THE INTERSECTIONS OF WHITE IDENTITY AND THE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES
OF SELF-IDENTIFIED ANTIRACIST EDUCATORS

By

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Abstract

MICAH JOHNSON GRIFFITH. The Intersections of White Identity and the Instructional Practices of Self-Identified Antiracist Educators. (Under the direction of DR.ERIN MILLER and DR.BRITTANY ANDERSON)

While there was much research on whiteness, especially the role of whiteness in the classroom and the associated impact of racial mismatch and implicit bias, and also some research surrounding white racial identity development devoid of intersectionality, there was previously no existing research examining the multiplicities of white racial identity in self-identified antiracist educators. This study served to fill the gap within the research and began to analyze how sociopolitical systems potentially serve to replicate and reinforce whiteness and racial bias through intersections of racial identity, and also potentially identify how those intersections can be disrupted in such a way as to foster critical consciousness and antiracist activism within classrooms nationally. This study answers the questions: "How do intersections of identity shape the way teachers view themselves in the classroom?" and "How do the varied intersections of white identity inform teacher experiences, philosophical and pedagogical paradigms, and instructional practice amongst self-identified antiracist educators?" Using interpretive phenomenology and employing the theoretical frameworks of critical whiteness (Roediger, 1994), critical whiteness feminism, and double-imagery (Seidl & Hancock, 2011), the following themes were identified as relevant to forming white teachers' critical consciousness (Freire, 2018), thus supporting an antiracist paradigm: gender, religion, proximity to people of color, and education.

Keywords: *white and Black, white identity, critical consciousness , conscientization, white identity, double consciousness, critical theory, critical whiteness, Antiracist, Antiracism, humanizing paradigm*

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to both Deborah and Tony Birchett. Through their willingness to love me and challenge my previously held beliefs about whiteness, privilege, teaching, and education, I have been challenged to become a better person despite being born into a system of white supremacy of which I at times remain complicit. Their consistent willingness to speak into me and share their reflections, no matter how brainwashed I might have been or still may be, has motivated me towards accepting my full self and also has inspired me to love *the other* in fullness.

List of Abbreviations

CT- Critical Theory

CRT- Critical Race Theory

CRS- Critical Race Structuralism

CWS-Critical Whiteness Studies

CWF- Critical Whiteness Feminism

SBA- Southern Baptist Association

CL- Critical Literacy

CML- Critical Media Literacy

CP- Critical Pedagogy

CRP- Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

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Chapter 1: Introduction

While picking up toys quickly in the hallway outside of the bathroom where my

three-year-old daughter, Rachel, was bathing, I realized that her soft cooing had changed to quiet

tears. Just minutes earlier she was happily playing with her bathtub toys. Quickly, her crying

escalated to racking sobs. Alarmed, I rushed back inside immediately. I asked her what was

wrong, fearing the worst, as every mom of an only child does. Had she hit her head? Scalded

herself? Cut herself badly? All of the worst-case scenarios ran through my mind in less than a

split second as I waited for her tearful response. I had only stepped out of the room for a

moment. How could something terrible have happened so quickly? I was already chastising

myself and feeling guilt prior to even knowing what was wrong. I hastily grabbed her up out of

the bath, wrapped her in a towel, and began soothing her. What on earth was wrong?! Finally,

she stopped crying and was able to speak. "Mama, why am I pink?" she asked. I stared at her in

confusion.

"What do you mean, baby?" I responded.

"Why am I pink? I am not brown," she stated as her lower lip began to protrude again

and her eyes filled with tears. Still confused, I told her that I was not sure what she meant, but

that she was beautiful. Her tears began again in earnest now as she began to wail that she wanted

to be "brown like the boys." Then, it dawned on me. Friends of ours (and Rachel's god-brothers)

were a beautiful shade of Black and Brown. We had spent the day with them only the day before,

and she was comparing her skin tone to theirs. She had already begun to recognize that there

were differences in the way she looked and the way they looked. However, rather than viewing

their skin tone through a deficit lens tainted by socialized racist ideology as some scholars

suggest white people do (Fasching-Varner et al., 2017; Hancock & Warren, 2017; Sato & Lensmire, 2009), she was envious of their beautiful, Black and Brown skin tones.

I recount this event as a mother and a researcher because it stood out to me as a unique experience in her young life. Unlike my journey towards understanding myself as white and developing a white identity in a racially homogenous community, I had intentionally surrounded my daughter with people from diverse racial backgrounds. I reflected on how lucky she would be to grow up with a diverse group of friends and family members surrounding her, shaping her, and informing her of not just herself but of the world in general. Perhaps her world would be bigger than mine. Perhaps she would be part of the change we so desperately need.

When looking back on this experience, it is obvious that my three-year-old daughter did not have the capacity to understand that her "pink" skin afforded her then and would throughout the rest of her life, a set of privileges that her god-brothers would not and could not have. However, due to her close proximity to Black and Brown people within our social circle, she had already been informed of *difference,* and in her mind, her skin was inferior. I marveled at this on that day, and have marveled on this moment ever since.

Prior to this experience, I had never verbalized that we were white to her or to anyone else for that matter. Truthfully, I had never thought of myself as white at all. Had I mentioned that the boys were Black? Probably. And it is possible she thought they were more beautiful than her because I had cared to mention their skin tone, and not her own. The invisibility of whiteness had already made an impact on my home and my own, personal child…. And how many others, I wondered? As a white, female educator how many other messages about whiteness and Blackness had I unintentionally conveyed or reinforced within my classroom? How has the invisibility of my whiteness impacted my students or my colleagues? It was at this moment, I

determined to learn more about whiteness, its relationship to Black and Brown bodies, and its

impact within the classroom and on my own personal child.

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In the vignette above, race became suddenly meaningful to my young daughter. Its

meaning impacted her racial consciousness, even at a young age, just as it shaped the way she

viewed herself as a white person. For her, this realization came out of experiences with Black

and Brown people and most likely, the way I spoke about and responded to those around us with

Black and Brown skin. The fact that her whiteness was not named, while their Black skin had

been acknowledged and possibly celebrated, had created—in her mind—the construct that her

skin color was not preferred, or at least as beautiful as theirs. This story complicates the notion

that white children grow up believing in the superiority of their own race (Sullivan, 2014) as it

brings light to the ways whiteness is also laced with feelings of shame and uncertainty. This

message that I had unconsciously shared with my own daughter about Black, Brown, and white

skin, was due in part to my own discomfort with my whiteness. Since I was also a teacher, I felt

sure my words, actions, and inactions around racial identity also impacted the children in my

classroom daily unbeknownst to me.

It was this experience and the discomfort it created that led me to further question how

the intersections of *my* identity impacted the students in my classroom and my child. I had spent

the better part of my adulthood learning how to disavow myself of my own whiteness as I

simultaneously associated my whiteness with uniformity and perhaps unwanted superiority. My

internalized negative views of my own whiteness likely influenced my daughter's view of her

own racial identity. This led me to wonder what messages had I shared regarding whiteness and

Blackness in my classroom? Why was I uncomfortable with my whiteness in the presence of

Black and Brown people specifically? What aspects of my identity made me feel shame about my white identity? What impact did the intersections of my identity (social expectations, life experiences, religion, gender, and class) have on my identity? Did they create or reinforce this discomfort and possible shame?

To be clear, whiteness and white identity are terms with contested meanings. To some, they are synonymous with white fragility (DiAngelo, 2016) or white privilege (McIntosh, 1998) These terms reinforce the idea that white people benefit from their white skin as well as the silence that surrounds it which insulates white people from having frank conversations about race. To some, whiteness or white identity means the essence of oppression and/or the oppressor. Freire (2018) describes oppression or an oppressor as any situation or person that exploits or hinders an individual or a group of people from being fully self-actualized and human. It can also be used as dog-whistle to faux *wokeness* and allyship (Jupp & Badenhorst, 2020; Love, 2019), or an opportunity to situate oneself as a good white person (Sullivan, 2006), blameless in the face of systemic injustice. To some, whiteness or white identity may be seen as a shield of armor that offers protection from racial victimization. To others, it is a hurdle to overcome to become more fully human. Some see it as a totally invisible construct, something that is too hard to see or name because it has been so normalized. And, some white people see whiteness as a hyper*visible* construct that they must deconstruct in order to form authentic relationships and live a healthy and secure life. For my daughter in the vignette above, it meant shame and sorrow because she did not see her white skin as beautiful or recognized. Ultimately—for the purposes of this study—I am focusing on white identity and/or whiteness as a complex social construct taught, developed, and reinforced by aspects of our culture including but not limited to religion, gender, and class through the ongoing oppression of people of color (Miller, 2015; Lensmire,

2008; Thandeka, 1999). Ultimately, I work from the assumption that whiteness is not something that white people necessarily choose, but is a reality that is imposed upon our psyches as part of our social experience. I also assert that whiteness is shaped by intersectional aspects of identity, including religion, class, gender, and social expectations.

Statement of the Problem

Since the educational workforce is made up predominantly of white women, and the majority of the students they teach are not, in fact, white, the educational mismatch, coupled with implicit bias is one of structural and fundamental ways that racism is maintained and propagated in educational settings (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013). In order to address this mismatch a possible solution, short of dismissing 85% of teaching staff (Ford, 2012) and replacing them with teachers of color, might include analysis on what events might lead white, women teachers to examine their implicit bias, and bridge their cognitive dissonance as it pertains to race as a whole.

