system affording beliefs of superiority and agency. Through Robert's analysis of systematic participation, he returns to questions about self, system, and agency. As he reckons with the master narratives embedded in white maleness, he unravels sit: "I'm not the hero of my own story, right? It's a story that has been written for me centuries ago."

Together, Jane and Robert's interrogation of inherited narratives showcase the ways they move beyond confessional narratives and link their experiences to broader systems and histories of power. Importantly, this kind of reflection, in itself, does not constitute *ipso facto* coalitional action but is itself a literate act, unsettling singular worldviews, identities, and subject positions. This cycle develops an important practice of storying, analyzing, and reckoning with embodied subjectivities as an important and iterative process of un/learning.

Outward Cycle

Through interrogating identities, histories, and systematic participation, partners often build on these reflections to shift their engagement through literate acts that specifically engage the perspectives of others— that social acts. The outward cycle of un/learning moves beyond insular interrogations and shifts routine practices to engage pluralist worldviews. In my interviews, two distinct literate acts were associated with shifting social practice with deep engagement: (1) naming accountability in past harm and (2) listening to decenter.

Naming Accountability in Past Harm

A defining characteristic of un/learning was the ways research partners named past harm and sought to change harmful practices and routines. Through our interviews, many partners returned to moments where their whiteness adversely affected people of color in their lives. Each partner could recall a series of instances where their ways of being caused harm, including specific

actions or ways of viewing the world, that reified historical, structural, and symbolic violence. I observed many partners use this naming of self-accountability for past actions as a springboard to correcting the behavior and seeking out different perspectives to challenge the practice that incurred harm in the first place.

For example, Chris tells me about a microaggression she committed as director of a social justice organization with a Black graduate assistant. One day when the institute was hosting a guest speaker, Chris asked her graduate assistant to make a cup of coffee for the guest. “She thought that was racist,” she tells me, “and I acted defensively. I’ve known about microaggressions for years.”

Chris recalls her microaggression to one of her graduate students and explains how her un/learning is never complete: “It’s so fucking depressing that we learn at the expense of people of color.” Chris’ awareness of white learning and consciousness predicated on harm to folks of color is documented both in her un/learning reflection and her scholarly work, being the biographer of Anne Braden, an important Southern white antiracist. For Chris, her awareness of the harm she has committed is not an end in itself. In talking through her ongoing goals for un/learning, she returns to a phrase from Anne Braden.

Chris “sees through white eyes.” During our last interview, I asked partners to set goals for their un/learning. Chris is retiring from her university over the next few years. Chris also talks about wanting to push back on the whiteness that surrounds her, in her immediate circle, in the community contexts she participates in, and so on. She explains she wants to continue to un/learn her whiteness and teach others in community-organizing contexts. Through this example, Chris’ naming of past harm motivates her un/learning goals for the future. In order to push against “seeing in white,” she and her husband push against “white flight” which is typical

during post-career years, cultivating an intentional community with antiracist groups. Chris' reflection and goal-setting represent a key shift many partners underwent: naming past harm to deliberately change harmful routines.

In Biannca's case, she tells me of an experience in college where she enacted anti-Blackness by telling her Black friend, Morgan, that she could not be alone with her. Bianca's disposition of the distrust of Blackness inherited from her parents showcases how she internalized and perpetuated anti-Blackness. She tells me that her relationship with her friend faded, and she feels shame and guilt about how her white worldview enacted violence on her classmate. Even years later, Bianca is aware of how her white ways of knowing fundamentally harmed Morgan, and she seeks to be accountable for her past practices while demanding labor or acceptance from Morgan. She tells me:

I want to be accountable. I want to atone and to learn from this. I wanted to do better. At the time, I did not know how, and now, I guess I still don't fully know how without recentering myself. I want to ask her, What am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to do it? But that would put the burden on her, and it belongs to me.

Bianca's reflection about the roles of accountability and reconciling past harm motivates her un/learning practice of seeking out and compensating Black creators' content regarding anti-Blackness. Both her awareness of her past harm and her goals for un/learning focus on her roles, as a white person, who must labor with and dwell in her past harm for emergent and transformative praxis. In her reflection about accountability, her explaining that the burden of accountability belongs to her represents a clear moment of insight: she knows, at this moment, her responsibility to reconcile her past harm is not labor to be put on Morgan or other people of Color. By dwelling in this space of accountability, it becomes clear that Bianca's orientation to

herself has changed. She realizes the labor of un/learning is hers to do and does not call on others to educate her on her behalf.

As Chris and Bianca's stories illustrate, shifts in practice based on past harms committed emphasize the ways in which partners have to reconcile and challenge their own embedded worldviews. In many ways, by claiming that they've enacted harm, partners are able to address and shift harmful ideologies and practices, thereby challenging— even minutely— their recurrent practices.

Listening to Decenter

Research partners often employed listening as a vehicle to un/learn and shift their orientations toward a deeper engagement with multiple realities and subjectivities. Emergent and developing practices of listening were a recursive literate act used to challenge white cultural logic. Nicole, for example, tells me that her initial impulse for un/learning was to seek out advice for racial justice from a white mainstream author. She attended an online forum with two Black authors who asked why white people would be more trusting of a white author than an author of color to engage in racial reckoning. This question was significant because it surfaced Nicole's explicit trust in whiteness and implicit distrust of Blackness. She tells me this shifted her orientation to listening that intentionally seeks out, and compensates, for the labor of educators of Color engaging in antiracism.

Nicole's story represents a recurrent shift undergone by several research partners. They initially use listening as a site of doubt, where the existing white racial paradigm was reaffirmed. Nicole's example of shifting orientation to listening to people of color showcases how she approaches a un/learning listening practice that seeks to destabilize white onto epistemologies. This represents what Frankie Condon (2012) has explained about the “ongoing and interconnected labors” (p. 87) of decentering and nuancing for white antiracist epistemologies.

As she writes, decentering is “the attempt at stillness, at the postponement of judgment, at consciousness of bias” (p. 87) that seeks to “un[do] the self as distinct from the Other” (p. 87).

A shifting practice of listening requires an unsettling of white onto epistemologies. An antiracist listening practice intentionally decenters and nuances, developing a more complex and fluid boundary between self/other. This unsettling listening practice represents a deeper commitment to fluidity, complexity, and uncertainty characteristic of white racial un/learning. By moving away from listening as a tool to reassert stable white worldviews, white antiracist listening practice seeks out counterstories that require a dwelling in paradox.

Miriam’s reflection illustrates the ways she’s similarly shifted her listening practice that involves a reframing of what she pays attention to. She tells me a story about going out to drinks with her mostly white co-workers. She witnesses the server ask her Black women colleague which group she belongs to. Miriam reflects on this microaggression committed by the server at a local restaurant. Her listening practice– the reading of this situation– links racialized dynamics at play toward the harm committed to her colleague that Miriam admits she would not have witnessed without a shift in her listening practice. She extends this example of racial discrimination in a restaurant to the conversations about race she has with her white friends and family members. She reflects:

We talked about issues of whiteness, but I’m unsure if they’re constructive. I feel like many white people don’t have any friends of Color and haven’t really done any research. I don’t know. Like, are you seeking out different perspectives? Are you reading, listening to, and watching things by creators of color or not?

Miriam’s reflection here is significant because it showcases her listening practice that toggles multiple perspectives, particularly in regard to the kinds of learning she expects and talks with

her white colleagues, friends, and family members about. Her frustration with folks in her community for not seeking out counter perspectives and engaging— and listening to— creators of color signals both her awareness of racial dynamics that play out in everyday interactions and how she uses listening to decenter and nuance, which ultimately seeks to unsettling the taken-for-granted ideas that shape racialized structures. Though Miriam admits she struggles with the how-to practices of disrupting discrimination, her reflection on listening and engagement underscores a key shift in listening to that embraces counterstory and paradox to conventional and normative white racial knowledge.

Jane explains how listening, particularly to Black folks, must be thought of as a sacred covenant. As an antiracist learning specialist, she is aware of the ways that white people's un/learning is often unfairly predicated on the emotional labor performed by Black people, a labor that is absolutely never owed. She notes the violence implicated in such emotional labor of Black people to justify their humanity to whiteness. The labor of Black people explaining sacred cultural knowledge, often anchored in their survival and humanity, to white people can be costly and dangerous, if not responsibly and accountably engaged. Jane describes her relationships with Black people as something that must be sacred because of the inherited histories of her body as a white woman:

You can just respect the experiences of Black people as precious and sacred. Part of the doubt, the downfall, the con of whiteness, is that nothing is really held as sacred in the culture because we have fought and spent generations and decades and everything else forcing our cultural norms onto other people. And so when you come across knowledge or art, these are ways of survival. It feels like white people should not even be aware of these things. When Black people are sharing with me the experience of Blackness, and

living in a white supremacy culture, I hold that as really sacred. I just want to honor those experiences and never question them.

Jane's description of the sacred bonds of being in community with Black people demonstrates her awareness of the ways Blackness has been exploited under white supremacy and further illustrates nuancing and decentering via listening. Jane describes a key concept for her is that Black people don't owe white people anything, including cultural knowledge often based on survival. One of Jane's interview artifacts was the album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998), of which Hill had been rumored to say that she hopes white people never buy her album MTV interview in the late 1990s. For Jane, she had to pause here to consider that there are things that are not for white people to openly explore and that not everything is for white people's consumption, gaze, and entertainment.

Jane's reflection about the labor of Black folks illustrates how she seeks to engage, both accountably and responsibly, with sacred knowledge dovetails with Miriam and Nicole's use of listening as a literate act that intentionally decenters nuances. In this way, listening becomes an integral component to engage un/learning in concrete ways. Particularly, listening implicates different ways of sensing, interpreting, and engaging the world. By using listening as a tool for decentering, partners enact a shifting worldview that is race-conscious and intentionally seek out counternarratives to disrupt singular, self-affirming white worldviews.

Importantly, as Condon (2012) points out, listening solely does not constitute antiracist action, even if it does shift listeners toward more race-aware sensing practices. As Condon notes, "the aim ... is not cross-cultural communication, but the destruction of the logics of racism" (p. 88). Antiracist epistemology structurally destabilizes regimes of narrative and knowledge. In this way, Nicole, Miriam, and Jane propel listening beyond cross-cultural awareness, toward a

continual re-rooting of white epistemological commonplaces that, in decentering and nuancing, embrace and seek out contradictory knowledge and worldviews.

Upward Cycle

The first two cycles outlined in this chapter illustrate an important shift from interior interrogation toward outward, social practice that necessitates different and emergent ways of engagement. For example, the move to listening to decenter and naming accountability are examples of public and social practices that enact the kinds of ideological shifts from interrogating histories, narratives, and social participation. These cycles are important to develop individual habits that center interrogative routines around history and practice.

Notably, these moves engage individual orientations and do not necessarily shift organizational and structural routines. This cycle, in concert with inward and outward, focuses on how partners think about and attempt to shift structural shifts toward justice. Notably, structures are reproduced by individual social actors and a single interruption may not fundamentally change the macro structures of white supremacy. However, through the literate practices that focus on engaging structures differently, this cycle helps showcase how partners might intervene and disrupt, even momentarily, policies within (1) their spheres of influence and (2) witness to manage inequity.

Importantly, this kind of pushing must be seen as a product of decentering and listening, as engaging shared goals in thoughtful and intentional ways. Jane explains an instance earlier in her professional life when she realized this kind of listening and acting *in coalition* was critically important. She tells me a story of a huddle at her social work job after the Charleston church shooting in 2015. Her coworkers were talking about how no one talks about horrific instances. Jane recalls her gut reaction wanting to bring it up then and there. She explains how she has had

to train herself to pause and reflect: “I love this idea. How can I support it? Where your role is? It might be cliché, but when you're speaking for people with no voice, we have to why don't they have a voice? Why? Hello!” Jane’s story here reflects the importance of coalitional action in interrupting spaces and not recenter in ways that reassert the ideological power of whiteness and impulse, and instead work to support initiatives in thoughtful and reflective ways.

Interruption in Sphere of Influence

As Jane’s reflection showcases above, coalition is a key component to engaging action in ways that are responsive, reflective, and emergent. Partners who practice coalition use their positionality and influence to shift machinations, policies, and ways of being in their spheres of influence.

Chris’s example positions a kairotic moment at her current university that interrupts its structure toward justice. Chris tells me a story about her searching for a job to lead a social justice institute at another university. Chris tells me that her friend, Anne Braden, suddenly passed away. As she tells me:

I didn't really want to leave, but it was a better job offer. And right in the middle of that decision, Anne Braden died very unexpectedly. I just countered to the Dean. I told him, I don't really want to leave, why don't you set up a center like that here? Why don't we do that? And he was like, let's do that.

Chris’ story about building a social justice campus unit reflects the ways she was intentional to disrupt the machinations of her university further toward justice. This creation was modeled after her relationships with the community, the campus, and her work with social movements. This example showcases how Chris’ positionality and a kairotic moment afforded such a place to interrupt for good.

Beyond a workplace context, Miriam practiced interrupting in her sphere of influence as a parent in thoughtful and rhetorical ways. As Miriam tells me: “We do have discussions about what are societal constructs. We have talked about the social construct of race, like how we have, it comes from history, right, like, but we have decided that lighter skin colors are better than darker skin colors. And we talked about how that's completely made up, but it's very real in its effects.” Miriam’s conversations with her children reflect a developing and interrupting of socialization that is critically important as parenting is one of the socializing agents. She tells me a story of her and her kids playing *The Game of Life* (Hasbro, 1862), where Miriam places a pink figurine into the passenger seat next to a figure. She does so to illustrate and normalize queer relationships. Her kids laugh, and she asks them, “What’s so funny?” This example helps showcase how within her sphere of influence as a parent, Miriam intentionally pushes against heteronormative and white-centered ways of knowing and being. Importantly, this is a kind of un/learning in itself and seeks to shift socializing processes as they occur.

As these cases showcase here, partners engaged situated, embodied, and coalitional approaches to interrupting their spheres of influence. These examples demonstrate a range of how partners acted in coalitional ways. For example minor actions, in the case of Miriam, to subversive reading and acting practices, in Chris’s case, showcases the ways coalition becomes enacted for meaningful structural shifts. Like un/learning, however, it’s important to realize these practices are not ends in themselves, but, instead require ongoing commitments to interrupt injustice.

Witnessing and Advocating to Manage Structural Inequity

Partners also practiced witnessing as a way to manage and disrupt structural inequity. By this I mean, partners moved beyond interruptions and practiced advocacy to shift and change policies toward equitable change. In particular, I focus on Nicole and Robert’s local government

advocacy here to showcase how they worked coalitionally to both individually impact change and at the same time, advocate for changes in local policy.

Nicole and Robert both discussed the ways they were intentional in their local office to resist inequitable policies. As Robert explains, “Policies have been weaponized in the past against marginalized communities, and policies can be used to have positive impacts.” Across both of their stories, they explain how their office received a grant to support the reissuance of suspended driver’s licenses from minor infractions, like parking tickets. Their analysis revealed that these policies most directly impacted Black men.

Their office received grant monies to research how to mitigate the harm of this mundane fee-driven practice. As Nicole tells me,

My constant learning is that we do this thing as city governments that even the most progressive units of city government, where we're studying the problem. We will rope these people in and give them a \$50 gift card to spill their whole sob story. And then we will move on with our lives as though nothing happened. We don't change. There has to be what's next. Because if there isn't, we used those people for no reason. Yes. Hey.

And so yeah, we paid them to tell us their story. But now we have to do something with the story or we're causing harm.

Nicole’s reflection about the ethics of data collection links the commonplace toward justice.

Nicole tells me, after a few attempts to do focus groups, she and Robert decided they would use the grant monies to pay off suspended drivers' fees to get their licenses reinstated. Nicole explains that she must answer to the funder, who doesn’t love this idea because they want to research. “But I was like, Look, I was like, at the end of the day, you must answer to your funder

too and I'm about to just mail you 20 grand because I don't have another way to spend it. Yeah. So let me spend it on these people.”

Nicole also talks about her administrative knowledge around budgets: “If you don't spend it, and it's a grant, they have to leave the grant account open because it's not legal to push that into general funds the city. So we just quietly bank, these little piles of money for good.” This example showcases how Nicole and Robert, who work in the same office, use their positionality to “resistantly read” grant requirements toward specific, justice-centered ends. Through this kind of individual attention, individuals harmed by such a policy were able to get their fees paid off.

Beyond the individual interventions or “band-aids” as Nicole calls them, she works with Robert to advocate for a change in the policy that produces suspended licenses based on nuisance fees, like parking tickets.

Nicole and Robert manage inequity through witnessing and advocating for change in their spheres of influence. As they both admit, they struggle to identify the specific balance between pushing (realizing pushing too hard might not engage productive change) and not pushing enough. As Robert says, “I also have days where it's just too slow. We got to do more, we got to be bigger and faster. It'll take forever if that's if our approach is one person at a time when we need massive policy change at the city level.” Robert’s reflection illuminates the double binds and paradoxes involved when moving from individual change to structural change.

Conclusion

As I’ve demonstrated in this chapter, un/learning whiteness modulates transformative orientations to the world— that is, it features ideological shifts in values, ways of thinking, and ways of acting with others and with/in systems. As these example show, un/learning consists of not solely knowledge consumption about histories of power, identity, and privilege, but, more

urgently, un/learning engenders action at varying degrees. Put another way, when individuals' worldviews change, their practices change as well- how they think about themselves and their histories; how they engage in social and interpersonal action; and how they scale these learnings to coalitionally witness and advocate structural change in their spheres of influence. Given the coalitional organizing structure, I offer in this chapter- one that moves simultaneously for inward, outward, and upward cycles of engagement- un/learning, in this way, becomes an individual responsibility for white people to engage in shared liberatory and emancipatory goals aligned to communities of color.

By emphasizing the literate action of un/learning, we can better understand how orientations and dispositions to the world implicate a shift in practices. The practices I outline here are representative of the contextually rich portraits from my interview protocol, and, as such, represent an emerging index of literate and rhetorical acts, that, for the purposes of this study, transcend, yet honor locality, context, identity, and influence. I do not mean to suggest that un/learning centuries-long dispositions to whiteness can be easily taken up by transplanting the practices outlined in this chapter. What is important here, is that *worldviews carry practices*. Yet, these practices are always situated, always emergent, and always flexible.

As partners reflected on their un/learning, they leaned into complexity and paradox as key, defining (though messy) features. Indeed, many were wondering if what they were doing was enough to engender enough action and change within their spheres of influence. Nicole captures these tensions well:

Because what is the point of pushing for nothing to happen? But isn't that what is the point of saying it? And, also, am I participating in harm? Because it can be true that

nothing, I say at that moment is going to affect a point of view. But how do I know if I'm not trying? Right? And that's the tricky part.

I get super uncomfortable if people praise us for this work. Are you kidding? We move the needle this much. We used somebody else's \$40,000 to send out a survey four times that nobody trusted us enough to fill out, huh? Yeah. Do we do any good? I don't know. Sometimes all you can do is elevate the conversation. Sometimes all you can do is bring a tiny bit of awareness. But, is it good enough? Like there's this line where it's like, the line between Am I pushing hard enough? And am I pushing too hard it is so covered in fog and unable to be seen?

Nicole's reflection here about how to best engage change-based leadership reflects a deep tension around competing cultural and organizational logics with personal values, goals, and motivations. Indeed, several partners aligned with the tensions between individual change and macro change. Some even admitted that challenge was so overwhelming to move to thoughtful action to disrupt systems of power. I think Nicole's questions about the paradox of pushing/not are important to name in these instances.

Returning to Matias and Boucher's (2021) piece, I find it important to note that these literate acts of un/learning are never innocent and, as Nicole captures in her reflection, engage harm, particularly toward communities of Color. By focusing on un/learning here as a coalitional practice, I also hope to emphasize that each partner's emerging practice develops out of emotional and spiritual labor on people of color. It is important we name the harm that un/learning does and realize that coalition is dangerous. As Bernice Reagon (1983) writes: "You don't get fed a lot in a coalition. In a coalition, you have to give... You can't stay there all the time. You go to the coalition for a few hours and then you go back and take your bottle wherever

it is, and then you go back and coalesce some more” (346). Despite coalition as important, we must reconcile that un/learning is harmful and we must center that harm in developing coalitions and white antiracist consciousness

Finally, this chapter complicates our move to practice, as a field. Take, for instance, a routine call in the writing classroom and writing center to provide “practical implications” for teaching and tutoring through antiracist perspectives. The results of this chapter provide a helpful challenge to that kind of questioning. Indeed, when we embrace the development of political consciousness, we develop shifting and emergent practices on the groundwork. Harkening back to Bourdieu (1977), *habitus* carries ways of doing and so when ways of knowing transform, so too do our ways of being. There are not simple answers, and if anything, the results showcased here invite us to lean into complexity, paradox, and uncertainty, echoing Diab et al.’s (2016) call for antiracist pedagogy. By centering these values, we might develop more robust frameworks for un/learning that are responsive, coalitional, and complex.

To put it another way, this chapter emphasizes Kynard’s (2011) call for political consciousness in rhetoric and composition. Indeed, no one can put it better than Kynard, who honors a deep, complex, and complicated history of Black student protest since at least the 1920s:

You cannot simply bypass the ideological trajectory I have traced [...], collect some ready-made assignments and syllabi, and then expect to actually achieve praxis that will actually commune with: the triumphant history of literacy and education from slavery to Reconstruction; the reframing of higher education today that was shaped by Black student protesters from the 1920s to 1960s civil rights movement; sociolinguistic knowledge of African American Language and historical location in composition theory;

[...]. All that ain't a lesson plan. It's a political disposition that shapes what and why you do what you do in a classroom. You got to go there to teach there.

As Kynard says, we must go there to teach there, and I'll add, to be there. As this chapter captures, the work of practice is the work un/learning and antiracist reflective action. When we are there, our practices emerge within cycles of reflection, accountability, and action.

In the next chapter, I turn to explore entry points and apprentices into white racial un/learning. In doing so, I focus on how partners moved from simple to complex heuristics of knowledge and the roles of concrete and abstract apprentices in onboarding and ultimately complicating simplistic guides for antiracist engagement.

CHAPTER 4:

“I DO IT, BUT I DON’T CALL MYSELF DOING IT”:

TROUBLING EXPERTISE, APPRENTICESHIP, AND IDENTIFICATION IN WHITE RACIAL UN/LEARNING

I...I... Identity?

“Nick is our resident critical whiteness scholar,” one of my supervisors proudly says, gesturing to me. She knows that I’m working on my concentration exam focused on critical whiteness studies. So, I get why I might be called on in this way.

Still, this identification makes me uneasy.

“Am I?” I sarcastically volley back to her.

Another moment, years later. I walk into the writing center and hear a conversation about expertise happening. I half-chuckle and half-roll my eyes. I am hesitant to wholeheartedly embrace ‘expertise’ as capital in academe since it gives the illusion of stable knowledge, a white, western, and patriarchal delusion.

“Well, I am not an expert in what I study,” I chime in, unprompted. “I literally cannot feel the violent effects of whiteness so how do I have any claim in knowledge that has been experienced and codified by scholars of Color? I see my work taking that burden off and working coalitionally toward shared goals.”

They don’t say anything back.

Another: I am teaching a writing course on Zoom for TRIO, a federally-funded program for low-income and first-generation students. I introduce myself and my research in antiracist

pedagogies. I feel really weird saying this. *What am I trying to prove, I think?*

These moments highlight the ways we, simultaneously, identify and are identified, often by the basis of our stocks of knowledge. In such instances, I felt– and feel– an uneasiness about the implied syllogism that knowing something conceptually directly corresponds to an identity of expertise, as is so often the story in higher education. As a teacher, administrator, and scholar who seeks to challenge whiteness in our disciplinary practices, pedagogies, and local policies, I hesitate to take on simple, stable, and fixed understandings of myself, the world, and our work.

As I talked with each research partner in this study, we often discussed un/learning as ongoing, shifting, and infinite work. Through these conversations, however, I realized partners possessed a developing awareness of specific local knowledge within this domain of un/learning whiteness. Still, I wonder, as Sara Ahmed (2004) describes in “Declarations of Whiteness,” if identifications based on local knowledge are examples of non-performatives, where inaction is the intended outcome of a speech act.¹¹ Or, as Shannon Sullivan (2014) describes in her book *Good White People* if the onto-phenomenology of white liberals who claim “antiracist” identities invest in false impressions that we are unlike those “other” (read: poor) racist white people, who we are good (read: middle class, liberal) white people. As Sullivan notes, such a claim to a white liberal antiracist identification “is not necessarily an attempt to eliminate racial injustice ... but a desire to be recognized as Not Racist, perhaps especially by people of [C]olor” (p. 5). Relatedly, I wonder about the ways white people develop local knowledge to disrupt these identifications. I wonder.

This tension between identification, knowledge, and action sets the course of this chapter’s central inquiry: how do white people with actionable commitments to racial justice

¹¹ Ahmed draws on J. L. Austin’s *How To Do Things With Words* around speech act theory in linguistics.

develop local knowledge to unlearn whiteness? How does this learning and un/learning shape how they identify and become identified? This chapter, then, seeks to pivot the object of inquiry toward questions of identity, knowledge, and identification that are paramount to white racial un/learning.

To this end, this chapter deepens and complicates the previous chapter's analysis of white racial un/learning as rhetorical and literate processes of "ideological becoming" (Bakhtin, 1982), involving shifts in habits of speech, knowledge, and action. Alternatively, this chapter examines how research partners were apprenticed to develop schemata and heuristics for white racial un/learning and how these relationships informed their identification toward coalitional action. To operationalize un/learning whiteness, research partners (1) sought out literate apprentices in un/learning whiteness, (2) complicated simplified knowledge toward robust, shifting, and situated, often flexible, knowledge orientations, and (3) developed, and then often troubled, prescriptive methods of engagement from patterns of apprenticeship and experiences of un/learning (itself a type of un/learning expertise).

My analysis offers an exploration of research partners' complex and often resistant relationships to "anti-racist" identifications. Early on, several research partners desire concrete pathways for antiracist engagement in the ways prescribed by their apprentices. As they develop more complex funds of knowledge, partners' experience with un/learning challenged the singular modes of engagement described by their literate apprentice. Such an analysis places partner stories and meanings around identity, identification, and knowledge in conversation to inform a framework for un/learning that moves beyond causal moments, meanings, and reflections to participate in a broader conversation about becoming and unbecoming, and the accompanying knowledge development that invariably complicates original onboarding structures.

Theoretical Foundations: Expertise, Apprenticeship, and Rhetorical Identification

To interrogate the ways knowledge development and identification play out in my research partners' moments, scenes, and meanings of white racial un/learning, I braid together three theoretical concerns: (1) expertise development, (2) patterns of apprenticeship, and (3) rhetorical identification. In doing so, I showcase how developing expertise, in this context, means (a) complicating prior knowledge within a new domain of practice (e.g., un/learning whiteness), (b) occurs through direct and indirect apprenticeship, and (c) informs how individuals identify and become identified.

Development of Expertise

Writing studies scholars have examined how writers progress from general, isolated knowledge strategies, characteristic of novices, to more sophisticated, local ones, characteristic of experts. Michael Carter's (1990) article "The Idea of Expertise" explores competing theories of how people develop and enact expertise in their local contexts. Cognivisits, like Flower and Hayes (1981), consider writing knowledge as the development and enactment of general knowledge, developing effective, and often universal, strategies, such as goal setting and maintenance across contexts. Social constructivists have rightly pushed against general knowledge and instead advocate that domain-specific experience shapes expertise more than the application of pre-packaged principles. Synthetically, Carter (1990) forwards a pluralistic theory of expertise, acknowledging both local and general knowledge strategies are needed for the development of expertise. In other words, to develop "expertness," novices use general patterns in developing registers for local knowledge.