This study aimed to analyze how white, female educators, like myself, deconstruct elements of their identities in order to recognize their complicity within systems of whiteness and oppression in educational systems. Since whiteness within educational systems—as well as the world around us—often remains invisible (Hancock & Warren, 2017), this task has been historically understudied and under-researched. Self-analysis and self-reflection of racial identity, while embraced in K-12 education as a means of improving instructional practice, has paid little attention to the impact that intersectional identities may have on instructional practice, such as: What are the intersections of white, female educator identity? How do the intersections of white, female identity inform instructional practice? How do intersections of their identity shape the

way teachers view themselves in the classroom? How do these identities inform their philosophical and pedagogical paradigms?

While the aforementioned questions provide a framework for a much-needed general inquiry, I specifically worked from a specific set of research questions.

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide this study are:

- How do intersections of identity shape the way teachers view themselves in the classroom?

- How do the varied intersections of white identity inform teacher experiences, philosophical and pedagogical paradigms, and instructional practice amongst self-identified antiracist educators?

Theoretical Framework

Since this study is deeply intertwined with the social, political, and transformative impact education can have on students as a result of hegemonic norms and their invisibility within educational spaces, the theoretical underpinning of this study will draw heavily from Critical Whiteness Studies (Morrison, 1992; Roediger, 1998; Jupp, Berry, & Lensmire, 2016), Critical Theory (Freire, 2018), Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1974), the foundational theoretical groundwork of Roediger (1998), Morrison (1992), and the Dubiosian notion of double-consciousness and double-imagery (Dubois, 1903; Seidl & Hancock, 2011).

Critical Whiteness

Critical whiteness or critical whiteness studies (CWS) refers to

an emancipatory, predominantly Anglophone, and interdisciplinary body of historical, social science, literary, and aesthetic intellectual production that critically examines White people's individual, collective, social, and historical experiences. As an

emancipatory social science, this definition of cws recognizes the centrality of scholar's historical-social embeddedness in the research and also Scholars of Color and White scholars' different positionalities with the whiteness of historical narratives, the social sciences, and the field of cws itself (Jupp et al., 2020, p. 222).

Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Critical Race Structuralism

In order to fully understand critical whiteness, it is important to understand critical theory (CT), Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Critical Race Structuralism (CRS). However, a foundational understanding of CT's ties to functionalism, conflict theory, and interpretive theories (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1998; Lemert, 2004; Morrison, 1995) must first be established. Stratification of students based on ability, meritocracy, bureaucracies, human and cultural capital, conflict, and hegemony are all embedded within these ideologies and inform, albeit in differing ways, the more modern critical theory paradigm and by default, also critical whiteness. Critical literacy (CL), critical media literacy (CML), critical pedagogy (CP), and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) then are all also loosely related to these paradigms as well

Functionalism. Functionalism focused on the concept of social transmission between generations to reproduce structures, customs, rules, desired behaviors, and culture. Within this theoretical framework, there is an assumed agreement or consensus on what accepted or valued cultural norms are reproduced or transmitted. Functionalists, including Emile Durkheim (Morrison, 1995), agreed that the purposes of schooling included intellectual development and political order, as well as economic and social development. Through this theoretical ideology, schools became focused on building human capital, where young people and their future potential within the workforce, were commodified and stratified based on student ability (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1998; Lemert, 2004; Morrison, 1995). Conflict, through this theoretical

lens, was demonstrative not of inequity or power imbalance, but rather a need for adjustment

within the system to maintain equilibrium and balance of agreed upon social and cultural values

Conflict Theory. In contrast, conflict theorists like Karl Marx and Max Weber

(Morrison, 1995), saw conflict or tensions within society as power struggles between those with

varying degrees of power, specifically economic power or property ownership. Within conflict

theory, schools serve

to maintain wealth and power in the hands of the middle and upper class, reproducing status

through language, tracking, and reinforcement of dominant systems and culture. Their

acceptance and assimilation to economic, cultural, and hegemonic state reproduction is different

in that they do not see these as societal norms reached via consensus, but rather via the power of

the economically dominant class. Conflict theorists believed that schools mirror inequities within

the society at large, and "that children learn, through both a hidden curriculum and an explicit

curriculum, the skills and attitudes that will correspond to their later work roles" (deMarrais &

LeCompte, 1998, p.13), including implicit lower expectations for students in lower class

stratifications. Conflict theorists maintain that this power dynamic and school correspondence to

class in life outside of the school impacts curriculum, language development and instruction,

socialization, and the ability to build social capital, thereby maintaining and reproducing

oppressive, hegemonic norms.

Interpretative Theory. Interpretive theories, including phenomenology and symbolic

interactionism, shifted the focus from large-scale quantitative analysis of schools to small-scale

qualitative analysis using ethnographic and anthropological methodology. Through interpretive

theoretical research involving specific people on the microlevel of schools and school systems,

interpretivists viewed their participants as constructing culture through daily interactions. This

theoretical paradigm laid the foundation for transformative theories and human agency against hegemonic domination. Different from both functionalism and conflict theory, interpretivism moved theory and practice pertaining to theory from passive to active (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1998; Lemert, 2004; Morrison, 1995).

Critical Theory

CT, then, comes from the critique of functionalism, conflict theory, and interpretivism. While CT assumes the same basic purposes of education and schooling mentioned in both functionalism and conflict theories and paradigms, the emphasis shifts from merely identifying and naming power discrepancies and inequities as in conflict theory, to locating oneself within these systems of oppression. Critical theory also emphasizes exercising human agency, like in interpretivist theory, to transform, deconstruct, dismantle, or create change for the betterment of all people within the system as a whole. CT encourages educators to leverage points of contradiction or conflict to destabilize systems of oppression and force change.

Within education, critical theorists like Freire (2000), Delpit (2006), and Ladson-Billings (2014) maintain, like conflict theorists, that schools are sites where power struggles between dominant and subordinate groups take place. However, CT or critical pedagogy, also maintains that educators must resist this domination by developing a critical consciousness, or *conscientization* (Freire, 2000) through critical self-analysis and self-reflection, as well as a critical analysis of social, political, and historical forces at work to support, reproduce or maintain this system of domination and inequity in schools. Critical theorists believe that educators must identify their part within these systems and operate as change agents within their schools and their classrooms.

Thus, critical educational theorists are deeply concerned with the art and practice of teaching. They argue that teachers must become 'transformative intellectuals' and 'critical pedagogues' in order to resist the oppression of the dominant ideology and to produce a liberating culture within schools (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1998, p.32). Mere recognition of racism, hegemony, and inequity and the act of calling it out is not enough (Ladson-Billings, 2014), as CT demands human agency and/or action.

Freire's (2018) advocacy for *conscientization*, or the development of critical consciousness of social, political, and historical forces and the need for the individual to understand their own part within these systems for the future collective good is similar to Kendi's (2019) conceptualization of antiracism which suggests that racism is embedded within every part of life and society and that in order to be *antiracist* one must de-racialize behavior through critical analysis of racialized systems and subsequent action. Since this study's focus is on the intersectional white identity of educators in K-12 education and how those intersections inform their instructional practice, their relationships with students, and the system of education overall, this study is an analysis of how white female teachers develop conscientization regarding their white identity.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) draws from the concepts of Critical theory in that it acknowledges the impact of power and privilege allocated to white spaces and white people, and also the impact of oppression and racism on marginalized peoples and theorizes means to create or stimulate social change. CRT takes this one step farther in that it specifically seeks to identify and completely dismantle or deconstruct racism within bureaucracies and systems, as well as within individuals within certain spaces, including within educational settings (Solorzano &

Yosso, 2001). CRT examines the "theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical [strategies] that account for the role of [race]" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 472), and works specifically to eliminate them. CRT also analyzes the ways in which power, defined as "when those who are the subjects of marginalization and mistreatment, comply with the wishes of dominant [white] groups based on the perceived benefit towards their own self-interest, or because of the habit or fear of punishment and reprisal" (Wiggan, 2011, xi), legitimizes white authority and privileges white norms at the expense of non-white people. Since ultimately the goal of this study is to potentially identify ways in which our social, cultural, and political landscape work to create and reinforce white racial identity, and hypothesize potential avenues to disrupt this negative acculturation, which damages both people of color and white people, CRT has potential to be useful in the future analysis of collected data.

Critical Race Structuralism

Critical Race Structuralism (CRS) adds to the field of CT, CRT, and CWS by broadening the scope of critical analysis and deconstruction to include the ways in which race, gender, culture, and social structures are institutionalized in schools, governments, policy, and systems (Wiggan, Teasdale, & Parsons, 2022). There are five tenets within CRS. These include

> (a)critical analysis of societal structure; (b)address dominant cultural indoctrination in education practices and policies; (c)utilize social justice to advocate for equitable representation, access, and resources; (d) engage in intercultural collaborative communication and actions of change (Wiggan, et al., 2022, para 16).