In this vein, Liane Robertson, Kara Taczak, and Kathleen Blake Yancey (2012) develop a theory of prior knowledge, describing how writers draw on, rework, and create new knowledge and practice based on prior experiences. The development of writing expertise does not wholesale reject prior experience or what Carter calls general knowledge; however, through modification, remix, and creation, people develop more specific, routinized schemas for situations and domains. Carter draws on Robert Glaser's (1985) work to explain that schemata are "source[s] of prediction... [that] enables individuals to make assumptions about events that generally occur in a particular situation" (p. 272). As individuals participate in more specific and local contexts, individual schemata become more and more sophisticated and routinized. Marilyn Cooper (2011) illustrates that routine experiences often become unconscious and embodied processes of knowing and action. In this way, when novices participate and experience new discourses and environments, their development of expertise moves from mostly conscious to mostly unconscious: expertise develops as an ongoing process from repeated social action.

This discussion of expertise is productive for analyzing white racial un/learning because it centers on the ways in which actors develop more nuanced practices of doing and knowing, based on complicating previous experiences. However, it is key to consider the ways knowledge and expertise are tethered to broader white epistemological positions. Drawing on Kuhn (1962), Paxton (2010) defines the white paradigm as a "complete pattern of thought in which a particular worldview rests. Kuhn makes the point that until a new paradigm is understood, all science and conventional wisdom work to justify and defend the existing paradigm" (p. 122). Expertise is often situated within this paradigm— meaning "experts" guard the canon of knowledge through empiricism and objectivism.

In using expertise as a conceptual framework for analysis, I do not mean that white people can be experts in un/learning whiteness because, especially, we cannot feel the full, embodied, emotional effects of whiteness, that communities of color do. Quite on the contrary, this line of disciplinary research on expertise provides conceptual framing to understand how people, when joining a new discourse— such as un/learning whiteness— draw on and complicate their previous knowledge positions. In this way, this chapter offers an analysis of emergent expertise, or perhaps more accurately how white epistemological paradigms are refashioned within local domains of practice. In the case of this project, this new domain of practice, this new discourse, closely resembles what Leonardo (2009) calls a “critical pedagogy of whiteness.” As he writes,

critical pedagogy must forge a third space for neo-abolitionist whites as neither enemy or ally but a concrete subject of struggle, an identity which is ‘always more than one thing, and never the same thing twice’ (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 206). This new positionality will be guided by non-white discourse... Students would do well to recognize the point that as they work against whiteness, they are undoing the self they know and coming to terms with a reconstructed identity, even an abolished one. Like the abolitionists of the nineteenth century, white subjects of the twenty-first century commit one of the ultimate acts of humanity: race treason. This act of repudiation must be accompanied by a racial project of rearticulation whereby whites and students of color actively work to dismantle the material basis of white privilege.

Taken together, this conversation of developing expertise in this new, neo-abolitionist, discourse helps point to the ways prior knowledge, and its accompanying worldview is complicated in a new domain of practice, which in this case, represents a different epistemological commonplace

than of general knowledge. Put differently, by examining this coming to expertise, I simultaneously acknowledge the impossibility of white people being experts in this kind of unbecoming while recognizing the value of tracing shifts in knowledge systems and ways of knowing. In fact, as Carter (1990) notes, “When the expert system encounters a problem it cannot solve with the data it possesses, it becomes a learner, resorting to heuristic strategies which allow it to accumulate the domain-specific data that increase its base of local ‘knowledge’” (p. 270). We can view the coming of enterprise as both an accumulation of routinized experiences for solving problems— in this case, un/learning whiteness and also an orientation for continual learning.

Patterns of Apprenticeship

Literacy research has demonstrated that expertise and literacy are developed through networks of mentorship, apprenticeship, and sponsorship (Dyches & Gunderson, 2020; Beaufort, 2000; Olinger, 2014). Deborah Brandt’s (1998) hallmark theory of literacy sponsorship draws attention to the agents that often show up at scenes of literacy learning for political, ideological, and material gain. Brandt describes sponsors as “agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy” (p. 166). Given the complex geographic, material, and historical dimensions that show up in scenes of literacy learning, sponsors tend to bankroll individual learning of literacy— and the “ideological freight” those economies of literacy carry. Brandt’s theory emphasizes that “literacy learning throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, coercion” (p. 167).

Brandt’s analysis of literacy apprenticeship focuses on alphabetic text production in political and material economies. As detailed in chapter three, my understanding of literacy

pushes against text-only conceptions and resonates with what James Paul Gee describes as Discourses, “*saying(writing)–doing–being–valuing–believing combinations*” (p. 6, emphasis in original). In this vein, Black feminist literacy researcher Eric Darnell Pritchard (2017), drawing on new literacy studies, Black feminist approaches to literacy, and critical pedagogy, defines literacy as “a practice of meaning-making that does include print, but also as a way of reading everyday life” (p. 20). Literacy sponsorship then can be understood robustly, to include reading, writing, speaking, navigating, making, and thinking combinations. In any case, literacy learning—from learning a technical skill at an office to learning about challenging whiteness—is a product of apprenticeship.

In keeping with the complex uses of literacy, Pritchard (2014) develops a theory of literacy ancestorship among Black LGBT people, to illuminate the ways Black LGBT identify inspirational ancestors as a map to “disrupt historical erasure and promote identity formation and affirmation” (p. 36). Based on 60 in-depth interviews with Black LGBT+ identifying individuals, Pritchard develops four patterns of ancestorship developed through literacy:

1. Literacy is used to create, discover, and affirm relationships with ancestors
2. Ancestors model the multiplicity of identities as a category of rhetorical analysis
3. Descendants' identity formation/affirmation is affected by an ancestors' writing and lives
4. Descendants receive cross-generational mandates to become ancestors through literacy

These patterns among Black LGBT people showcase how literacy apprenticeship serves deeper aims than solely teaching functional literacy, and instead, illuminates the multiplicity of identities, systems of knowledge, and ways of being conferred by literacy apprenticeship.

Integral to Pritchard's analysis, descendants seek ancestors' wisdom often through their authored texts, to guide their work, make meaning of their identities, and pass along their wisdom to others like them. These patterns also reveal how the ideological freight of literacy learning can transform individuals' ways of understanding themselves and their orientations to the world at large. By honoring the contributions of Black queer people's patterns of literate ancestry, we can deepen theories of sponsorship to account for the ways past apprentices, often show up and mentor people, directly and indirectly, into different ways of being, knowing, and moving through the world.

Rhetorical Identification

Lastly, I bring disciplinary conversations of identification into the fold to name how expertise and apprenticeship inform how actors identify and are identified at the intersections of their experiences and funds of knowledge. In rhetorical studies, Kenneth Burke's (1969) theory of identification functions to bridge between rhetor/audience with divergent stakes and worldviews, between self and other. Because "[i]dentification is compensatory to division" (p. 22), identification is the act of naming properties of being, thus implying a degree of connection and unity, even peripherally, between rhetors who might otherwise not hold shared meaning between themselves. Linking the examples of literacy apprenticeship above, identification plays a key role in developing expertise in this new domain because it showcases the multiple uses of identity and knowledge by others who share a similar identity or goal.

In her critique of Burkean theories of identification, Krista Ratcliffe (2005) argues that such views that position identity as a product of identification are limiting and reductionist. In fact, as she notes, "No single identification may inform a person's identity" (p. 51). Drawing on feminist and queer theories of identification, Ratcliffe shows that multiple, overlapping

subjectivities, in varying degrees of privilege and marginality, must frame how we conceptualize identification and identity. She draws on Diana Fuss' (1995) work to link identification as both external and internal, and imbued by psycho-physical and cultural meanings. Additionally, she introduces disidentification as "an identification that has already been made and denied in the unconscious" (p. 62). For example, an example of a disidentification might be race evasion that flattens the experiences of people of color, and therefore when white people are challenged to address the complexity of race, they are unable to talk about racialization because the white worldview unconsciously and consciously disidentifies that subject position. Ratcliffe argues that queer and feminist understandings can productively enact "rhetorical listening," of listening for similarities and differences through cross-cultural communication.

In education, Jupp and Slattery (2010) explain that identification shapes identity formation for white people, how they "articulate[] complex, intersectional, oppositional, and relational ways in which whites form identities" (p. 458). Identifications, they write,

negate reified, fixed, static, or "essentialized" identity tropes. Conceptually, identifications attempt to articulate identities as narrative processes rather than provide identity typologies or topographies. Nonetheless, identifications maintain identities' importance in day-to-day practices, constructed spaces, social interactions, personal desires, and what is generally understood in common sense ways as "lives," especially as lives relate to status or assigned identities like race or gender. (p. 458)

In this way, Jupp and Slattery (2010) showcase the ways white teacher identifications toward antiracist goals seek to complicate oversimplified portraits of white racial identity. However, whiteness humanizes and individualizes. From this perspective, white identifications, particularly those claimed as "antiracist", can be read as attempts to further create a rhetorical distance

between good/bad white people (Sullivan, 2014). In fact, as Matias and Boucher (2021) have demonstrated, such displays to make white people “woke” and “good white people” reassert white supremacist ideologies.

Taken together, these three theoretical concepts help frame this chapter’s investigation into the ways in which identification shapes, constrains, and affords the rhetoricity of white racial un/learning. In particular, these concepts demonstrate how:

1. Expertise is developed by refashioning prior knowledge and worldviews to local knowledge-making practices
2. Expertise is developed by concrete and abstract apprenticeships that serve as guides for a multiplicity of identities and actions
3. Identification is built through and complicated by developing expertise via apprentices

The Quest for White Antiracist Apprenticeship

As Tatum (1997) points out, developing a positive white antiracist identity– “new ways of thinking about Whiteness” (p. 201) -- often “lack[s] knowledge of White role models” (p. 203), those who have labored in coalition with communities of Color for racial justice. As she writes,

There is a need to know about White allies who spoke up, who worked for social change, who resisted racism and lived to tell about it. How did these White allies break free from the confines of their socialization they surely experienced to claim this identity for themselves? These are the voices that many White people at this point in their learning process are hungry to hear. (p. 202)

Similarly, Drick (2015) offers stories of “white allies”¹² who follow the organizing of people of color and become what Ignatiev and Garvey (1996) describe as “race traitors,” white people who advocate new abolitionism to disrupt organizations and institutions that “reproduce race as a social category” (p. 3). As Drick (2015) acknowledges, white people who have fought for racial justice are not without flaws, in fact, many upheld racist and violent structures. Still, apprentices, these scholars contend, are important for white people to work to organize, critique unproductive and harmful mechanisms of white charity and advocacy (e.g., white saviorism), and follow the leadership of communities of Color. Importantly, much of this writing on needing examples of “white allies” is authored by white people, which may, again, reinscribe white onto epistemology.

Aligning with the line of scholarship, in first-round interviews, my research partners were invited to select three objects that represent their un/learning journeys. Each partner, unprompted, selected an object that represented a white antiracist role model, often a book, person, or other media created by a white person who either fought for racial justice or who critically engage whiteness and white racism. These models of apprenticeship were, of course, distributed based on the specific contexts of their un/learning, and included *The Wall Between* by Anne Braden (1985)(Chris), *White Lies* by Maurice Berger (1999)(Robert), and *White Fragility* by Robin Di’Angelo (2018)(Jane).

Maurice Berger: Robert’s Model of Apprenticeship

As a local government worker, Robert recalls his early undergraduate memories, when Representative John Lewis came to talk to incoming students of the public policy college about the duty of public service. From the talk, he was invigorated to pursue a public service career,

¹² While Drick uses this term to explain that white people who have fought racial justice causes, I want to emphasize the ways “allyship” is often a neutral position that reinforces status quo.

and enrolled in the policy college. In one of his introductory courses on identity and politics, his professor assigned the class Maurice Berger's (1999) book *White Lies*. As Robert tells me,

Every sentence I read blew my mind. It was so eye-opening because it's a book written by a white guy who is very honest, retelling his experience understanding race. He does not hold back. He talks about the ugly things he heard his mom say growing up about his Black friends and neighbors and talks about his dad's struggles with mental health. Seven years ago and this book still sticks with me. The book was more impactful for me because it was written by a white author, seeing someone who could expose their prejudices. I don't want to say a book by an author of Color would have been meaningless, but I don't know if it would have been like that introduction that my brain needed at the time.

As Robert confesses, the resonance of *White Lies* stems from a white author's critical interrogation of her own experiences. As a first-year student being introduced to his major, Robert's positionality as a white cis het man orients him to Berger's book in direct ways, often because of a shared identity.

Robert's orientation to a pluralistic white identity by someone with a white identity participates in what Doug Paxton (2010) describes as white epistemology traits: "individualism, competition, positivism, rationality, logic, and objectivity" (p. 123). Robert's responsiveness to *White Lies* is firmly situated in this white worldview, which provides credibility to this white author. Yet, this also represents the ways in which a white epistemology can be used to, inductively, onboard and begin developing orientations to be critical of whiteness. Still, at the core, this orienting structure must be considered in the ways whiteness credentials itself in

knowledge-making regimes. Indeed, Robert's own socialization as a white cis het man is inherently linked to the ways whiteness dispossesses onto-knowledges of people of Color.

While *White Lies* represents one early moment for Robert's un/learning journey, it helpfully introduces the roles of identity and identification in cultivating an awareness of whiteness' embeddedness in modern institutions. In a Burkean sense, for example, Robert's identification with Burger's experiences helps construct a classification of whiteness across other categories of difference. Likewise, Berger also serves as a model of apprenticeship, whereby Robert embraces a multiplicity of whiteness as informed by his reading of *White Lies*. Put differently, Robert begins to (re)imagine whiteness and white people with the possibility of something different from dominant representations of whiteness, anchored in violence, dispossession, and ownership.

To use a term from Robertson and colleagues (2016), Robert uses Berger, as his apprenticeship model, to remix and reimagine his prior experiences and expertise toward a new configuration of identity. Robert's knowledge of multiple white identities— in Berger's case that is critical and introspective— also participates as an initial interaction toward what Carter calls “local knowledge,” a specific activity— in this case, a reflection— within a new domain that begins the development of expertise. Of course, Robert is in no way an expert at this moment, however, his reflection about Berger showcases his trajectory of un/learning and un/becoming from his prior stocks of knowledge.

Anne Braden: Chris' Model of Apprenticeship

Chris, a retiring interdisciplinary faculty member at a Research I university in the Southern United States and former director of an institute of social justice research, developed

relationships and identifications with Anne Braden, a fierce white antiracist who fought vehemently for racial justice in the cold war South.

Infamously, in 1954— days before the hallmark Supreme Court ruling *Brown v. Board of Education*— Anne Braden and her husband Carl purchased a house in Louisville, Kentucky for the Wade's, an African American family. They transferred the title to them, which sparked the segregationist politics of Louisville to quickly deteriorate, enacting racial violence in the Wade's house and anti-communist violence to the Braden's. As the Wade's eventually moved to a predominately Black area of town, the Bradens were prosecuted under Kentucky's sedition laws by McCarthy-esque policies. As Fosl (2002) notes, Braden's life was marked by six decades of fierce un/learning, and coalitional racial justice activism, behind the bleak backdrop of the segregationist Cold War South. In the documentary *Anne Braden: Southern Patriot* (Lewis & Pickering, 2012), Anne Braden recalls William Patterson, leader of the Civil Rights Congress, calling Braden to talk to white people about joining “the other America.” She remembers him saying,

You know, you do have a choice, you don't have to be a part of the world of the lynchers, you can join the other America: the people who struggled against slavery, the white people who supported them. The people all through reconstruction, he came all down through history, the people who have struggled against injustice. The other America.

(“Anne Braden,” 3:53-4:23)

Taking Patterson's advice to heart, Braden publicly worked to raise consciousness among white people in Louisville, despite being a political and social outcast. Years later, Braden wrote *The Wall Between* (1958), which recounts the events around her and Carl purchasing the Wade house and its racist backlash. She also wrote the prolific piece “A Letter to White Southern Women”

(1972), urging that white Southern women will never be free from the confines of gender oppression if they do not engage in the issue of racial justice.

These examples of Braden's activism, particularly those that follow the goals and desires of Black-led racial justice activists, frame Braden as an interesting example of white antiracist models. Chris tells me about the prolific life of Braden, who was both her friend and the subject of one of Chris' book projects. As she tells me:

I argue this as a historian and I'll argue it on every basis of my identity, I think there are very few people, white people, in US history that have demonstrated the kind level of endurance and depth of commitment to anti-racism than Anne Braden. You could criticize her as a human being for it— Her relationships eroded; her other interests eroded; she lived by anti-racism. However, that is an amazing thing to be into. She has shaped me in ways that would go far beyond this conversation. But, practically speaking, in becoming her biographer, I became the avatar for that story. And then more so because I co-founded a social justice research institute at my university and directed it for 15 years. There's not a week that goes by that I don't get contacted by somebody who wants something related to that.

Interested in the twentieth-century social movements history, Chris found herself realizing that literature about civil rights, being published during the 1980s, lacked representations of women in social movement histories. Wanting to do a single-subject biography project, Chris ran into *The Wall Between*, then out of print, in the reading room at Howard University. Years before, Chris attended her first demonstration in 1979 to protest the Greensboro murders of 1979, where Anne Braden spoke at that rally. As she says, "I couldn't help but be blown away by her accent,

you could tell she's white and southern. And the power of her message, like I was really struck by that.”

She recounts her relationship with Anne Braden as importantly linked to her own conflicted identification as a “white antiracist scholar.” She admits she’s resisted calling herself an antiracist before her biography project with Braden. Later, she describes an interview where she was asked if she was a white antiracist scholar. As she explains,

I do white antiracism, among other things, I much more identify as a social justice movement historian, or maybe even an interdisciplinary Social Movements scholar. You know, I don't say like, I'm a scholar of white anti-racism. And I've had to ask myself why like, like, do I think of myself that way? And to what extent do I think of myself that way?

In the creation of her making artifact– the second part of the interview methodology developed in this dissertation, where partners select a moment or moments to reconstruct that seem significant to their development journey of un/learning– Chris creates a thoughtful timeline of her un/learning. Titled “Annotated timeline of Chris’ anti-racist journey as of March 2020,” the artifact represents several dilated moments in time significant to her un/learning. Chris’s beautiful timeline braids together historical events, local moments, questions, and reflections with pictures across her life. In it, she returns to her identification as “anti-racist,” attending her first march in 1979, connecting with Braden, and meeting white antiracists mentored by Braden. Chris details the work she did in the institute, the production of public histories, and her own moments of tension with action, reflecting on her own microaggressions while directing the institute.

Chris's identification as anti-racist develops unevenly across her life: sometimes identifying with, and against, such an identification. As she wonders about the significance of being called a white antiracist or a white antiracist historian, her making project represents a few threads of bringing together antiracist politics in her own life. She explains the goals she has as she moves into the next phase of her life, wanting to be in community with white people and advocate for change. Indeed, Chris' stories about Anne Braden, as a hallmark in her un/learning journey and in her professional work, illustrate how Braden, as "not just as a subject, but as a friend and a mentor" has shaped her life. Chris remembers a moment in her life when she may need to leave Louisville, and recalls Braden saying, "Louisville needs you, Chris."

Akin to Robert's story of being opened up by a white writer who critiqued racism, Chris captures how her relationship with a historical figure, and the professional work of writing the "avatar of her story" that carried throughout her life. Perhaps, especially given the contexts in which Chris worked, as a faculty/administrator at a Research University, charged with leading the social justice research institute, Chris' identification as a somewhat resistant, but ultimately critical and reflective "white antiracist" both pays homage to her biographic work on Anne Braden and, particularly after Braden's death, the work of carrying out Anne Braden's legacy for justice. As Chris admits, "I do it, but I don't call myself doing it." The act of calling, and being called, antiracist participates and affords the kinds of work Chris sees integral to her identity. In other words, Chris' identification ultimately, within the university context, enables her to make visible the work of working with white people toward racial justice initiatives. Yet, her resistance outside of those contexts reflects a more complex story about action, narrative, and being.

Singular to Plural White Identities: Twin Examples

Read in the context of one another, both Robert and Chris' identification with white people who work for, or write about, racial justice serve as dueling examples of apprenticeship into white racial un/learning. They illustrate a kind of identification in the Burkean sense: a bridge between rhetors. For each, they offer partners opportunities to realize there are pluralistic meanings of whiteness. Like Braden's call to join "the other America," Robert's identification with Berger also signals the kind of "outward reflection" that Pouncil and Sanders (2022) advance in our coalitional heuristic model. As we write, outward reflection involves "unpacking individual associations of identity (e.g., what I think about me) may be different or the same for others who share an identical association of identity" (p. 5). By uncovering how a shared identity, in this case, "whiteness," simultaneously assumes a shared identification and also that within that shared identification there are differences.

Robert begins, at any rate, a process of realizing and rethinking the processes and practices of whiteness, a kind of local knowledge for white racial un/learning. That is, like Berger, there are possibilities of white subjects who are indeed critical and imaginative among a shared identity of white people. As represented in this extended analysis of Robert's first object, it aligns with the literature of positive white identity desiring models of the un/learning and antiracist action of other white people. However, this example with Robert also showcases the desires for models are saturated within the white worldview, and implicated in anti-Blackness that often is perpetuated in the ways white people distrust the experiences and stories of people of Color. Thus, this example brings nuance to the ways that models interface with identification that simultaneously open up the consciousness of pluralistic versions of whiteness while being saturated and constrained by white epistemology.

For Chris, her identification with Braden, who had shared regional identity and had family roots where Braden lived and organized, guided her work and life. Leading antiracist workshops, and creating events to honor Braden's work are integral to Chris' identification. Even as Chris resisted that categorization, she was able to synthesize the meanings of her identification. Yet, importantly, Chris does not let her identification as an antiracist, as a type of historian, scholar, and academic, as the complacency that she "has arrived to the promise land" of antiracist consciousness. She interrogates her actions, her interactions with past students, and her goals to be intentional with her community as she moves to the next phase of her life.

Across Chris and Robert's apprenticeship models, it becomes clear the ways their "sponsor" informs both how they think about themselves, akin to Pritchard's patterns of literacy ancestorship among Black LGBT people, and in doing so, remix prior knowledge and identities toward a pluralistic one.

Un/learning Interlude: Disrupting Roadmaps in Summer 2020

In Summer 2020, what some have called the "the great awakening" of nationwide protests for Black life, many white people were searching for easy answers to wicked problems. Robin Di'Angelo, the author of *White Fragility*, was often the go-to piece.

As a graduate student with interests in whiteness studies years before the great awakening, I found *White Fragility* to be a challenging and emotional read as a white person who benefits from white supremacy and anti-Blackness, but also a clearly analytical book that placed white people's socialization as a site of racial injustice. In conversations with others, I would commend *White Fragility* as an exemplary text to introduce the work of white antiracism and whiteness studies writ large. I remember learning that the role of white people in racial justice work was to onboard other white people to the work of reckoning with racism. I saw

Di'Angelo's book as an exemplar of how to talk to white people about white racism, good/bad binaries, and racial justice. I remember thinking that I would really strive to be a Robin Di'Angelo-type scholar.

I had my roadmap.

However, during the summer of 2020, I remember witnessing outrage on social media by Black folks harshly critiquing Di'Angelo's book. I was gagged. I read comments that said that white people should read their antiracist work from folks of Color and that she profited ostensibly from her book.

I experienced what I only can describe as white fragility about *White Fragility*. I retreated into a white worldview and convinced myself that they must have not read Di'Angelo within its rhetorical context. It was an introduction for white people, I remember saying as I quickly cut out of social media. Like Robert, I had centered a white person's knowledge as a credential over folks of Color, and have apotheosized a model of racial justice that is embedded in the capitalistic exploitation of racial justice initiatives.

As I worked through my white fragility about *White Fragility*, I sat with my feelings, venting to my well-meaning white friends who would push me to ask why I was so up in arms about the critical reception of the book. While I still have complicated feelings about the utility of *White Fragility* and am appalled by the ways Di'Angelo profited exorbitantly from the labor of Black activists in the name of racial justice, I worked to center the feelings of racial justice organizations in their assessment of Di'Angelo, and have been intentional to decenter her contributions in the ways I've conducted this dissertation study.

“How Dare You Robin Di’Angelo!”: White Antiracist Apprenticeship Models Gone Awry

Chris’ and Robert’s identifications with a white antiracist figure served as an opening up of their understandings of whiteness as a pluralistic identity category. Albeit, such identification alone does not alone inspire the kinds of antiracist action. However, across their examples, we can better understand how apprenticeship models open up consciousness and even participate in the kinds of un/learning that could engender action. However, as represented by Jane and Nicole (and my own vignette above), the search for actionable white antiracist apprenticeship models can lead folks astray, into a narrow imaginary of an appropriate model of white engagement in racial justice work. Since models for white antiracism are sparse— and for good reason— it’s key to understand that singular models of “white antiracist” can replicate the same typology of whiteness as a shared, toxic identity. Taken another way, when we focus too narrowly on models for white antiracist engagement, in ways that are either uncritical or decontextualized pragmatism, white people who desire to show up for racial justice and transformative work can be led into harmful practices, particularly to colleagues and communities of color.

Robin Di’Angelo serves as one such example of an identification that potentially has harmful effects when taken as a singular model of white antiracist engagement. As demonstrated below, Jane and Nicole both initially identified with Di’Angelo and her book *White Fragility*, as a roadmap for the kinds of white antiracism. However, as both describe, their uptake of Di’Angelo’s model had to be complicated and more responsive than a check-box approach.

As an antiracist facilitator for a non-profit hospital in the Pacific Northwest, Jane interacted with Di’Angelo before the publication of *White Fragility*. She had visited a white caucus group in the Pacific Northwest for social workers and graduate students in social work. As Jane recalls, “I was fangirling so hard and trying to be internally cool about it.” Jane tells me

that Di'Angelo read the group rules formerly established and said, "These only protect white fragility. This only protects white supremacy, this is about protecting white people in this process" As Jane explains, "It was earth-shattering to ask people should just engage." Initially, then, Jane's identification with Di'Angelo mirrors that of Chris and Robert's opening up of a pluralistic white identity. She admits,

When *White Fragility* came out, I took it as my bible. I wanted to be Robin Di'Angelo when I grow up. It took me learning from other Black women who were saying like, this is pretty fucked up. To start to be like, oh shit, what am I doing? Just thinking about the admission prices and thinking about how much money she was making started to make me feel uneasy. What is this woman doing? The learning in this for me was to, like, be your own hero as usual. It is not the gig to be looking to other white people for how this is gonna look. It's not.

As Jane tells me, Robin Di'Angelo serves as an important re-orienting moment for her work of un/learning. She realizes that even though she may identify with Di'Angelo, given a shared regional identity and professional trajectory, roadmaps based on individual people are inherently flawed. By challenging the impulse for easy how-go guides, Jane also recognizes that within white supremacy, white people cannot inherently be leaders for social change given that they do not feel the effects of whiteness like communities of color do. An everyday white person can be more aware of how structural racism operates in local contexts; however, as Jane's story illuminates dwelling in complexity and challenging simplistic and singular understandings of the work can productively help white people to meaningfully engage.

Jane's realization evidences her deeper engagement with local knowledge and the limits of general knowledge in white racial un/learning. Through her experience, she realizes that

general knowledge will not serve her goals and so she develops expertise in local ways. In particular, in realizing Di'Angelo cannot be the roadmap for her antiracist journey, Jane develops specific local knowledge to resist singular pathways of white antiracist engagement. Given her work, Jane, simultaneously realizes that white people need to talk to other white people about whiteness. She explains that developing a level of criticality is a shared responsibility of white people and must be engaged through complexity. As she says,

In no way am I saying it's hard to be white. However, I think that these decisions are changing especially for white people who are used to having a right and a wrong.

Instead of step one and step two and step three, this learning is messy. Having this job around anti-racism training for people and holding that I can both be doing the labor and that and also I can't be the sole message provider either.

Jane's reflection seeks to hold complexity and resist right/wrong binary understandings of what constitutes meaningful white engagement in racial justice work. At this moment, we can see how Jane remixes her prior funds of knowledge— particularly anchored in right/wrong binaries— toward local and responsive expertise. As she explains above, the “how tos” don't work: they're entry points into ways of interrogating individual positionalities afforded in the work. For example, her balancing perspectives that white people need to learn from other white people while also realizing she cannot be the sole practitioner of antiracist work in her context.