Since this research focuses specifically on white women in K-12 education systems and their individual, perceived agency to potentially impact those systems, CRS may also be a useful tool with which to analyze the impact that societal structures, including teacher education programming and site-level systems, policies, and structures that either reinforced their racial

identity or assisted in their deconstruction of damaging racial stereotypes and associated expected norms.

Three Waves of Critical Whiteness

It is important to note that despite the implementation of critical thought and similarities to critical theory and Critical Race Theory, CWS should also be considered its own independent field of study (Jupp, 2020). There are three waves of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) development. The first wave, and probably the most easily recognized outside of the field of educational research, urban education, and critical studies has epistemological roots in white identity, nation building, white privilege, color-blindness and race-evasion, and whiteness as normative culture (Jupp, et al., 2020). The second wave of CWS was born out of critique of the first wave. However, prior to CWS as we now know and understand it, there was significant scholarship on whiteness from Black scholars including W.E.B. Dubois, bell hooks, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Derrick Bell, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Frederick Douglass, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett to name a few (Roediger, 1998). As Roediger (1998) states in *Black on White: Black Writers on What it Means to Be White,* "African Americans have been among the nation's keenest students of white consciousness and white behavior" (p.4) for centuries. Therefore, since whiteness has been deeply analyzed and written about by Black authors, CWS draws heavily from their scholarship.

The First Wave of CWS

Prior to the emergence of first-wave CWS, the rise of emancipatory social sciences in the 1970s created fertile ground for CWS to also emerge firmly embedded within gender studies, cultural studies, multicultural and ethnic studies, critical legal studies and even within critical race theory in the 1980s. Following this scholarship and critical thought, CWS also subverted

other less obvious social sciences as well. Aspects of critical whiteness were seen in sociology, psychology, commentary and critique of the labor industry, and curriculum.

Frankenberg (1993), in her book titled *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness,* argued that race shapes the lives of women, both white and nonwhite. Within this work, Frankenberg challenged the concept that white people are raceless or race neutral and spoke to the agency white women have in either promoting or challenging racism, with emphasis on the impact of white women specifically within feminist movements. Around the same time period, Helms (1990), burst on the scene with racial identity models, detailing her hypotheses of the ways white people move through a variety of stages to develop racial awareness following their exposure to Black and Brown people. Roediger's scholarship (1993) explored the impact of race in the labor industry, specifically analyzing "how [white] American workers made class-conscious choices within the parameters open to them, (Roediger, 1993, p. 34)" how racism "shaped those parameters, (Roediger, 1993, p.34)" and how those two events were joined together to create a labor industry that oppressed both people of color and inadvertently white people as well. Giroux (1997) then, follows their scholarship by tying CWS to educational curriculum, specifically calling out white educators for committing *pedagogical violence* against Black and Brown students by ignoring "the histories and narratives that students bring to schools, and [expecting to] perform miracles in children's lives by mere acts of kindness" (Giroux, 1997, p.306). However, he also challenged domination and privilege pedagogy when he questioned

> What subjectivities or points of identification become available to white students who can only imagine white experience as monolithic, self-contained, and deeply racist? What are the pedagogical and political stakes in rearticulating whiteness in anti-essentialist terms as part of a broader new discourse of ethnicity, so that white youth can understand and

struggle against the long legacy of white racism while using the particularities of 'their own culture as a resource for resistance, reflection and empowerment' (Hall, 1991) (Giroux, 1997, p.314).

Combining both of these sentiments, Giroux is effectively calling for emancipatory educational programming for both students of color and white students through deconstruction of cultural, historical, and political systems that support and maintain whiteness. The work these scholars contributed to the field during the initial development of first wave CWS effectively disrupted the consensus of *factionist politics* or *culture wars* prevalent at that time by denouncing whiteness as it had been previously portrayed, or more succinctly ignored by white culture. It firmly established whiteness within conceptual-empirical research and literature with specific emphasis on whiteness as a hegemonic norm, white privilege, and white colorblind ideology and race evasive tactics.

Whiteness as a Hegemonic Norm. Whiteness as a hegemonic norm, due to its relative invisibility within culture, along with heterosexuality, white supremacy, and patriarchy, firmly establishes white people as normal and those who differ as *other.* This simple distinction between the invisible white body and *the other* allows for dehumanization or a deficiency mindset to dominate ideologies about nonwhite peoples. Additionally, when added to the whitewashed historical narratives of economic progress, human development, and capitalist enterprises, whiteness as the normative and dominant culture is legitimized, again allowing for other cultures to be viewed as deficient and/or *other* than normal (Jupp, 2020). According to Jupp (2020) and Hall (1981) initiated [the] explicit linkage between whiteness and Gramsci's notion of hegemony" (p.226) when he spoke about ideology being not the "product of individual consciousness or intention" (Hall, 1981, p.90), but rather the result of "social formation and

conditions in which individuals were born" (Hall, 1981, p.90). Thus, white culture, since it is

dominant in historical representation, the workforce, media, and virtually all other mediums

nationally, is irrefutably established as hegemonic norm.

   Nation Building. White identity within the concept of nation building is also an important

aspect of whiteness that was identified within research literature during the first wave of CWS.

Ultimately, the goal of identifying genocidal, white colonialism as well as white enticement,

populist democracy, and racism within the very fabric of our nation is to change the narrative

surrounding how our nation was established, by centering other voices, stories, and narratives

other than those born out of hegemony (Jupp, 2020). This concept is revisited in the

second-wave of CWS as intersections of whiteness and gender are critically analyzed in relation

to how the nation was built and maintained through white reproduction, patriarchy, and even

religious dogma (Deliovsky, 2010).

   White Privilege and Property. Scholarship on white privilege and property highlights

how white people have socially constructed the concept of race based on phenotypical

differences to benefit from absence of pigmentation of their skin and the *constructed reality* of

race (Jupp, 2020). Whiteness as property emphasizes the privileges whites have been able to

access as valuable assets which must be protected at all costs, even codified into laws and

systematically supported throughout history (Harris, 1993). Through this process, "assumptions,

privileges, and benefits accompany the status of being white" (Harris, 1993, p. 1713) and have

led to the cultural and legal embrace of whiteness as a tangible *property interest.* This is further

illustrated by even those who are ethnically nonwhite but have attempted to *pass* as white

phenotypically in an effort to attain such associated assets and privileges. Therefore, the need for

white people to protect and maintain the assets and *property interest* associated with their

whiteness, means that it must be protected as a rare and valuable commodity not available to all

who wish to access whiteness subsequently leading to the further marginalization and

oppression of nonwhite people.

 "White privileges include membership in whiteness, wages of whiteness in [the]

economic sphere, participation in and understanding of White social codes, ease of access to

upwardly mobile social spaces, and most generally, the benefits of being socially perceived as a

natural and normal 'human' rather than a racialized 'other" (Jupp, 2020, p. 226). Whiteness then

served as a means to humanize white people while simultaneously dehumanizing non-white

people. While this scholarship originated in the first-wave of CWS between 1980's and 1990's,

this concept is still front and center in mainstream political, social, and cultural spaces and has

been heavily politicized in recent years.

Colorblindness and Race Evasion. Extensive research on colorblind racism and

resulting race-evasion of white people when confronted with racialized issues was also a part of

the first wave of CWS. The unwillingness of white people to acknowledge race, but rather only

acknowledge deficits, flaws, or problems within communities of color was critically analyzed

and documented. The associated outrage then, when met with conversations of white privilege

or white guilt, was then easily able to be identified and named *reverse racism* (Jupp, 2020).

The Second Wave

It is important to note that the first wave of CWS emerged out of both African-American

and African-Caribbean scholarship, rather than predominantly white scholarship and was

inspired by the emancipatory social sciences previously mentioned. "As a whole, first-wave CWS's analytic arch demonstrate[ed] Whites' overall desire to invisibilize, disappear, or otherwise make extinct multi-variegated racialized realities, knowledges, and identities" (Jupp, 2020, p.228). The second wave of CWS developed out of the critique of first wave CWS. Critiques of the first wave included the oversimplification and reduction of white identities including the uncomplicated binary presented of Black and white without analysis of intersectionalities within identities. The construction of a *good white person* or ally, with no following action was also criticized (Jupp & Badenhorst, 2020). For example, within her experience, Sleeter (1993) related that most white, women educators engaged in harmful colorblind ideology (Jupp, 2020) and/or drew on their own, positive Eurocentric experiences with people of color rather than recognizing social or power structures and their complicity within them and working to dismantle them. Furthermore, McIntyre (1997) identified *white talk* that further "serves to insulate white people from examining individual and collective roles in the perpetuation of racism" (p.45) working to maintain the comfort of white educators within predominantly white spaces. However, action steps to dismantle or deconstruct these harmful practices embedded within white identity were not addressed. Intersecting identities of gender and class were also not identified or analyzed in first wave CWS, and multidimensional histories, social, cultural, and political context was not provided. Despite the criticism, second wave CWS scholars chose to integrate the scholarship of first wave CWS and other Black scholarship on whiteness to advance CWS towards antiracist whiteness pedagogies providing key steps forward in CWS scholarship. In this way, second-wave CWS looked back to move forward (Jupp & Badenhorst, 2020).