Nicole, similarly, worked through similar identifications with and around Di'Angelo. Outraged by the 2016 presidential election, Nicole took one of her Black colleagues to lunch to vent. “I know realize that was an awful thing to do,” she admits to me. She turns to a trusted friend, a non-Black person of Color who studies liberatory pedagogies in English Education. She tells Nicole to work with her to unpack her experiences and to decenter read Robin Di'Angelo. “I

buy the audiobook and listen to it every day.” Nicole is invited to a social media live when two Black authors are promoting their books. They say, “How dare Robin Di’Angelo?” Similar to Jane’s remixing of prior knowledge, Nicole practices a different discourse, a local knowledge, by asking: “Why was I more comfortable learning about racism from a white lady? Because it's not that our information was bad for information wasn't bad. It's that we needed to hear it from a white woman, right?” As Nicole reflects, she comes to conclude the ways in which whiteness, even in these instances, controls the means of knowledge transmission. Paxton (2010) explains that the white worldview protects itself within the paradigm of objectivity and credibility. Nicole reckons with the Discourse of whiteness, ways of knowing and believing, challenging previous knowledge embedded in this worldview.

As Nicole and Jane’s stories helpfully showcase, awareness of white antiracist apprenticeship models becomes a complex and complicated endeavor. Indeed, as both these stories show, for white people, there is a certain rhetorical power to hear racism from a white person. Yet, as both Nicole and Jane realize, such rhetoricity is inherently linked to white supremacist and anti-Black narratives and knowledge-making structures. Through these realizations, they both remix their previous stocks of knowledge toward a new domain-specific to un/learning. In listening to Black women, Nicole and Jane were able to move beyond an easy and palatable racial un/learning, which reinscribed the ways in which, often uncompensated, emotional and spiritual labor of Black people are expended in white racial un/learning. At the same time, for research partners, an opening up of consciousness is linked to identifications with pluralistic examples of whiteness, even if later identifications are troubled. Taken together, then, these examples of apprenticeship models and identification reflect much what Jane describes as using complexity in the ways we approach, and are reoriented, to meaningful engagements.

Teaching Interlude: “Tell Me What to Do!”

It’s January 2020, and I am co-facilitating a workshop on language justice at Lansing Community College with my friend and cohort member, Floyd. The room has at least 30, or 40 people, faculty, students, and staff, for an all-campus kick-off for the spring semester. Floyd and I are asking participants to consider how their beliefs about “good language.” We adapt Baker-Bell’s (2013) activity to uncover linguistic biases by drawing two different speakers– a white mainstream speaker and a Black language speaker.

“You won’t share these,” we say. “This is just a reflection activity for you.”

In discussion, a faculty member in English raises her hand. She’s an older white lady. I’m sure I’ve worked with her students in the Writing Center before. “My job is to teach white mainstream English,” she declares.

“Where does it say that in your job description,” I ask her. She’s frustrated. “That’s what good English is!” We talk. I’m not sure anything I am saying is making sense.

“Well, can’t you just tell me what to do,” she asks me.

I grow immediately irritated, even though she’s starting to shift her perspective. I tell her to email me and we can talk. She doesn’t.

After we dismissed the session, a white staff member approaches me, bypassing Floyd.

“You should be ashamed. You made me racist,” he says.

I’m confused. “How did I make you racist?” I ask.

“You made me discriminate.”

“I think this just surfaced those implicit biases. I didn’t make you do anything,” I say as he leaves the room.

The room empties, and I lunge into a chair near the presenter station. “Phew,” I said.

Floyd cuts me a side-eye and then smiles. “A different crowd than we’re used to,” he says.

Rethinking Identification and Onboarding in White Racial Un/Learning

I end this chapter with a teaching interlude to deliberately demonstrate the messiness of un/learning and multiple identifications in social justice workshops— always incomplete and always fractured spaces of un/learning. At once, participants from different professional roles are placed in an environment of un/learning that spirals into a variety of complicated, paradoxical directions: placing blame, asking for action steps, reflectively dwelling, and, almost all around, degrees of frustration.

Indeed, in this teaching interlude, we see a variety of responses to this kind of work. Both, I’d argue, are examples of white people relying on their socialization through white supremacy to justify their responses and action in the face of antiracist education— employing general knowledge in a new context, consistent with novices. The English faculty member's insistent that she is paid to gatekeep languaging practices that are inconsistent with white mainstream English reflects her own identity as a community college writing teacher, and the deficit narratives about what writing is and is not and how, more likely than not, her students, especially her students of color, could not be considered “good writers” by the virtue of their identities. She holds onto white supremacist ideologies to justify her work as if her livelihood, she perceives, her income depends on it. The staff member frustrated in confronting his own biases, similarly, justifies his response based on his socialization to not discriminate. These are examples of both the messiness of un/learning when identifications and shared identities are not meaningfully shared.

By contrast, the research partners surveyed here showcase the complex ways white people are moved to be more aware and actionable in their solidarity and action for racial justice. Robert, Chris, Jane, and Nicole all create identification and apprenticeship with a white person, historical figure, or author that introduces a pluralistic white identity, one that works toward racial justice in prescriptive ways. Identifications in this way serve to showcase that there are multiple meanings of whiteness and that configurations of whiteness need not be anchored in oppressive and violent discourses of removal and ownership that have characterized white racial identity development under settler capitalism. However, as Jane, Nicole, and my own reflections showcase, recognizing there can be a multiplicity of whiteness may include narrow approaches to white antiracism. That is, these models might be used as a mimetic— a prescribed singular pathway for engagement. In such cases, the singularity problem of whiteness and white identity is replicated: perspectives of how to engage and be are tethered to a singular way of being. Jane describes her disruption of these impulses to “be your own hero, as always.” While these roadmaps might be helpful for initial onboarding into the work, they become too limiting and narrow to engage white identity as a subject of struggle, “always more than one thing, and never the same things twice” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 186).

In honoring the perspectives of Black practitioners, Jane and Nicole complicate their initial identifications and apprenticeship of un/learning. Importantly, my analysis showcases a double-bind: (1) White people with commitments to racial justice seek apprenticeship models and roadmaps by identifiable white antiracists, and (2) these models are often too narrowly prescriptive and recenter the white emotionality, delegitimizing the experiences of people of color. As Boulder and Matias (2021) contend, any analysis of whiteness must be critical of the ways whiteness impacts communities of color. One key way whiteness impacts communities of

color, in this case, is through the proliferation of white-centered knowledge-making regimes. Paxton (2016) explains that the white worldview is credentialed through mechanisms of rationality, suspicion of experience and narrative, and objectivity. As rhetoric and literacy scholars have rightly pointed out, these regimes of knowledge are seeped in problematic cartesian assertions anchored in body/mind dualism (e.g., “I think therefore I am). Such a construction denies embodied knowledge as a credential in the ways that white, armchair pontificating is considered, and credentialed, knowledge.

As Ratcliffe (2005) explains, identifications and disidentifications play out concurrently, in that identifications carry disidentifications. That is, acts of rhetorical identification construct and sustain a similarity between rhetors. In the cases explored in the chapter, such unity often comes not only from a white person who engaged in racial justice (e.g., an identification in whiteness), but often with a shared regional identity (e.g., an identification in regional similarity). Chris, for example, identified with Braden because of their family relationships in both Georgia and Kentucky and Jane with Di’Angelo’s Pacific Northwest regional identity. In terms of disidentification, Ratcliffe explains, building on Judith Butler’s work, that disidentification is a disavowal of an identification. For example, in these examples, Jane and Nicole seek to disidentify with a singular example of white antiracism. As Ratcliffe asks, “How accurate are the mental images that drive our identifications and disidentifications? Who decides and defines what is accurate” (p. 62)?

Certainly, these questions are important for trajectories of white racial/unlearning. As Jane explains, there is a good reason why white antiracist people are not in the spotlight, why roadmaps are impossible. As she explains:

Doing this project has me thinking about part white antiracism feels lonely. Because, when you're actually doing anti-racism, you're actually not performing. You're not the person who people are paying attention to.

That's the whole point, right? Is that decentering and pushing against performance? When you hear about Betty White, and after she died, and all of the things that she did to have Black people on her shows... You would never be like, "Oh, this old white lady must be really down." Because if people are doing it in a way that's genuine, there's not a roadmap. Obviously, for many, many reasons. There's not a performance-level of having the right response. All of that shit is not real.

I, as a white person, have been taught how to perform. I could perform the hell out of that shit. I could say all of the right words. And what is that doing for discourse? What is that doing for like, actual change? You know?

As Jane recounts here, the acts of white antiracism are intentionally nuanced and decentering, examples of local knowledge within this new domain of practice. In the example of Betty White ensuring Black performer's space on her talk show, Jane emphasizes the difference between saying the right thing and doing a context and value-dependent action. Especially in more advanced un/learning partners like Jane, identifications with other white antiracist people become less important to their actions. In acting in their spheres of influence, these models are not consulted as templates for white antiracism: instead, it captures the degrees to which decentering becomes an important step in cultivating antiracist epistemology, which for Jane required reckoning with the needs for apprenticeship models, and the Discourse requiring such

models, to begin with. Frankie Condon (2012) explains that decentering means “we learn to see ourselves and to be ourselves not in the kind of isolation from our relations with one another that permits the illusion of a natural, fixed, and stable self, but as unstable and unbalanced effects of those relations” (p. 75). As represented across these research partners, troubling identifications, an important early moment of un/learning, can open pathways, and participate in local knowledge expertise, decenter and act in ways that work toward meaningful, coalitional antiracist work.

Finally, this analysis of identification complicates the literature on positive white identity, where white people need to learn about histories of white antiracism. Indeed, these perspectives can help develop complexity— an important praxis for Jane— about white identity. Yet, such examples are only useful as an entry point or an onboarding structure for white people to realize how white people can choose to divest in the structures of whiteness, as George Lipsitz (2006) argues. Yet, it also requires us to understand that these models are only training wheels: once models are developed they should, as Jane and Nicole do unapologetically, critically interrogated. In this way, through critically examining why and how structures of whiteness constrain these models, un/learners of whiteness both have access to roadmaps and develop critical habits of mind to break apart the white worldview.

In the context of expertise, my analysis showcases the ways partners move from simplified general knowledge to local knowledge, often through the identification of white antiracist apprenticeship models and a remixing of their prior knowledges. As partners develop more local, responsive, and critical local knowledge, they often remix their prior stocks of knowledge and challenge the accompanying epistemological structure of those worldviews that are based on the perceived credentials of whiteness. Through this analysis, then, it’s clear that

partners develop expertise, though in no way become experts, by troubling their models of apprenticeship and embracing complexity as a Discourse in this new domain of un/learning whiteness.

Pedagogically and administratively, this chapter invites implications for critical white identity pedagogies for antiracist education and administration. Any antiracist pedagogy that reinscribes comfortability politics for white people is insufficient. Instead, this chapter points to the possibility for white people to study and interrogate antiracist white apprenticeships to develop local knowledge responsive to the new domain of un/learning whiteness, as a way to onboard white people to realize and recognize the multiplicities of white subjectivities. After such a study, students, teachers, and administrators might analyze their own knowledge-making structures, particularly based on features of white epistemology. Experiences like this can help learners reject simplistic understandings of antiracist work, center the experiences of people of color, and, in the vein of the previous chapter, critically interrogate the white worldview that necessitates models. As a practice of complexity, then, such experiences can be used to introduce white people to possibilities of white antiracist subjectivity, while simultaneously unraveling the knowledge regimes of the white worldview.

Furthermore, such an approach also points to the roles of coalition in contexts of antiracist teaching and learning—white leaders might focus specifically on onboarding white people to multiple subjectivities of whiteness through a white epistemology while inviting participants to critically interrogate the structures of the worldview. Jane’s reflection about holding a two-ness, of being an un/learner and facilitator of un/learning in her job. “I can’t be the sole message provider, either.”

In the next chapter, I build on this discussion of troubled and shifting identification in white racial un/learning and the previous chapter's analysis of reflective criticality in disrupting the white epistemological commonplace. I focus next on mini-lessons of coalitional action that can inform administrative contexts, particularly in predominantly white institutional structures.

CHAPTER 5:

INFRASTRUCTURING UN/LEARNING AS A MATTER OF HABIT:

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC STUDIES

Breathing deeper, being really present, in a world where people are actually taken care of it would be a relief. – **Jane**

What ideas did humanity lose? In this world, there would be more. More opportunities people have to succeed, more chances for everybody to win. – **Robert**

Forming more collectives that are not so constrained by a lack of resources. I would love to imagine what a spiritual life looks like in that arena. – **Chris**

The stance of curiosity and learning out, that's what the world would look like. An opening up of how and why we know, a destruction of tenants of white supremacist culture. – **Miriam**

How can me and my team work in my spheres of influence work to build something that will redress harm. – **Nicole**

There would be peace and calm.– **Bianca**

A Return to Imagining

During the last interview with each research partner in this study, I asked them to describe their ideal world, a world where whiteness and white supremacy have been divested and systems of oppression existed, but no longer exist. Notably, this kind of question is hard to answer: it requires an imagination that transcends the present to a transformed, liberated social world.

I offer clips from each partner's thoughts on imagining a world that is possible, but not yet. I asked this question to end our interviews deliberately, to invite each research partner to link their ongoing, infinite journeys of un/learning toward liberated worlds. Through our last conversation, each partner set goals for their ongoing un/learning reflection and action. By

asking this question to dream last, I hope we could connect their previous, messy un/learning experiences and future goals with the broader coalitional goals of this work: to build a world that divests whiteness and dreams of something irresistible that does not yet exist

I open this final chapter with a return to imagining and reimagining as a core commitment to transformative praxis. The reflections offered by each research partner showcase a future world that would embrace some combination of safety, wellness, resources, and genius. These reflections also point to community care, taking care, and coalition. I take these reflections as important representations of how these seven research partners have and will continue to challenge their socializations into white supremacy, while recognizing the mistakes they had and will surely make again.

In the epigraph that opens this dissertation by Toni Morrison (1992), she notes that imaginations are processes of becoming. In this spirit, imagining, particularly attuned to the Black radical imagination, continues to be at the core of this project and important for reimagining the work of writing and rhetoric studies as a practice of equity and justice. This project has been a future-facing endeavor that simultaneously requires a reckoning with histories, legacies, and social systems produced and reproduced through machinations of white supremacy.

This final chapter is motivated toward disciplinary futures that engage un/learning to divest whiteness in our disciplinary and methodological narratives, our policies, our pedagogies, our onboarding structures, and other domains of our personal and professional work. In this way, this chapter is concerned broadly with infrastructure, hoping to scale up these individual accounts toward intentional curricular, co-curricular, and institutional structures that promote un/learning for antiracist policy and practices that ultimately engage coalition, decentering, and structural transformation. This chapter is directed toward the various domains of rhetoric and writing studies, including writing center/program administrators, faculty, and researchers. This

chapter has a few connected aims. First, I capture the key moves and findings of this project and discuss key limitations and arenas for future research. Second, I offer implications for pedagogy, research, administration, and policy to engage un/learning as a structural corner piece to our work as rhetoric and composition practitioners. Last, I offer an actionable heuristic for un/learning in the various domains of writing and rhetoric studies.

Un/learning as Literate, Rhetorical, and Coalitional Action

Across this dissertation, I have argued that whiteness must be divested by white people to disrupt the political, ideological, rhetorical, and material power of white supremacy maintained through social institutions. In doing so, this project has interrogated the literate and rhetorical dimensions of how white people with actionable commitments to antiracism disrupt white worldviews and practices and coalitionally advance antiracist futures. By focusing on individual renderings of un/learning by committed white people, I have complicated common uses of “unlearning” that tend to reify the labor of antiracist work on scholars of color. Instead, I used the term un/learning as a rhetorical and coalitional framework to describe how white people with actionable commitments to racial justice interrogate, deconstruct, and dismantle their socialization into white worldviews, policies, and practices.

I historicized divesting whiteness as a disciplinary concern for rhetoric and writing studies that engage calls by scholars of color for whiteness for a just and equitable discipline that evidences explicitly a shift in consciousness and practice that centers the needs, goals, and desires of communities of color. I followed Kynard’s (2011) call that white supremacy must be locally interrogated and challenged by white people to frame my inquiry into un/learning as a rhetorical, historical, and pedagogical problem for rhetoric and composition. In particular, I focused on calls for race-conscious pedagogies, particularly through language justice frameworks, as an enduring call. Further, I engaged in critical whiteness studies (CWS),

particularly Matias and Boulder's (2022) critique of CWS to disrupt white epistemological commonplaces in white antiracist scholarship and spotlight what Leonardo (2009) describes as "neo-abolitionist whites"—white people who "concrete subjects of struggle" (p. 186) who labor toward antiracist action via non-white discourses. In this spirit, I drew attention to the work of coalition, as articulated by Black queer feminists (Combahee River Collective, 1974; Chavez, 2013; Walton et al., 2019), which describes the ways differently positioned groups work toward shared goals in contextual ways.

Drawing on queer and multimodal pedagogies in rhetoric and composition, I forwarded a pedagogical and administrative methodology to trace un/learning through key tenants of reflective, coalitional action, narrative reconstruction, and structural criticality. I designed what I coin a critical of whiteness multimodal methodology that offers a structured pedagogical experience for research partners to recover moments of un/learning and set goals for responsive coalitional action. I collected data through a three-phased process consisting of (1) artifact-based interviews, where research partners selected three material objects to story moments and reflections of their un/learning, (2) multimodal artifact reconstructions, where partners create a multimodal artifact to reconstruct a key moment in their un/learning, and (3) and reflective interviews, where partners reflected on the meaning of their experiences of un/learning through an analysis of their multimodal artifact to articulate commitments for future coalitional action.

Based on data collection, I demonstrated that research partners un/learn whiteness through literate acts that shift to embrace pluralistic consciousnesses, such as listening to decenter, interruption in spheres of influence, and reflective action. From this perspective, I examine the literate and rhetorical practices associated with un/learning, emphasizing that shifting worldviews implicate shifting practice. Through thematic coding, I map such practices onto a coalitional framework, including three cycles: (1) interior, (2) exterior, and (3) upward

action. Such a coalitional model illustrates that research partners tend to move from internal interrogation of histories and participations to advocating change within their spheres of influence. Such an analysis reveals the shifting habits associated with un/learning that emphasizes shifts in everyday literate practice and provides antiracist practitioners with cues for emergent white antiracist consciousness that can be scaled to programmatic and community contexts.

Further, I showcased that research partners' emerging complexity was defining feature of developing actionable antiracist knowledge schemata. I offered a discussion on the roles of rhetorical identification in onboarding white people into un/learning experiences. In particular, my analysis revealed that partners sought out concrete and abstract apprentices to develop, and eventually problematize, heuristics for white racial un/learning that often moved from simplicity to complexity in their emerging orientations to antiracist knowledge and action. Research partners all selected one artifact written by a white person who engage racism critically in their lives in scholarship, art, and activism. Partners often moved from simplistic schemata for antiracist action that followed their apprentice toward more robust, complex, and flexible schemata for antiracist knowledge. This shift underscores how partners complicated relatively easy heuristics for antiracist action (e.g., often emphasizing a singular prescribed way to "get" antiracism) toward a more contextual orientation (e.g., reflexively responding and engaging in antiracist work based on context and needs). This finding is particularly important as it showcases how partners seek out models for antiracist engagement, but then complicate and trouble the practices of their apprentices in pluralistic ways.

Limitations

In developing this study on white racial un/learning, I was interested in the key moments, practices, and reflections of un/learning of white people with commitments to racial justice and equity. While I was not interested in a generalizable account of un/learning— but instead the multiple entry points, reflections, and action of un/learning. Similarly, qualitative research generally garners critiques as non-generalizable. From my perspective, such a goal of generalizing a transcendental model or finding is not possible given the complexity of context—and itself a product of positivism. However, this project should not be taken as guides, models, or generalizable accounts, but instead as a tool for approaching un/learning as literate, rhetorical, and coalitional.

Similarly, qualitative research, particularly in the phenomenological tradition that informs this project, tends to focus on how individuals united in a context or identity witness and make meaning of a shared experience. I departed from this practice to focus less on a shared experience or identity and more on the process of becoming. My research partner selection reflects this departure, given that I was interested in how white people with commitments to racial justice worked to un/learn whiteness, without regard to specific shared domains of practice (e.g., a workplace, a classroom, etc.). In this way, context simultaneously was accounted for, yet such context did not overdetermine the un/learning arcs of my research partners. In this way, the context was not treated as defining trait of un/learning, and while still accounted for in individual stories, could be treated in more direct ways in broader thematic analysis.

In selecting my research partners, I employed a networking and snowball sampling method, particularly from colleagues and friends in my professional network. I intentionally screened and filtered for the selection criteria outlined in chapter two. However, these criteria

reflect my understanding of effective antiracist development and hinged on their ability to articulate their racial justice commitments. Thus, these research partners who might identify differently (e.g., as “antiracist” or as a “social justice practitioner”) may not have been represented in this study. Additionally, my partners' diverse ages, professions, regional locations, and other demographic information while helpful to focus on the processes of un/learning, may not adequately treat the depth and importance of context in un/learning. Further, because of these demographic differences, this project contained a very small sample size, especially when regional data is considered.

I also focused on partners outside the institutional context of faculty working in higher education workplaces, because, as I felt, it's important to learn from others who do this work in other domains. Miriam is the only exception to this case, who worked in the community with racial justice groups that guided her university service. As I show below, I believe there are many connections to rhetoric and composition; however, in deciding to look beyond the field, these findings may not extend to the specific disciplinary contexts I had hoped they would.

Lastly, and most importantly, my whiteness must be seen as a limitation in this project. Because I have been socialized as a white cis-man, my own orientations to antiracist work constrains my data collection and analysis. While I attempted to decenter whiteness throughout this project and to operationalize what I have learned by conducting antiracist education and coalitional work, my engagement in antiracist as a white person is always partial. This limitation is critical for white researchers to engage, especially in the context of antiracist research and practice.

Directions for Future Research

In completing this project, I was ultimately interested in using the results from this study to inform, measure, and support institutional interventions and innovations that enact coalition and un/learning as cornerstone to programmatic antiracist practice. This project, admittedly, focuses on individual representations of un/learning— and their accompanying moments, reflections, and meanings— to inform antiracist practice. Given the individualist nature of un/learning historical systems of power in everyday life, and that un/learning is quintessentially ongoing, infinite, and dialectic, I believe future research can build on and complicate the work in my dissertation study in two key domains: (a) expanding the coalitional, rhetorical, and literate dimensions of un/learning and (b) shifting toward interventionist research paradigms to develop, implement, and assess curricular, co-curricular changes to engage un/learning in local institutional contexts.

Future research expands upon the rhetorical and literate practices I have explicated in this project. In particular, I hope future research can expand the index of rhetorical and literate moves I've analyzed through the critical of whiteness multimodality forwarded in chapter two. The coalitional model I've adapted from Pouncil & Sanders' (2022) *Technical Communication Quarterly* piece can be expanded and complicated by adding additional accounts of white people who engage in commitments to racial justice in their work.

Future research that shifts participant recruitment to specific local and institutional contexts could fruitfully push on and complicate the findings offered here. For example, this study represents research partners across their lives, in different professional domains such as social work, local government, antiracist learning and development, and university administration. An additional empirical investigation into these and other domains can offer a

more direct connection to local disciplinary practice and un/learning while expanding the heuristic models I've offered in this project. Further research could investigate the extent to which white antiracist role models are called on or complicated in un/learning within these specific contexts.

Secondly, I understand the future of this project to live in administrative, pedagogical, and institutional uptake. In this dissertation, I frame my research through descriptivist paradigms and believe that while descriptive research in qualitative research traditions is critical to developing a deeper understanding of meanings, moments, and scenes of un/learning, they can be insufficient for broader institutional and organizational change. As such, my second recommendation for future research is to engage interventionist approaches, that seek to use these findings for local and institutional change.

I imagine future research can develop, implement, and measure un/learning in curricular, disciplinary, and institutional contexts. For example, we may study, from a pedagogical perspective, the utility of studying white antiracist people and then complicating their practices to develop emergent and reflective schemata for antiracist knowledge and action.

Administratively, we may employ the coalitional model I adapt in this project as a framework for training writing instructors, tutors, and graduate students to treat coalitional as a critical practice that enacts equity as a matter of habit. I would hope these studies not only offer innovative pedagogical and administrative practices, and also measure how un/learning happens over time, as an iterative process across a degree program (e.g., through diary study, learning, and action communities). Further, other future work might offer an examination of coalition as a university-level learning community with implications of concrete policy changes. I believe institutional and longitudinal expansions to these findings can move them beyond individual recollections of

un/learning and shift to use this research to make institutions better by building an infrastructure un/learning in pedagogical, administrative, and policy angles.

I hope future research can expand this project to deepen the coalitional, rhetorical, and literate dimensions of un/learning and move to implementation in local contexts. Further, there were two items that my experience interviewing research partners revealed. First, there is a need to interrogate white shame and guilt in the work of un/learning. Many partners described moments of shame and guilt that showed up in their un/learning moments, and the ways those feelings linger and haunt them. I particularly believe that focusing on shame and guilt from a transformative learning perspective can engage shame and guilt as important components of un/learning that can ultimately be used as a tool to increase complexity in antiracist knowledge and action. Second, many partners reported the process of reflecting on their un/learning and future goals as “healing” and many noted the need for community. While there are national-level non-profit organizations, like Standing Up to Racial Justice (SURG) and Coalition on Antiracist Whites (CARWs), future research might offer a community approach to un/learning and the impact on community moments as asked for by many partners.

Lastly, this project also offered a novel approach to studying un/learning through a combination of artifact-based interviews, multimodal reconstructions, and critical and reflective interviewing. I hope future research can employ this approach to future un/learning work and in administrative and pedagogical approaches to un/learning. For example, I wonder about the utility of the methodology in a faculty development learning community, in an undergraduate antiracist pedagogy class, and other un/learning contexts.

Un/learning and Institutional Change Through Pedagogy, Policy, and Action

My analysis of white racial un/learning can offer the field new ways of thinking about white antiracist engagement and onboarding to develop pluralistic and coalitional orientations to antiracist rhetorical action. In particular, I see these findings as informing antiracist infrastructure- and capacity-building across higher education, and more specifically, in rhetoric and composition. Below, I offer implications for administrative work that specifically onboards white people toward pluralistic worldviews and practices through an emphasis on complicating apprenticeship models and enacting literate and rhetorical practice.

Given the history I contextualize this project through, writing and rhetoric studies, as institutional spaces the relegate literate practice, and identities, are deeply imbricated into a history of control, antiblackness, and whiteness. As I've argued in this project, un/learning whiteness and then divesting whiteness is critical of our discipline to embrace and enact justice as defining our practice. And while these concerns are surely institutionally constrained, I believe that the discipline must wholeheartedly focus on un/learning and divesting whiteness as coalitional, rhetorical, and literate action. Given the variety of the areas where our work takes place, I offer implications for these specific disciplinary domains.

Writing Centers & Writing Programs.

Given the infrastructures of writing centers and programs that touch many— if not all students, they serve as critical partners to center and enact un/learning as coalitional, rhetorical, and literate action. In the best cases writing centers and programs, are places where students un/learn their socializations by valuing “good writing” that resembles proximity to middle-class whiteness. This project informs an approach to administrating these programs that encourages un/learning and coalition building as important programmatic work. For example, un/learning

and coalition building might be represented as key curricular foundations, connecting these concerns to language and literacy.

Furthermore, coalition building and un/learning might be used as a curriculum for incoming teachers and tutors. For example, we might offer curricular or professional development experiences where students/teachers/tutors document their un/learning moments over a term. Students/teachers/tutors may use an amended version of the critical of whiteness multimodal methodology to uncover their own goals for justice-centered and antiracist pedagogy. These stakeholders might also investigate white antiracist role models to complicate schemata for antiracist knowledge and action in their day-to-day tutoring, teaching, and writing work.