One important change in second wave CWS was the shift to include personal narratives of white people in the analysis of how and why white people shift and move to either challenge white normativity, white silence, and hegemonic norms or choose to remain silent or participate within racist conversations or systems. Lensmire (2017), in his book *White Folks: Race and Identity in Rural America* illustrates how powerful stories of white people, living the white experience, can be when he explains how oftentimes white people, "[use] people of color to figure out who [they are]" (p.7). He explains, using powerful narratives, how white people define themselves as white against the backdrop of white fear. White fear, as Lensmire explains it, includes fear of people of color that is either enculturated into the white psyche through white privilege and racism, a result of abusive parenting regarding racialized relationships (Thandeka, 1999), or part of our white culture promoted and sustained through religious teachings and fear of abandonment by white peers (Deliovsky, 2010; Lensmire, 2017). Both Lensmire's (2017) and Thandeka's (1999) detailed storying of white conversations and experiences shed light not just on the events as they are observed, but also the tension and shame internalized by the white people experiencing them (Thandeka,1999). These stories also provide opportunities to determine how and why the social codes and structures of white identity are upheld despite that tension and shame. This type of narrative and analysis, along with a dedication to action as a result of CWS further differentiated the second wave of CWS from the first wave.

In summary, the second wave of CWS "embarked on an anti-essentializing-pedagogical conceptual-empirical arc" (Badenhorst et al., n.d., p.5). In other words, second wave scholars of CWS felt that the first wave oversimplified white identity. The conversations of race evasion and

white privilege of the first wave of CWS held the paradoxical power to both move antiracism

action forward, while simultaneously stalling and or halting progress altogether towards

antiracism. Second-wave scholars then have leveraged Black scholarship, complexities of white

identity, antiracist action, and the associated deep internal work of understanding white identity,

to further transform and inform scholarship as well as other related fields (Badenhorst et al.,

n.d.).

The Third Wave: On the Horizon

Where does that leave CWS at this time? Remember Basic Becky, Crazy Karen, and

Sex-Crazed Stacie? There is no doubt that CWS (the first wave) helped create these stereotypes.

But what do they mean for us now? What insight can we draw using the analysis of the more

nuanced second and third waves of CWS about these stereotypes and other tropes of white

women?

At this time, the third wave of CWS is beginning to build on the existing scholarship of

white hegemony, colorblindness and race evasion, white nation building, white privilege, white

victimization, and power dynamics that render whiteness invisible by "locating race as one of

many social relations that shape individual and group identity" (Twine & Gallagher, 2008, para.

6). This third wave of CWS "sees whiteness as a multiplicity of identities that are historically

grounded, class specific, politically manipulated and gendered social locations that inhabit local

custom and national sentiments within the context of the new 'global village'" (Twine &

Gallagher, 2008, para. 6). In so doing, scholars are working to identify what confluence of global

factors have contributed to white identity development so that emancipatory and antiracist action

can move society as a whole forward. Perhaps this third wave of CWS will help us identify what

multiplicity of identities have shaped white women stereotypes and the women who fall prey to them, help us understand their prevalence in our daily lives, and help us to critically analyze if these stereotypes are actually beneficial to the movement of antiracism and emancipatory action (Miller, 2022) if they are just another strategy meant to steel us against the internalized shame of being white, or if their creation is possibly a combination of the two.

White Double-Imagery

Since many white teachers do not acknowledge their race and its impact within the classroom, compared to Black and Brown students whose life " in a white-dominated society has meant that their prosperity, and at times, survival, depended on seeing themselves through the gaze of White America and managing that consciousness" (p.693, Seidl & Hancock, 2011), it is important to draw on the concept of double-consciousness (Dubois, 1903) or double-imagery as so defined by Seidle & Hancock (2011) to analyze how white, female educators deconstruct aspects of their intersectional and complex white identities to develop and employ double-imagery within their classrooms.

The concept of double-consciousness draws heavily from Dubois's description of "his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Dubois, 1903, p.38). This concept of double-ness or double consciousness is an impossible concept when applied to white people since their very survival does not depend on their ability to act as two separate and yet connected selves as is required of Black and Brown people within the United States due to pervasive systemic inequity.

White people, however, may be able to develop a double-image, however. Due to hegemonic norms and stereotypes, white people are unaccustomed to examining themselves as

both a white person, with a complex identity tied up in racialized stereotypes, as well as a citizen or individual apart from those privileges which their race provides. Through interrogating whiteness and white identity as complex identities that intersect with social, political, and cultural expectation and experiences, rather than a monolithic hegemonically defined identity, there is potential that white people could similarly develop an understanding of themselves as white, but also as a complicit part of a larger system of oppression and inequity and begin to work to combat it. Ultimately, double-imagery, like double-consciousness, could work within white spaces to protect and empower students of color while also empowering white people, specifically white educators, to better understand themselves, their identities, and their role in deconstructing racist systems (Seidle & Hancock, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to analyze the ways that some white, female educators make sense of their whiteness, and by default their complicity within systems of whiteness and oppression in educational spaces to form a more positive white identity. Since whiteness within educational systems, as well as the world around us, often remains invisible (Hancock & Warren, 2017), this task has been historically understudied and under-researched. The intersections between whiteness, gender, place, and class within educational spaces, and the impact on the journey to antiracist pedagogy is even further understudied and under-researched. This study sought to analyze, through phenomenological research and thick descriptions of lived experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), within the classroom and the outside world, the path to antiracism in education as a white, female educator, in order to identify similar trends or patterns across this specific population. The hope is that this study could potentially pave a way for this journey to be recreated in teacher pre-service programming so as to intentionally develop double imagery

(Seidle & Hancock, 2011) amongst white educators and effectively create a safer space for students of color within educational spaces.

This study explored the ways that white teachers understand and deconstruct or make sense of the intersections of their white identity in order to become culturally relevant and make a positive impact on the students of color in their classrooms. In this study, I deployed a theoretical framework informed by critical theory, critical whiteness, and the Duboisian theory of double consciousness. Through an in-depth phenomenological study centering their lived experiences as white females, I had hoped to shed light on how the intersections of white identity can potentially be addressed in order to create a more equitable and inclusive future for all students in public schools K-12.

Significance of Study

This study serves to fill a void in the research surrounding white, racial identity development. While there has been significant research on whiteness, the negative impacts whiteness, and invisibility of whiteness within educational spaces, the concept of whiteness as a nuanced form of socialization that intersects with multiple other identity factors (i.e., class, gender, religion) is still relatively new. This study serves to help identify ways that our social, political, and cultural landscape operate to teach and reinforce whiteness and create negative white racial identities that impede racial justice work.

Dissertation Overview

The overarching purpose of this dissertation is to analyze white identity through the lens of CWS to determine what aspects of identity development, including but not limited to gender, class, place, and religion, impact white female educators as they formed their racial identities. Through semi-structured, autobiographical interviews female educators were asked to identify

intersections of their racial identity, analyze the formation of their racial identity, and identify the ways their racial identity informs their educational practice. This study provides useful information to the field of research surrounding racial identity development and provides opportunities for future research on the deconstruction of negative racial stereotypes and impacts of racial identity amongst white, women educators.

Key Terminology

The key terms for this study are listed below and defined to ensure greater clarity.

white and Black: For the purposes of this study, I have chosen not to capitalize *white* while also simultaneously choosing to capitalize Black. This is in an effort to recognize that the majority of social, political, cultural, and educational spaces are dominated by white ideologies and white norms while at the same acknowledging that Blackness is not inferior within these predominantly white hegemonic spaces.

white identity: Using critical whiteness studies, this study seeks to understand how white people define themselves in relationship to their ethnicity/ phenotype and how the intersection of their ethnicity/phenotype with other cultural, political, and social experiences and expectations develop, shift, and change as a result of these lived experiences.

Conscientization or Critical Consciousness: Critical self-analysis and self-reflection, as well as a critical analysis of social, political, and historical forces at work to support, reproduce or maintain the system of hegemonic domination

White Double-Consciousness: The ability of white people to recognize the associated power and privilege that their ethnicity/race/phenotype provide them while simultaneously recognizing the

potential negative impact that their ethnicity/race/phenotype have on those around them who present differently. This is distinct from Dubois' notion of double consciousness in that white people, as a result of their sociopolitical location, do not have to move between critical consciousness and a lack of consciousness in order to remain alive and safe, as Black and Brown people must but rather they may choose to move into critical consciousness so as to challenge hegemonic norms and systems of oppression.

Critical Theory: Locating oneself within systems of oppression and exercising human agency, to transform, deconstruct, dismantle, or create change for the betterment of all people within the system as a whole. CT encourages educators to leverage points of contradiction or conflict to destabilize systems of oppression and force change.

Critical Whiteness: According to Jupp et al., (2020) CWS is "an emancipatory, predominantly Anglophone, and interdisciplinary body of historical, social science, literary, and aesthetic intellectual production that critically examines white people's individual, collective, social, and historical experiences" (p.222).

Antiracism/Antiracist: According to Kendi (2019), an antiracist idea is any idea that suggests the racial groups are equals in all their apparent differences- that there is nothing right or wrong with any racial group. Antiracist ideas argue that racist policies are the cause of racial inequities. Therefore, in order to be an antiracist, one must have developed a critical consciousness around historical and sociopolitical systems in order to move in opposition to these systems.