One of the key findings in this dissertation was that partners employed complexity in their antiracist knowledge schemata. I believe that complexity over simplicity can inform a revision of program goals and pedagogies. Such an approach to complexity challenges the field's interest in clarity, logic, and control; instead, such an approach to complexity would realize that there are never easy answers and that simplicity is a product of white supremacist knowledge-making regimes. Thus, writing centers and programs might develop curricula, assessments, and values that center complexity and criticality, build coalitions with other groups on campus, and challenge the work of learning toward something messy and challenging. As Morrison (1992) noted, imaginations are about becoming. I believe by centering unbecoming in our teacher/tutor education and pedagogy, we more directly champion criticality and complexity across campus.

Administration as Coalition.

In particular, I believe administrators can learn from this study's approach to the coalitional practices of un/learning. For example, administrators might look to how to advocate

in their spheres of influence for positive institutional change, or how to decenter and interrogate their individual histories. I believe the coalitional model can serve as an important thinking tool for administrators to enact a relatively abstract idea in their day-to-day work.

For example, take Robert and Nicole's example of subversive reading of grant guidelines, where they reallocate funds to not only support people negatively impacted by a racist policy but also advocate for the changing of that policy. This story is particularly useful for higher education administrators who might intentionally misinterpret how institutional policies can be interpreted and enacted in subversive and rhetorical ways.

The coalitional model I offer can also showcase the ways administrators can navigate multiple levels of an institution, including from their interior, interpersonal, and structural un/learning work. This can inform how administrators can use their spheres of influence to enact meaningful work through everyday practice. It also emphasizes structural change through advocacy in their spheres of influence as ongoing. In many ways, the coalitional model is about making meaningful institutional change, and I believe administrators can use the coalitional model for meaningful change.

Graduate Programs.

Graduate programs represent the building blocks of tomorrow's discipline, and therefore are critical intervention points for un/learning. Graduate programs should consider how they build in moments for un/learning, interrogating individual and disciplinary histories, and employing coalition. Even as the academy drastically changes, our graduate programs must offer formalized space to engage un/learning, particularly for white graduate students who must learn to decenter themselves and center Black, Queer, and Feminist approaches to the work. For example, in an introduction to graduate studies course, students might learn about coalition in

response to their specific positionality, practice the traits of coalitional un/learning, and use their toolkits (classrooms, research, leadership, etc) for justice.

By focusing on graduate programs as sites of un/learning, we invest energy in the rhetorical toolkits graduate students take with them to other institutions but also in their community-engaged work, their industry experiences, and more. It reframes graduate education as mastery of a niche area, toward something that rhetorically embraces complexity in teaching, research, management, and analytics. Such an approach would build further accountability structures for un/learning that empower students to advocate for local policy change that centers on justice.

Approaching Un/learning as Infrastructure in Rhetoric and Writing Studies

These implications, I hope, show the need to scale the findings of this study toward responsive institutional ecologies that encourage un/learn to divest whiteness. Because the ultimate goal of this dissertation is to dream toward and enact justice in our day-to-day practice, I offer a heuristic for approaching un/learning as an infrastructure that employs the findings of my project toward justice changes.

I've organized this heuristic as a thinking tool. I've organized around three different levels— the institutional level, the programmatic level, and the individual level. Under each, I offer a few domains for this work.

Figure 5.1: Heuristic of an Infrastructure of Un/learning

<p><i>Institutional-level</i>– How does un/learning and challenging whiteness become a strategic institutional priority? How does this show up in values, policies, and the daily work of the institution?</p>	
<p><i>Policy and Values</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the institution define, enact, and report un/learning? • What metrics are reported around un/learning and the impact of un/learning in areas of DEIB? • How are faculty and administrators afforded time to un/learn? How does that count for their promotion and tenure (e.g., not as an add-on)?
<p><i>Community Engagement</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the institution approach constructions of community? • In what ways does community engagement disrupt the white saviorist tropes of charity? • How does the institution monetarily support community organizations that approach their work through racial justice perspectives? • How are faculty and students engaging in community work onboarded and held accountable to challenge whiteness and white saviorism?
<p><i>Learning and Action Communities</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the university offer interdisciplinary places of un/learning? • How do these projects shift institutional policy and resources that focus on equity and justice? • In what ways are individual units responsible and held accountable for their un/learning and metrics for DEIB?

Figure 5.1 (cont'd)

<p>Program-level: How is un/learning represented in the curricular and operational work of a program? How is un/learning cultivated as a curricular and programmatic priority?</p>	
<p><i>Recruitment, Onboarding, and Professional Development</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are graduate students, faculty, and staff being recruited to represent their un/learning and advocacy work? • What co-curricular and service (e.g., orientations, professional development, committee work) introduce coalition as a practice of professional work? • What kinds of mentoring and community learning offers members chances to interrogate their positionality, their pedagogy, and engage coalition as a practice? • What are the policies (e.g., bi-laws) and reporting structures (e.g., yearly reviews) represent commitments to un/learning and challenging whiteness?
<p><i>Curriculum Development</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What concrete curricular moments exist for students to interrogate positionality, history, spheres of influence, decentering, structural advocacy, and/or coalition? • How are these curricular moments evaluated? How do they center intentionally Black, queer, and feminist approaches?
<p>Individual-level: How do individuals within a program approach un/learning or where do they go to do so? What traits do we look for in un/learning happening as part of this person's work?</p>	
<p><i>Pedagogy & Curriculum & Assessment</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What pedagogical tools are used to encourage un/learning and coalition? • What do students learn about positionality, history, spheres of influence, decentering, structural advocacy, and/or coalition? <p>How is un/learning represented and assessed?</p>
<p><i>Professional Development</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What professional development is required? • How do these professional development moments reward un/learning in the tenure and promotion process?

As I have mentioned above, this is a tool for thinking about how we scale up un/learning as a critical component to the day-to-day, administrative, pedagogical, and curricular dimensions of our work. Further, these questions are not intended to be a finite checklist, but a way to approach how we take something abstract (like un/learning) that can be operationalized to different parts of our work.

Daydreaming & Invitations & Thanks

We are here five generations after you and a lot has happened. A lot of things that used to exist when you were 12 or even when you were 28 don't exist anymore: People broke a lot of things other than silence during your lifetime. And people learned how to grow new things and in new ways. Now we are very good at growing. I'm growing a lot right now and everyone is supportive of growing time, which includes daydreams, deep breaths, and quiet walks. No one is impatient while everyone else is growing. It seems like people are growing all the time in different ways. It was great to learn about you and a time when whole communities decided to grow past silence.

–Alexis Pauline Gumbs, “Evidence” (p. 35), from *Octavia’s Brood*

If I've learned anything throughout this project, is that our futures— coalitional, antiracist, queer, futures— are in the making today. And, they desperately needed for the survival of humans to live abundant, justice-centered lives. I felt compelled to end with yet another return to imagining; this time through Alexis Pauline Gumbs' (2015) short story, “Evidence.” In it, a woman five generations from now reflects on how the world has changed. This excerpt shows how, in this post-apocalyptic world, people are growing past silence, past the status quo, growing into something, from today's white supremacist logic, unimaginable.

I'm thankful for the work of this project that has shown me that growing, and un/learning

is hard, messy, and imprecise, but the lives of communities and those we love and care about so deeply depend on divesting harmful histories and systems. As Black queer feminists have taught me, this is a work of science fiction, of building and dreaming together toward justice, and it's already happening. And we need more of this thinking, un/learning, and coalition.

This is particularly true for writing studies. We have the opportunity to build something new and to grow in unprecedented ways. I hope we will take the decades of calls by Black women of our discipline to transform it into an unabashed practice of justice. From writing and teaching centers to first-year writing, our majors, and graduate programs— I hope, like Gumbs' narrator in "Evidence" that we do this growing past silence, past the status quo, and past white supremacy that is so characteristic to our pasts.

I'm thankful for the time, labor, and reflections of my seven research partners: Chris, Robert, Jane, Nicole, Miriam, Bianca, and Noah. Thank you for sharing your journeys with me, your fears, and your hopes. I've not only learned so much about your un/learning, but I've been transformed by your vulnerability, reflections, and dreams, and I hope our field and institutions are too. Thank you.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL & SOCIAL MEDIA

Hi there! I'm Nick Sanders, a doctoral candidate in Rhetoric and Writing at Michigan State University, and my research seeks to rupture the violent cultures of whiteness perpetrated by individuals and institutions. In this vein, my dissertation project examines the contexts and experiences that shape how white people with actionable commitments to racial justice unlearn and divest their whiteness. It is my hope that this project can inform future antiracist intervention programs and policies from communities to colleges and the general public.

I'm writing to invite you as a research partner to participate in this un/learning project. Much of the landscape of white antiracism is often performed through simplistic understandings of "love" and "wokeness." Instead, I am instead interested instead in partners who:

- identify as white and are critical of the meaning of their whiteness;
- have had a shift in the ways they understand structural racism, individual racism, and whiteness; and
- have concrete actionable commitments to racial justice following Black, Indigenous and People of Color activisms

Additionally, I particularly welcome partners from a variety of regions, careers, and positionalities, especially including those who work with grassroots racial justice campaigns and those who work outside of education fields.

If you or someone you may know may be interested and meets these characteristics, please fill out this form: [LINK]

Research partners who participate in all interviews will be compensated 100 US dollars for their labor. Additionally, a donation of 150 US dollars will be granted to a racial justice organization of their choice.

Interested partners will be invited to three interrelated interviews, each of which will last one to three hours. These interviews will take place on Zoom and each interview will have a distinct focus and invite personal stories, reflections, and goals. Additionally, each partner will be asked to create a representation of their learning in a form that may be useful to them (e.g., video, podcast, story, etc.). These interviews are intended to be learning experiences for both myself and partners. Partners, especially, should expect to learn more about their learning arc to support others to the work, and further develop a network of accomplices.

Notably, this project has grown out of my own unlearning as a white gay man and how my whiteness could be a gatekeeper and obfuscate racial justice in my communities and workplaces. Additionally, working with writing teachers and tutors on troubling white supremacist ideas around schooling have demonstrated how important this work is and the need to learn about unlearning of whiteness.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at sande463@msu.edu. Thanks in advance for your interest and willingness to circulate.

Be well,
Nick Sanders
Doctoral Candidate
Michigan State University

Participant Invitation- Social Media

Hi there! I've been following you for a while and have really appreciated, and learned from, the work you do to educate white people on racism and the work of antiracism. Currently, I am a doctoral student in Rhetoric and Writing at Michigan State, and my research seeks to rupture the violent cultures of whiteness perpetrated by individuals and institutions. My dissertation project examines how white people with actionable commitments to racial justice unlearn and divest their whiteness.

I was wondering if you might be interested in potentially being a participant in this un/learning project. I'd love to share more information with you or any one you think might be interested! Thanks for your time!

APPENDIX B: SCREENING SCRIPT & SURVEY

SURVEY

1. What is your name? [Short response]
2. What is the best way to contact you? [Short response]
3. Do you identify as a white person? [Y/N checkbox]
4. What does your white identity mean to you? [Long response]
5. Has your understanding about race, individual racism, structural racism, and/or whiteness changed over time? If yes, explain. [Long response]
6. What are your concrete commitments to racial justice? Who are you accountable to?
7. Do you know anyone else who would qualify for this study? [Y/N]
 - a. Please provide contact information [Short Response]

SCRIPT

Welcome and Agenda (3-5 Minutes)

Thank you so much for your interest in this project! I really appreciate your interest in talking with me and your commitment to working towards antiracist futures. The purpose of this meeting is to talk more about the project, talk through any questions, concerns, comments, etc. you have. Specifically, we will:

1. Walk through the study's aims and goals with you and review the process for participating in this study, what it will entail, what you can expect from me, and the time commitment.
2. Get to know you a little bit more, and I've designed a few questions to learn more about details of your life.
3. I would like to discuss next steps for participation, including completing informed consent.

Overview of Project (5-7 Minutes)

As you know, this project is interested in tracking the moments, artifacts, places, people, and conversations that have shaped how you've worked to un/learn whiteness and work toward antiracist futures. By "whiteness," I mean the specific ways of understanding and navigating the world that are consistent with how white people strategically use power in their everyday life to sustain and maintain the status quo (e.g., rationality over emotionality, calling the police on Black people, perfectionism, only having white people in their networks, not believing people of color, and so on). In this vein, I am interested in learning how white people work to disrupt whiteness in themselves and their communities.

I also realize that this un/learning is often not linear or logical and is a constant process. To this end, I'm very interested in the life experiences that inform how white people have developed stances toward racial justice that will helpfully inform future work.

To do so, I have developed a three-phase interview process that invites critical reflection through storytelling. This will include two interviews, scheduled for a two-hour block on Zoom, and a making activity. Between interviews, I will ask you to participate in a making activity where you will recreate a moment or series of moments that were key to your un/learning. This will be in a form of your choosing such as a written story, map, video, artwork, podcast, comic book strip, zine, etc. Across each phase, I am particularly interested in concrete, detailed examples and reflections of your un/learning.

- Phase I (Zoom): You will be invited to bring 3 objects that were significant in your un/learning. We will use this to have a conversation about your life history around racial learning and un/learning
- Phase II (Independent): You will be invited to participate in a making activity, to recreate a key moment or moments in your own learning and un/learning. This could be in any form or mode, such as a video, a podcast, a comic book strip, a piece of art, a written piece, some combination therein.
- Phase III (Zoom): You will bring your object talk through their project and reflect on the meaning of these experiences and set goals for yourself in the future

Additionally, I would like to describe what you can expect from me in this process. Because you will be sharing experiences and stories with me, I will be happy to share stories from my own experiences and reflections and you should feel free to ask me any questions. I will prepare questions for each phase but they are flexible and we can dig into the issues and components of your experience you wish to.

Because we will be discussing moments of your life and learning, I do want to recognize some of these conversations may be uncomfortable and challenging. While you do not have to answer anything that makes you uncomfortable, I would like you to consider that perhaps discomfort is a key part of un/learning. Likewise, as a white researcher who studies whiteness, I may disrupt some common conventions in research where the researcher is a passive recipient. Instead, I may invite you to think about how race and whiteness may have informed particular moments you describe and challenge you to think about how certain ideas might reinscribe whiteness. I do so to invite continued criticality.

Do you have any questions about the project, what you will be asked to do, or what you can expect from me?

If you are still interested, please feel free to complete this consent form: [Redacted]

General Life History Question (10-15 Minutes)

Okay, I now would like to spend about 10-minutes or so to ask you a few basic life history questions. These are used to give me some background on your life. These are relatively simple questions, quick questions.

- What year were you born
- Where were you born?
- Did you move while growing up? If so, where?
- What is your education status?
 - What schools did you attend,
 - When did you graduate, and
 - How large was your graduating class?
 - In the schools you attended, what do you remember as the racial makeup of students?
- What is your occupation? What is your work history?
- How do you describe your racial identity?
- How would you describe your class background?
- How would you describe your religion or spiritual identification?
- How would you describe your gender and sexuality?
- Why are you interested in this project?
- Is there anything else you would like me to know?

Thank you so much for sharing this information with me. Additionally, for research projects like this you can select to have your name be replaced as a pseudonym (a made up name). You will be able to pick your pseudonym. You don't have to know right now, but it is something to think on.

Next Steps (5 Minutes)

For next steps and to begin this process, you will simply need to complete this Qualtrics Survey that serves as a consent form that overviews what you'll be expected to do, protections, and ect.

Consent form: [Redacted]

Then, I will be in touch with you to schedule interviews for December and January. Do you have general days that are available for you? If you don't know right now, we can always talk about availability

If you participate in all phases of this project, you will receive a \$100 visa gift card for your labor and a \$150 donation to an organization that advances racial justice.

Do you have any further questions?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW #1 SCRIPT

Introduction and Framing

Thank you so much for joining me today and your willingness to be a participant in my dissertation project. I'm very excited to learn from you and your experiences of working to unlearn whiteness. As you know, this is research study interested in tracking the moments, artifacts, people, places, and reflections that accompany how you have worked to un/learn whiteness and work toward antiracist futures.

Today, we've scheduled a 90-minute interview. We will begin with some basic social identity questions and then move into the stories of the objects you've selected to share with me today.

Today, I've asked you to select three objects that are significant to your un/learning whiteness. Your objects can be physical things (e.g., a picture, a piece of writing, an heirloom) or intangible, (a specific sign, an intersection, or place); something that cannot be held, things that have been destroyed, things that no longer exist. Objects like books, movies, music, and other media, are all fair game. The goal of bringing objects to this first interview is to use them to tell stories of your unlearning whiteness. I am interested in concrete stories and experiences and find that objects can help ground those stories.

Based on our conversation last time, I've also listed a few assumptions and shared expectations:

- Un/learning whiteness is a lifelong process and may not be linear and white people cannot be experts in whiteness because we cannot feel its full effects
- I may disrupt conventional interview norms and will ask you to consider how whiteness has informed the experiences you share
- While you do not have to answer anything that makes you uncomfortable, I would like you to consider that perhaps discomfort is a key part to un/learning
- I am interested in concrete stories and experiences as well as your past and present reflections on those experiences. You may understand something very different now than a past version of yourself did.
- Since you are sharing stories today, I am also happy to share stories from my life with you. I will also do so in the write up of which I will share with you to remove, add, supplement the experiences you share.

Please also let me know when you would like to take a break today. Additionally, this session will be recorded, and I've enabled captions for accessibility purposes.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Let's begin with some background social identity questions.

Social Identity Questions

- What year were you born
- Where were you born?
- Did you move while growing up? If so, where?
- What is your education status?
 - What schools did you attend,

- When did you graduate, and
- How large was your graduating class?
- In the schools you attended, what do you remember as the racial makeup of students?
- What is your occupation? What is your work history?
- How do you describe your racial identity?
- How would you describe your class background?
- How would you describe your religious or spiritual identification?
- How would you describe your gender and sexuality?
- Is there anything else you would like me to know?

Transition: Thanks for sharing these answers with me! Now let's pivot to the objects that you've selected for today. We'll go through each object one at a time. Let's start wi

Object-based Questions (20-25 Minutes)

- Could you tell me about the object you brought?
 - How would you describe it?
 - What is your relationship to the object?
 - What are the stories of this object?
 - Where does it come from?
 - How would you describe the setting?
 - How would you describe the racial demographics of the setting?
 - Who else does this object involve?
 - What were/are their relationships to you?
 - What conversations, activities, etc. were involved with this object?
 - At what point in your life did this object come about? How would you describe yourself (e.g., your values, identities, motivations) during that time?
- Could you explain what the meaning of this object is to your racial identity and racial learning?
 - Has the meaning of this object (and yourself) changed over time?
 - What do you think the roles of whiteness and/or race, racism, informs this story?
 - What was the lesson you learned from that experience? What do you think of that lesson now? Has it changed it's meaning?

[Break here]

Relationships Among Them

- What kinds of relationships do you see between these objects and stories? Do later objects/stories complicate the lessons learned in the earlier moments? Do they intensify?
- As you think about these experiences, how would you say the roles of whiteness shaped them? What do you think the lesson in there is for that?
- What are lingering questions you have about what you've discussed and reflected with me today?

Coda:

Thank you so much for sharing these stories and reflections with me today. We are approaching the 90-minute mark, and I wanted to respect your time. I did want to briefly make note of next steps for this project.

Based on our conversations today, I would like you to recreate, in any mode or form, a key moment in your un/learning of whiteness. This could be a video, a podcast, a comic book strip, a piece of art, a collage, a written piece, or some combination therein. I will send you more detailed instructions by email with a list of possible examples and resources.

Once you've completed this process, we can schedule our second and final interview. During that interview, we can talk about what you made, the process of making it, and what you learned along the way and what you hope to continue to learn about unlearning whiteness. Additionally, I'm also happy to help brainstorm with you and provide any resources or tech support you might need for this process.

Are there any questions you have at this time?

Thank you so much!

APPENDIX D: PROMPT FOR MAKING ACTIVITY

Thank you so much for taking the time to connect with me last week and share your reflections and experiences with me. I learned a lot about your life and journey, and I'm excited to continue to learn more.

Below, please find information for the second phase of this project. In short, you will recreate a key moment or series of moments in your un/learning of whiteness in some form useful to sharing your story (e.g., video, podcast, collage, comic book strip, etc.). Once you've completed this, you can email me a copy of your making project and we can schedule our final interview.

Below are some basic instructions:

Thinking back on unlearning whiteness, I would like to invite you to compose something that tells the story of a significant moment, event, or experience in your development in a form or mode of your choice- a video, podcast, short story, a comic book strip, Tik Tok, collage, etc. Your project can be as long as you like and can look different based on what you'd like to tell and why you'd like to tell it.

I am especially interested in specific details of the events you describe in the moment (e.g., where you were, what other people were there, what did people say, what did you feel and think) but also a reflection, in the present, about that event.

You could consider questions like: What do you think and feel about this now? How does this fit into the story from our first meeting? Why is this event, moment, or experience significant?

I am more than happy to brainstorm and/or provide any tech support as you see fit. Please note, that you can also work on this project in non-tech ways, such as handwriting, crafts, and so forth. Either way, once you've completed your work send me a copy or a picture of it to my email, sande463@msu.edu.

Below, I've also compiled some easy-to-use online tools for a variety of modes. Feel free to use these as you see fit, but also no pressure if you'd like to use something else (e.g., something not listed here, a non-tech alternative).

- Video
 - <https://www.adobe.com/express/>
- Infographics
 - www.canva.com
- Podcast

- https://www.podbean.com/?utm_campaign=elearningindustry.com&utm_source=%2F321-free-tools-for-teachers-free-educational-technology&utm_medium=link
 - <https://www.audacityteam.org/>
- Comic Book/Strips
 - <https://www.storyboardthat.com/>

Please let me know if you have any questions or ideas you would like to chat about. I'm so excited to see what you create!

Nick

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW #2 SCRIPT

Thank you so much for reconnecting with today! I hope this interview can continue your reflection on your on-going journey of un/learning whiteness. I appreciate the time and labor you've put into this project.

Today, I would like us to first talk about the artifact you created, talk about how your journey of un/learning whiteness shows up in your professional work, and end with a reflection on your next steps.

Reflections From Last Time (10-15)

- It's been a few weeks since we've last connected. I was wondering if you had anything on your mind since we last spoke?
- Any other stories about whiteness and learning that you'd want to share and unpack together?

Artifact Creation (15-20)

- What did you decide to create?
- Why did you select this mode?
- What story does it tell? Who are the players? What did you learn from this moment?
- Why do you think this moment was significant to your un/learning?
- What was the process of making the video like? Did you learn anything about yourself making it?
- Was there anything surprising or noteworthy?
- What would you add?
- Did you see any connections or tensions between our conversations last time?

Connections to Professional Work (10-15)

- One element I was curious to learn more about is how your un/learning of whiteness has impacted how you conduct your professional work. Do you see your journey informing your work?
- What roadblocks do you face when trying to incorporate what you learn into your work?

Goals Looking Forward (10-15)

- How would you describe your commitments to racial justice now?
- What goals do you have for yourself looking forward? How do you plan to continue this work of un/learning?
- This last question invites you to dream a bit. If barriers of whiteness, sexism, homophobia, capitalism, and ableism didn't exist, what would your ideal world look like? Feel like? Be like?

I will be sending out an email form to collect information to distribute your honorarium sometime in April and May.

APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: Divesting White Racial Consciousness: Toward a Rhetoric of White Racial Un/Learning

Researcher and Title: Nick Sanders, Doctoral Candidate

Department and Institution: Writing and Rhetoric, Michigan State University

Contact Information: sande463@msu.edu, 5187280854

Sponsor:

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 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 researchers any questions you may have.

You are being asked to participate in a research study to examine the contexts and experiences that shape how white people with actionable commitments to racial justice unlearn and divest their whiteness.

Your participation in this study will take about 10-15 hours across 3 meetings in a 4-6 week period. You will be invited to three interrelated interviews, each of which will last one to three hours. These interviews will take place on Zoom and each interview will have a distinct focus and invite personal stories, reflections, and goals. Additionally, each partner will be asked to create a representation of their learning in a form that may be useful to them (e.g., video, podcast, story, etc.).

Besides your time, there are no likely risks of participating in this study.

The potential benefits to you for taking part in this study are chances to learn more about their learning arc as a way to support others to the work and further develop a network of accomplices. Your participation in this study may contribute to understanding how white people with actionable commitments to racial justice work unlearn and divest whiteness. Further, your participation should help inform future antiracist intervention programs and policies from communities to colleges and the general public.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this research study is to track the moments, artifacts, and trajectories to describe how white people with actionable commitments to racial justice come to un/learn whiteness and how these encounters shape their orientations to racial justice.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO

You will be invited to participate in three connected interviews on Zoom and each interview will have a distinct focus and invite personal stories, reflections, and goals.

- For the first interview (1.5-3 hours), you will be asked to select three objects or artifacts-- things that represent your past, present, and future in your un/learning whiteness. Your objects can be physical things (e.g., a picture, a piece of writing, an heirloom) or intangible, (a specific sign, an intersection, or person) a something that cannot be held, things that have been destroyed, things that no longer exist.
- During the second interview (1.5-3 hours), we will have a chance to watch the initial interview over again and reflect further on your objects and consider other moments and reflections. This will be generally open ended, and I'll invite you to notice anything that stands out to you as important. Additionally, from that reflection, we will also talk about a making activity (1-2 hours) that I'd like you to complete for the third interview. You will have a chance to reconstruct a moment from your life that you feel was central to your unlearning in a form useful to you (story, podcast, comic book, video, diorama,).
- During the third interview (1.5-3 hours), we will have a chance to reflect on the product of your making activity, provide participants a chance to share their construction, consider their goals for the future, and articulate their antiracist theory of practice

The length of your participation should last 10-15 hours between the three interviews and the making activity, across a four to six-week period. You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

You may not benefit personally from being in this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study will contribute to understanding how white people with actionable commitments to racial justice work to unlearn and divest whiteness. Further, your participation should help inform future antiracist intervention programs and policies from communities to colleges and the general public.

POTENTIAL RISKS

Besides your time, there are no likely risks of participating in this study.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information from all texts: notes, transcriptions, and finished reports. Participants will be given pseudonyms at the start of the study of which even they are unaware. The key to these pseudonyms will be kept in a secure location (a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office) as the data collection progresses. Once the data collection is complete with a participant, on July 31st, 2023, the key connecting the pseudonyms to the participant will be destroyed. Identifiable data will be restricted to the researcher and his faculty mentor.

Video recordings of in-person interviews will be made and stored in a secure location: an external hard drive that is stored in a locked filing cabinet in the investigator's office. These will also be password protected. All identifying information will be removed from the transcripts that result from the audio and video recordings.

Data collection will likely occur online. Participants are permitted, if they wish, to Zoom or comparable video chatting software. Zoom interviews will be audio recorded on a separate

recording device to prevent any identifiable information (i.e., IP addresses, video of the participant) from also being captured. Recorded Zoom interviews will follow the same protocol as the in-person interviews described above. Emailed responses to interview questions will be copied onto a new document (with identifying information removed) and deleted from the email account to prevent identifiable information from remaining online.

Records of the project with identifiable information removed will include the following:

Interviews;
Collected documents; and
Notes from interviews.

These records with identifying information removed will be kept indefinitely. Recordings of interviews will also be kept indefinitely.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW

You have the right to say no to participate in the research. You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY

There are no associated costs to participate in the study, other than access to a computer with high-speed internet for Zoom interviews.

RESEARCH RESULTS

You will receive any and all findings at several points during this process. First, your reflection during interview two will be a place of initial findings and will be determined by you. Second, after the study is complete, I will send you an email with the findings for your approval and suggestions. Third, I will always share drafts of publications with you and invite you to strike out any items you wish to not be included. Your name will be anonymized in all publications.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as how to do any part of the project or to report an injury, please contact the researcher:

Nicholas Sanders
300 Bessey Hall
434 Farm Lane
Michigan State University
sande463@msu.edu
(518) 728-0854

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT.

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature

Date

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

I agree to allow audiotaping/videotaping of the interview.

Yes

No

Initials _____

Zoom interviews will be audio recorded on a separate recording device to prevent any identifiable information (i.e., IP addresses, video of the participant) from also being captured. Recorded Zoom interviews will follow the same protocol as the in-person interviews described above. Emailed responses to interview questions will be copied onto a new document (with identifying information removed) and deleted from the email account to prevent identifiable information from remaining online.