Humanizing Paradigm: According to Friere (2018), the process of engaging students' whole being in their educational experience including their ways of socializing, thinking, and

communicating, as humans who occupy a historical, sociopolitical context, centering the

educational experience on the student rather than on the content or the instructor.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Existing research and literature on the subject of racial identity has covered white identity development (Cross, Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, & Worrell, 2002), Black identity development, Latinx identity development, and Native identity development among others. There has been much research as well on the impact of implicit bias of white teachers and whiteness in the classroom, specifically on students of color as it pertains to over-representation in special education identification (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Artiles & Kozleski, 2007; Ford & Triplett, 2019) and disproportionate exclusionary discipline practices (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2013). Moreover, whiteness has been studied as part of acculturation within the classroom (Haviland, 2008), and as a shield to disparaging opinions or professional development meant to identify their social location and the impacts within the classroom and encourage culturally relevant pedagogy (Bentley-Edwards, Coleman-King, Lee, Michael, Ramirez, 2017). Despite this abundance of empirical research examining whiteness in pedagogical spaces, there has been less research on the ways whiteness is learned through socialization as it intersects with class and gender and other aspects of one's identity This void is what I hope to fill with this study. In this review of literature, I provide a brief overview of popular racial identity models. This study, however, moves away from these models due to their oversimplification of white identity development. Then, I contrast those with how whiteness is conceptualized as a product of our socialization in early childhood and also as a means of reproduction of white norms and continued oppression of Black and Brown people. Finally, I provide a brief review of how white identity has been taken up as a field of study in education.

Racial Identity Models

Racial identity models have explored both Black and white people's journeys through racial identity (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1993). The racial Nigrescence model detailed by Cross in 1971 and 1978 stated that "racial preference was meant to be part of a Black person's personal identity and to affect the person's mental health functioning" (Vandiver et al., 2002, p.71). According to the Nigrescence model, if a Black person accepted their Blackness, then they were identified as psychologically healthy and exhibited evidence of a high self-esteem. In comparison, Blacks who accepted the values of whiteness exhibited tendencies towards self-hatred and low self-esteem. This model was detailed in five stages. In 1991, Cross revised this model of nigrescence to include only four stages towards understanding one's Blackness: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization. Pre-encounter is the phase of racial identity characterized by a negative self-perception due to pervasive negative racial stereotypes. Encounter is the stage where an individual is motivated, usually by a single event or a series of events, to interrogate previous assumptions made about their identity as a person of color. When individuals move into the Immersion-Emersion stage of identity development, they begin to reject white people and white culture as they choose to immerse themselves into Black culture. Finally, Internalization, the final stage of racial identity development within this model, is when an individual begins to accept themselves as Black and begins to participate more actively in associated actions to make systemic change. Table 2.1 is a summary of the nigrescence model's four stages.

Table 2.1

Nigrescence Model's Four Stages

Pre-encounter	Encounter	Immersion-Emersion	Internalization

During the pre-encounter phase, Black people often have a negative self-perception of themselves based on negative racial stereotypes of the Black community. This stage is characterized by miseducation and self-hatred.	This stage of racial identity development depicts either a single event or a series of events that motivate Black individuals to interrogate their previous assumptions about their identity. The discomfort, both cognitively and emotionally, may cause individuals to move to the next stage of development.	At this stage of identity development, people of color will often reject anything white and will immerse themselves in Black culture.	Moving into the final stage of development, people of color move into acceptance of their Blackness and begin to participate in activism to make systemic change.

Conversely, Helms (1993), addressed white racial identity development as a progression of five stages (later updated to phases to allow for a more fluid conceptualization): contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy. The Contact stage is characterized by a complete lack of racial awareness, where racial stereotypes are embraced, but not critically analyzed. Disintegration, the second phase, includes events or circumstances in a white person's life that force them to analyze or question contradictions within their belief systems or values about race. For example, white people may claim to not be racist, but still feel uncomfortable or afraid when passing a Black person on the street. These contradictions in the disintegration phase cause discomfort. Due to this discomfort, white people may often retreat back into safety or previously held racial belief systems. This is part of the Reintegration phase. If white people, when in the reintegration phase, experience something painful or has a deep emotional impact, they may progress to the Pseudo-Independent phase of racial identity. Within this phase, white people may begin to reach out to people of color and attempt to form relationships. They may be anxious and interested to learn more about other

cultures as they have just begun to understand that there are significant cultural differences. If white people are successful when forming these relationships with people of color, or if they are able to attain meaningful growth, white people may even begin to recognize their own privilege and begin to deconstruct their own personal biases. This would place them in the Immersion/Emersion phase. Finally, during the Autonomy phase, once they have recognized their privilege and have begun to deconstruct their own prejudice and bias, they may eventually experience reduced feelings of guilt. They may feel empowered by antiracist action and begin to develop a more positive white identity. Autonomy is the stage where a positive connection to their racial identity is fully formed and a pursuit of social justice begins, the crux of this specific study. Within Helm's study (1993), she found that each of these stages were usually related to the individual's world-view.

Table 2.2 is an outline of Helm's phases. This research indicates that movement and responses through racial identity in the lower stages of contact and disintegration might be more reflective of the ways in which white people are acculturated towards racial identity (Helms, 1993), making movement towards the higher stages of reintegration, pseudo-independence, and immersion/emersion a rare occurrence at best.

Table 2.2

Helms' Racial Identity Development Model's Six Stages

Contact	Disintegration	Reintegration	Pseudo-Independence	Immersion/ Emersion	Autonomy
This stage is characterized by color-blindne ss or a total lack of racial	During disintegration, white people are confronted with dichotomies or	During this stage, white people often retreat back into whiteness to	If white people also experience something significant or painful	If the white person is encouraged or reinforced to learn more, they	This phase is characterized by reduced feelings of guilt associated

awareness. Racial stereotypes in this phase may be consciously or unconsciously accepted, or at the very least not critically analyzed.	contradictions in their belief systems or in the world around them that create discomfort. For example, a white person may claim not to be a racist, while at the same time encouraging their son or daughter not to date or marry a person of color. This contradiction then causes discomfort and reflection/analysis of one's racial identity.	maintain emotional and cognitive safety. This stage may be characterized by a more firm stance on racial superiority as white people reject the notion of systemic injustices or complicity.	during the reintegration phase, they may move into the pseudo-independent phase. During this phase, white people may begin to recognize that there are differences both culturally and systemically. White people in this phase may reach out to other marginalized communities to form relationships and learn more.	may begin to develop their own personal definition of white privilege or racism at this stage. Individuals may be willing to identify personal biases at this stage and begin work in deconstructing them. White guilt is frequently an indicator that individuals are in this stage of racial identity development.	with racial identity. At this stage individuals may begin to develop a more positive racial identity as a white person, outside of racial stereotypes.

While these models provide a framework for identifying stages of development towards racial awareness for Black and white people, they ignore the intricacies of intersectional identities, the impact of social forces on identity development, and ultimately the human experience as a whole. These stages of racial awareness do not acknowledge the impact of socialization on the psyche of people, or the ways that identity is shaped by other aspects of one's identity, such as religion, social class, gender, geography, immigration status, historical context, etc. Therefore, they are at best incomplete or at worst flawed in providing insight to

identity development. This study is situated within genres of white identity development that explore how the intersections of social, political, and cultural experiences inform or reproduce whiteness during white socialization. In the next section, I turn to more nuanced views on white identity development as it occurs in early childhood

White Socialization

In the book *Learning to Be White,* Thandeka (1999) explored whiteness and racial identity through early childhood socialization. Thandeka discusses how whiteness is taught through learning how to suppress feelings of friendship and comradery with Black people, or those not within the same racial community as white people. Thandeka also suggested that white families' disapproval of white children playing with Black children is used as a socializing method that produces shame in white children - white children want to love Black children, but are not allowed to by their white families which causes them to feel ashamed of who they are. She states that what is experienced by these children is "an attack against the child by its own white community because the child is not yet white" (p.18, Thandeka, 1999). Likewise, Miller (2015) researched in depth the journey that white people take from birth on towards normalizing whiteness through the over-representation of white people in white children's lives. Dr. Miller (2015) emphasizes how, through the constant and unrelenting onslaught of media, from TV shows and commercials to spam mailers, toys and books, how white children are taught about what whiteness is, how it moves, and its place in society as a hegemonic norm. Through even these subtle, but ever-present, images and messages white children internalize that they are viewed as superior and/or normal, and that they are different from children of color despite the lack of explicit messaging reinforcing this concept.

While Thandeka and Miller take up the ways that whiteness is shaped through early childhood experiences, less attention has been paid to the ways that religion, social class, and gender intersect with whiteness to play key parts in the development of white identities within the literature. In the scant literature available, Miller & Lensmire (2021) found that "*becoming white,* is often wrapped up with upward movement in social class hierarchies" (p.408) as it "includes not only separation from people of colour, but also movement from 'low' spaces and into higher ones" (p.408). Hancock and Warren (2017), having specifically taken up the meanings of whiteness and gender in a broad sense, specifically discuss how the invisibility of whiteness within K-12 education, a field dominated by white women, also contributes to a lack of understanding of its oppressive impact on students of color. Seidle & Hancock (2011) also detail how white women must be willing to recognize themselves as raced, work towards acquiring a double image surrounding their race, and engage in conversations with their students regarding their personal identity development in order to forge meaningful relationships that will serve to bring life to culturally relevant and meaningful curriculum. However, their research does not necessarily engage the intersections of their identities and the impact gender plays in their identity development, but rather just addresses the prominence of the female gender within educational spaces. Finally, while scholars like Lillian Smith (1949; 1994) explored the intersections of whiteness and white Christianity. Smith (1949; 1994) emphasized the impact of white evangelicalism as a dichotomous means to create both a barrier between white and Black people in the Jim Crow South, while simultaneously inspiring guilt within white people about these social and political barriers. Smith, like Thandeka, emphasized the harm that racist ideologies had on the white psyche as a result of religious and cultural assimilation to white hegemony. While Smith was seen as a revolutionary ahead of her time, there has been little

empirical work that has studied how these white Christian identities specifically manifest in classrooms and how they might intersect with gender and social class (for exceptions, see Olshefski, 2020 & Miller et. al., 2022).

White Female Socialization

A distinct differentiation must be drawn between the socialization of white people in general and the socialization of white women specifically as white women maintain a specific social and political location within normative culture that fluctuates between complicity in white supremacy and oppression by that same patriarchal whiteness that they have been socialized to reproduce (hooks, 1985; 2015). Historically, as stated previously, white women have been charged with nation-building by bearing white children. This need to reproduce white children operated as a catalyst for white men to champion damaging stereotypes of Black and Brown men who were thus relegated to *brutes* and sexual deviants who desired to rape and brutalize white women if given the opportunity (Miller & Lensmire, 2021). While this stereotype is ridiculous at face value, the reality is that women today are still educated and socialized to believe that they must maintain themselves as racially pure and morally good (Watson, 2013) in order to be wholly accepted within white culture. While it was well-known and accepted that white men forced sexual escapades with both Black men and women during slavery, white women were never openly provided this same freedom. Similarly, even now, many years removed from slavery, white women are often frequently and openly discouraged from engaging in romantic or sexual involvement with Black and Brown men, while the same expectation for their male counterparts is nonexistent or inconsistent at best (Deliovsky, 2010).

Additionally, for a white woman, innate *goodness* and *morality* takes the form of specific expectations pertaining to their emotional management, their sense of agency and advocacy, and

behavior unlike their male counterparts. In recent years this has played out publicly in a variety

of ways. While there are many examples of this within our culture, none have been more visible

than conversations surrounding our national well-being and political environment surrounding

gun violence and even police brutality. When looking at schools and educational spaces since the

early 1990s, white males have participated in many large-scale acts of violence towards their

peers in various school shootings across the United States. The culture at large has decried

mental health, bullying and harassment within schools, lack of school administration

involvement and support, abuse at home, social isolation, and even a lack of social and emotional

support within school buildings to explain these horrific and deadly incidents. Not once has the

majorative culture paused to investigate the socialization and acculturation of white men as a

possible reason for their violent and extreme behaviors. Conversely, when white females have

participated in violent crime, their crimes have focused more on specific individuals who are part

of their social or familial circle (Lawrence & Snell, 2000). This indicates that while white boys

> seem to conceive of themselves on a grand scale, while girls don't venture far beyond the
> boundaries of their families and friends-attacking aggressors, or perceived aggressors
> specifically. The difference underscores the divergent social positions girls and boys
> occupy in relation to normative whiteness, with girls caught in an internalized rather than
> a public world of struggle" (Kenny, 1961; 2000, p.3).

This internalized struggle is also reinforced by the culture of politeness that white women

are socialized into starting at a very young age. White women are explicitly and implicitly taught

through both media and literature to support the male counterparts within their households and to

refrain from voicing strong opinions or emotional outbursts as those can be seen as acts of

rebellion or immoral at best and acts of derangement, madness, or hysteria at worst (Gilbert et

al., 2020). We have seen this clearly evidenced in recent political hearings and depositions within

recent years. When Hillary Rodham Clinton was deposed regarding alleged emails on her

personal devices and servers for 11 hours, we witnessed her respond to hours of questioning and maintain complete composure. Despite her complete lack of histrionics during this long and grueling deposition, the media still engaged in defamation of her character and her womanhood by calling out her short responses as evidence of her mental deficiency stating that she had demonstrated "a short-circuit to the brain" (Diamond, 2016) in an effort to damage her both personally and politically. However, in direct contrast to behaviors expected from her as a white woman, Justice Brett Kavanaugh under scrutiny and political duress regarding his alleged sexual misconduct prior to his appointment as a supreme court judge, responded with intense rage and extreme emotion when questioned. Media coverage briefly acknowledged that Kavanaugh "appeared to lose his composure and grow irritated, (Bush, 2018, para 10)" and later stating that he appeared "flustered" (Bush, 2018, para 15). Despite his emotional outbursts, his unprofessional display of rage which is uncharacteristic and somewhat undesirable for a Supreme Court Justice, as well as convincing evidence and testimony to his egregious and unlawful behavior, he was appointed to the Supreme Court in short order regardless. Looking back further in recent history, to the early 1990s, it is not difficult to remember the scandal involving President Bill Clinton and his political aide, Monica Lewinski. While both President Clinton and Ms. Lewinski participated in a mutually agreed upon sexual encounter, despite power dynamics between the two, President Clinton maintained his social and political power, his marriage to Hillary Clinton who went on to become the Secretary of State years later, and his dignity. Likewise, his wife, Hillary Clinton, who publicly supported him in the face of his sexual misconduct, also maintained her political power. Ms. Lewinski, on the other hand, was publicly shamed and forced out of the public eye for several years as a result of her testimony only to resurface several years later as an anti-bullying activist, specifically speaking out against the

deleterious impact of public shaming (McFadden 2021). This illustrates how expectations and the access to power and privilege between white men and white women clearly differ, and highlights how white women must align themselves as supportive and submissive to their white male counterparts to maintain social and political safety. In this way "white feminine bodies serve, as Chow (1990) frames, [as] 'sutures' to white men and whiteness (p.89). White women's bodies conjoin white masculinity to patriarchy and ensure that white power be maintained through [their] relationships to it" (McIntosh, 2019). White women therefore are socialized and taught to operate this way as both an obligation, responsibility, and a source of their own empowerment.

Speaking out, even if what you say is true, threatens social mobility, power, and agency as a white woman. White women, as nation-builders and also as *morally upstanding* members of society, must never question, expose, or challenge the authority of their white male counterparts, as part of their *moral obligation* is to support and defend the white male (Watson, 2013; Jupp, et al., 2020) even amidst public scandal and illegal activity.

> White woman. The phrase conjures up images of refinement, elegance, class, and beauty. White women are smart, but not overbearingly so; they are appropriately supportive of their husbands and protective of their beautiful families; they are good mothers. They are gorgeously pale and thin but not enough to suggest illness. They are desirable and desired. They are monied. The White woman is often sheltered and always protected. She is good, kind, and never malicious. She follows her heart and tries to do what is right. When she is wrong, it is because she is misled. White women are luminous. Their Greco-Roman profiles have been sketched, painted, embossed, and projected. Their families and their homes have been explored with gentle interest, as a reflection of their character and worth. They have been idealized, mythologized, and pedestalized. (Watson, 2013, p.59).

Since morality cannot easily be dictated outside of religious expectation, the religion cannot be discounted in the socialization of white males and females either. Within the scope of

morality, religious doctrine has been operationalized to maintain women's obedience to their

male counterparts and also their subservience (McIntosh, 2018). In this way "white women play

an imperative role in recentering whiteness. If white women are culturally organized as

nurturing, innocent, and pure, then they are never racist. White supremacy is secured through

white feminine enactments of whiteness" (McIntosh, 2018, p.109). Also, within moral and

religious obligations assigned to white women, white women are also not encouraged to have

agency over their own bodies or minds even as adults. This is clearly demonstrated in religious

ceremonies including but not limited to marriage, where the father of the bride is charged with

giving the bride away to an approved suitor who will then manage her from that point forward.

The religious and social expectation then taught within Western Christianity, the predominant

religion in the United States (The Pew Research Center, 2022), is that the woman will be given

away, harkening back to a time where fathers actually owned their daughters as property

(Froshchauer et al., 2018) and male suitors were expected to pay a dowry or *bride price* for their

hand in marriage. Within this example, it becomes clearly evident that white women are not

frequently socialized to embrace their own selves as capable agents of change, but rather

property or *in direct care of* the white men in their lives (Froshchauer et al., 2018), whether that

is her father or her husband. This required submission means that they are also implicitly

relegated to an inferior position to their white male counterparts socially and politically,

deferring through their own *morality*, innate *goodness*, beauty, and ability to bear white offspring

and even more power to their husbands as white men. It is important to note here that part of

being a submissive white wife and serving one's white husband also means that white women are

socialized to believe that their appearance reflects on their partner, either conferring him more

business power and acumen, or operating as a source of embarrassment (Cain, 2008). Within the

confines of this *moral expectation,* reified by religious doctrine, there are many white women who feel othered by the expectations to be thin, pale, or *suitably dressed* to support their husband's expectations and image (Bourdieu & Bennett, 1979; 1984; 2015; Goldenberg, 2010; Shilling ,1991; Chithambo & Huey, 2013). Often, women who fail to meet the physical beauty standards expected of white women are assumed to be involved with either Black men or other women. In this way, white women who fall out of the normative social expectations of look and dress are stripped of some of the privileges of whiteness (Bourdieu & Bennett, 1979; 1984; 2015; Goldenberg, 2010; Shilling ,1991; Chithambo & Huey, 2013).

Sexuality then, as an extension of religious norms and expectations, also reinforces white, female socialization. Similarly to how the Black male represented a threat to white nationhood and white supremacy, homosexuality or fluid sexualities also have presented a threat. "If gender is the term that marks [women] as outside the norm [since they are not white men], their sexualities become the lightning rod for reigning them back into the status quo" (p.77, Kenny, 1961; 2000) as it maintained the supremacy and dedication to the white male, thereby ensuring and protecting the inevitability of future offspring and white hegemony.

In these ways, white girls are not necessarily "born white. Whiteness, middle-classness, and femininity are cultural processes that are made and remade over time and across social conflicts or the avoidance thereof" (Kenny, 1961; 2000, p. 33). Therefore, within the context of this study, one must question whether white women must divest themselves from the socialized norms associated with white femininity in order to become truly antiracist. The intersectionality of gender socialization and race must be examined in order to fully understand how white women develop their individual identities and how those identities impact their paradigm of antiracism and pedagogical practice.

White Teacher Identities

While the impact of white socialization on white teacher identities is understudied in the literature, white teacher identities are not. At worst, white teachers have long been studied and labeled as discriminatory. At best, they have been seen as biased. For example, when considering whiteness in education, McIntyre (1997), detailed that despite her active and intentional intervention on white, women educator's racial identity to instigate social justice, antiracist activism, she was largely unsuccessful. McIntyre's (1997) research studied white, female educators, and indicated that for young, white women having a white identity was mostly seen as normal, accepted, and good. Research participants within her study experienced an unvarying conformity with white, Eurocentric values. All participants indicated that they experienced fear, discomfort, guilt, and even anger when presented with historical information about past transgressions against Black and Brown people. However, despite this emotional response to historical racism, participants, due to their social location as white middle-class females, were unable to recognize ways in which they could interrogate whiteness or decenter their privilege. While McIntyre's research (1997) did not indicate much hope for developing antiracist ideologies amongst white, female educators, some research has indicated that the arts may serve as a better tool to decenter whiteness and instigate social understanding and activism among white educators.

Possibilities within the Arts to Decenter Whiteness

Lea and Sims (2008) explored the impact of the arts in undoing whiteness within the classroom. Their findings, following a year of intensive professional development, suggest that through critical analysis of the arts, purposeful dialogue, and intentional social action, white, pre-service educators can see hegemonic practices within educational systems and will work to

disrupt them. For example, within Lea and Sims's study (2008), they found that when white educators were exposed to emotionally charged art, pictures, or video footage of discrimination or violence against Black and Brown people, followed by critical dialogue, they were able to identify systems of inequity and oppression and were able to move towards antiracist pedagogy. This is one of the few studies that actually addresses moving from the invisibility of whiteness as norm to understanding of race, the impact race has on their profession and/or classroom, and then creates a move towards cultural relevance. However, this study did not analyze how white educators developed their racial identities without intentional, outside interference. It also did not analyze this journey through the intersectionalities of religion, gender and class. Similarly, other critical-arts pedagogists, using installations of art depicting racialized violence, political media, and representation, have investigated the use of art to create or develop critical consciousness within students (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bettencourt, 2020; Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017; Chilton & Leavy, 2014; Kreikemeirer, 2021). This research provided convincing evidence that critical arts-based pedagogy could be a useful tool in classrooms and within pre-service teacher programming in creating the critical *conscientization,* spoken of by Freire, in both teachers and their students.

Impact of the Invisibility of Whiteness in Classrooms

The invisibility of whiteness is rarely discussed within educational spaces despite its significant impact (Hancock & Warren, 2017; Lensmire, 2017). Since 85% of the educational workforce is constituted by white women (Ford, 2012), the things they do not see or understand are automatically and ignorantly replicated within their classrooms and other educational spaces. Therefore, further analysis of the intersectionalities of religion, gender and class within the racial identities of white, women educators is warranted.

Implicit biases and deficit thinking of white educators (Meiners, 2007; Ford, 2012) work to maintain high rates of failure among Black youth nationally. According to Fasching and Varner (2017), "the current expectation of public education is to proselytize whiteness under the auspice of saving children of color through an educational reform industrial complex that is violent and will sacrifice lives to protect the interests of making and retaining profit" (p.13). The reality is that our predominantly white, female educator workforces need to be able to see their racial, social, gendered, and political positioning within their classrooms, and understand how their intersectional identities impact their students, their instruction, and the systems within educational spaces that work to maintain oppression and marginalization of our increasingly diverse student population in the United States.

Conclusion

In this chapter I summarized relevant literature on white, racial identity. I also included a summary of Cross and Helm's popular racial identity models. I synthesized white socialization from seminal works such as Thandeka (1999) and Smith (1949; 1994), as well as works by Miller and Lensmire (2021), who tackle intersections of white identity and class, and Hancock and Warren (2011), who examine intersections of white identity and gender. Finally, I summarized existing literature (McIntyre, 1997; Lee & Sims, 2008; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bettencourt, 2020; Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017; Chilton & Leavy, 2014; Kreikemeirer, 2021) on ways in which researchers and educators have attempted to disrupt the invisibility of whiteness, instigating further self-examination of white identity and its intersections with cultural, political, and social expectations in an attempt to create more equitable outcomes for students of color in predominantly white, female-led classrooms. Existing literature clearly indicates that there is a

further need to more deeply investigate intersections of white identity and the impact these

intersections might have on white educators in the classroom.

Chapter 3- METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used within this study to address the research questions, provides a detailed explanation of phenomenological research, and explains how this type of research will be utilized within this study. This chapter details how participants were recruited, how data was collected and analyzed, and strategies used to maintain reliability and validity. Finally, this chapter addressed the subjectivity of myself, as a researcher.

The purpose of this study was to identify the ways in which white, female educators are acculturated into whiteness through cultural, social, and political factors. The study aimed to examine the intersections of white, female identity, including but not limited to gender, class, place, and religion, and determine how these aspects of their identity impact their classroom and instructional practice. The data for this study was collected through multiple avenues. I utilized two semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted over zoom or in person, as well as reflective journaling, time-lining of each participant's lived experiences, and double-entry journaling and/or written responses to gather information about each participant's lived experiences pertaining to their own racial identity and *conscientization* of themselves as change agents or antiracist educators. By bridling my own intersections and intentions within the phenomenon, using timelining and reflective journaling, I was able to increase the validity of the study.

Research Questions

- How do intersections of their identity shape the way teachers view themselves in the classroom?

- How do the varied intersections of white identity inform philosophical and pedagogical paradigms and instructional practices?

Research Design

Interpretive Phenomenology

Traditionally, phenomenology aims to detail the essence of human experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Husserl & Landgrebe, 1973) and to explain a social phenomenon (Patton, 2015). However, interpretive phenomenology moves beyond understanding the essence of the human experience to understanding individual stories, experiences, or phenomena, and the interactions or events that shape or influence them (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology, a qualitative research approach (Smith et al., 2009) that places heavy emphasis on the essence of lived experiences (Husserl& Landgrebe, 1973).), is informed by hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutics then, being more than just identification of phenomena, requires the researcher to explore the meaning behind the phenomenon and the specific interactions of the research participants that lead to the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, interpretive phenomenology requires the researcher to analyze and understand the events, interactions, or processes that occur as individuals move through the phenomenon, moving the focus of the research from general to specific or idiographic (Smith et al., 2009). Interpretive phenomenology attempts not just to understand the phenomena itself, but also to understand the individual and the individual interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon. Since I am interested in exploring, understanding, describing, and capturing the essence of lived experiences from the viewpoint of participants to include both what they experienced and how they experienced their journey to whiteness and antiracism (Patton, 2015), I felt that interpretive phenomenology was the most appropriate method to employ for this research project. Since phenomenological research focuses on individuals' own interpretations of their lived experiences or phenomenon (Mertens, 2019), then this study, centering white, women educators' lived experiences towards antiracism, is a perfect fit for an interpretive phenomenological study.

Another reason why I chose interpretive phenomenological research for this study is because white women are seldom asked to reflect on their experiences as white women. Due to the invisibility of whiteness (Hancock & Warren, 2017; Lensmire, 2017), race is frequently not discussed in white spaces. Therefore, there remains not just a stigma around discussion of the white experience, but there can at times even be shame attached to their white identity development (Thandeka, 1999), leading to increased silence and invisibility. Additionally, intersectionalities of whiteness including gender, religion, class, and place have been understudied and under-researched. This gap in the literature may lead scholars and individuals to perceive whiteness as a monolithic experience, when in fact this may not be the reality. Through the lens of CWS, this study seeks to not only analyze how white women made the journey towards their self-identification as antiracist, through individual lived experiences and socialization, but also how intersections of their person might have impacted their willingness to move beyond hegemonic norms into a new, deconstructed space and identity. What must white women hold onto or let go of in order to embrace antiracism and antiracist pedagogy? Were there specific triggering events or means of socialization that these white women experienced that others did not? This study aims to shed light on these individual journeys and experiences, and how intersections of religion, gender, class, etc. play a part in their white identity development.

Population

Porter (1999), stated that it "is important that participants share certain demographic characteristics, which represent inclusion criteria for the sample" (p. 796). Therefore, the target demographic of this study will consist of 8-10 white, women educators in the K-12 sector who have taught for a minimum of 5 years. Since research participants must be accessible to the researcher (Porter, 1999), it is also important that the research participants are able to meet

virtually via Zoom or meet in person for the semi-structured interviews. Due to the recent

pandemic and associated changes, I do not believe that this will be a challenge for the study.

Sample

Participants were selected using social media platforms (specifically Facebook Educator

groups and pages to announce the study and recruit interested participants who self-identified as

antiracist, white, female educators within a K-12 setting). Participants selected saw themselves

as actively working to dismantle hegemonic norms within educational systems. By selecting

participants who identify as white, female, and antiracist within a K-12 educational setting, I

hoped to be able to determine how white educators dealt with the intersections of the white

identity and hoped to begin to recognize their own complicity within the systems meant to

maintain and support it. I also hoped to be able to determine how they reconciled parts of their

identities with their role in antiracist initiatives.

Self-Identification as Antiracist

Prior to beginning this study and asking for participation from self-identified antiracists, I

operated within the understanding of Kendi's (2019) definition of antiracism and antiracist.

Kendi (2109) defines an antiracist idea as any idea that suggests that racial groups are equals in

all their apparent differences- that there is nothing right or wrong with any racial group.

Antiracist ideas argue that racist policies are the cause of racial inequities. Therefore, in order to

be an antiracist, one must have developed a critical consciousness around historical and

sociopolitical systems in order to move in opposition to these systems. However, after

completing this study it has become clear that while this is the operationalized definition within

literature, the lived experiences of those who identify themselves as antiracist are often in

different places within their critical consciousness development and therefore may present

differently within their work and social environments. Additionally, while these women all volunteered to participate in this study, there were times within our conversations where I found them questioning themselves, still deconstructing the hegemonic norms of whiteness and white supremacy as they reflected on their own personal identities and the nuances within. It is important to note then, that unlike Black and Brown people, white people are still able to move between the safety of whiteness and white supremist beliefs and action, while maintaining their self-identification and thus belief in their moral *superiority* to those who do not identify as such.

There were, at times, even within this study that participants admitted to seeing and understanding bias and racism around them (most often this was mentioned when discussing earlier events in their critical consciousness development), and yet chose not to correct or intervene in those situations. This, then, by definition is not antiracism as their behavior in those situations did not move in opposition to white supremacy or against the sociopolitical norms of racism and hate. For the purposes of this study, I operate within the understanding that while white people may live in constant pursuit of antiracist action and antiracist thought, the mere ability of them as people who present as phenotypically white affords them the ability to either consciously or unconsciously move between the two paradigms and subsequent actions to either maintain their safety or at times even as a continued result of the pervasiveness of white culture and the invisibility of whiteness (Seidle & Hancock, 2012). Therefore, defining antiracism or defining oneself as an antiracist seems to require continual self-reflection, interrogation of oneself and one's actions, and a continued desire to move against oppressive historical and sociopolitical systems and norms that may still at times remain unseen to the *self-identified antiracist.* This work is not then a destination, but rather a continual journey of self-discovery and refinement.

Within this study, some participants addressed this continuum of self-discovery and constant need for self-reflection and refinement directly, expressing even discomfort with the label of *antiracist* despite their self-identification as such for this study. Gina responds below stating the following:

I don't know that I always feel like I am an antiracist. I guess I don't think of it as something constant. I still have to put the work in to be an antiracist teacher, but I can catch myself not always acting as such, if that makes sense….I think what makes me antiracist is that I do see race. I see it as part of others, my students. I see that their race and my own shapes the ways we act, speak, understand, learn. And I try to see these differences as differences, not that one way is better than the other. And I also think part of what shapes my view of myself as an antiracist is my willingness to help others (usually other teachers) consider how race affects our students, particularly when they are white teachers who may not think race has anything to do with the way students learn math or respond to teacher directions, etc. And once we see those things, understanding that it's not about changing the way students are to have them meet the white norms of school.

Becca echoes some of this same sentiment as well when she states the following:

I think actually some of the conversations we've had have helped me realize what a thorough part of my socialization that was [white socialization and acculturation] and that it's just something I've always been so sure of. I'm not saying that the facts don't match some of this assessment, but it's also just I think the rumor of this helped perpetuate it into existence and I think that that's a huge thing for white educators, which is just like standing in opposition to folks that are either not engaging with social problems or are engaging on the wrong side of social problems and just being like, well, I'm not like the other. Like, blah, blah, blah. I think that's a part of it. And I think

also the more recent evolution of that for me has been, like, shifting from I'm a good white, I'm a good white, I'm a good white person..and the thing is, there's actually particularly, like, if you're pretty solidly on the left side of things, there's a lot of reinforcement for that idea, up to and including from black people and other people of color. You can get a lot of cookies for that because the bar is just so damn low. And so I think where I'm at now is kind of trying to grapple with humility around that stuff and dig into what's actionable. Because it's sort of like an extension of that lesson from the classroom right, where it's like, okay, now I am a white woman who is… I don't know what my income puts me at, but it's definitely middle class…What am I doing with that? What am I doing with it financially or, like, civically? And I'm still figuring that out, especially because the landscape of how to engage here isn't 100% clear to me, I don't think. And there's just like the powers that be. There's a white power that be.

Here, it is clear that Becca is wrestling with her identification as an antiracist while still maintaining the privileges of being white and even the privileges and social-emotional rewards for being a *good white* person. She states that she is still trying to determine how make her beliefs in the humanity of Black and Brown people actionable in her white world and white existence. She goes on to say that while she identifies as an antiracist, ultimately she is still able to exist within white spaces safely and comfortably if she chooses to do so:

And the reality is I can cut the shit and pass anytime I want. In the nail salon they don't fucking know. People say weird microaggressive shit all the time in front of me. Because that's the thing. It's like, okay, yes. And actually, I can still access a lot of these networks. I get written off on certain things, but I'm just the quirky… It's like the aunt that doesn't have kids, like rocking in and doing her thing, and then later on you're like, maybe she wasn't weird. Maybe she has a…

really this life. But I think yes. And as soon as I try to be really conscious of… as soon as we're

into a narrative where it's just it's just really hard out here for the white lady.

She further details what antiracism looks like within white spaces:

…this is where we are fighting our own socializations around calling people in because actually

you don't want to be an island. Actually, part of your job is to stay and argue with these people.

And what arguing looks like or persuasion looks like can look really different depending on the

dynamic. And if there are certain people you just need to be away from, you need to be away

from them. But our job is not to just peace out on the conversation.

Becca then further mentions how identifying as an antiracist or being vocal impacts those in the

white community:

And they're feeling alone and defeated. And if they have no community, I think that's the piece.

There's not been a community that's really formed around this yet… keyword…yet.

Within these comments made by both Becca and Gina, it becomes clear that while these

participants self-identified as antiracist for this study, this is not without both internal and

external tension, and is not an achievement that they have attained but rather a continual process

of deconstruction and self-reflection with potential variations that at times are even contradictory

to this label by the very nature of their deeply ingrained socialization, acculturation, and ability

to either consciously or unconsciously access privilege as a result of their white phenotype.

Therefore, it is important for researchers and academics alike to understand that even within the

space of white allies and co-conspirators, the work is actively being done to deconstruct

whiteness and white supremist ideas, often within the moment and often as a result of the tension

between their two identified selves, antiracist and privileged white female.

Participant Profiles

This section of Chapter 4 will provide individual descriptions of basic demographics of each research participant. This information is important as it allows the reader to better understand the context of the participants' stories, their social and physical location, years of experience teaching, and subjects taught. Each participant identifies as white, female, heterosexual, and antiracist. Each participant was born into a nuclear family, with one father and one mother. Some of the research participants grew up in urban areas, while others grew up in suburban or rural areas. Some of the participants are married, some married and divorced, and others have not yet married. Religious affiliation growing up, if any, varies between participants as well.

Rachel, who will be called Rachel for the purposes of this research, was born in Brooklyn, New York into a middle-class family. Her father was a police officer and her mother initially worked as an X-ray technician. Their community was semi-diverse, with a large Puerto Rican population and subsequent culture. Many of their family friends identified as Puerto Rican, but still appeared to be *white passing*. Following an injury at work, Rachel's father retired from the NYPD and Rachel became the primary caretaker of her father at the tender age of three years old. Her mother, who had been a stay-at-home mother at that time, returned to work. Rachel moved to North Carolina towards the end of her elementary school years with her family and has remained in North Carolina since. Following her family's move to North Carolina, Rachel states that their social class has fallen from middle class to lower middle class. Rachel was raised in a somewhat religious family, having gone through confirmation in the Catholic church during her adolescence. Currently, Rachel is 29 years old and has 10 years of experience in the field of education. She has taught pre-k, kindergarten, first grade, third grade, fourth grade, and sixth grade across all subject areas. Her favorite subject to teach is math and her favorite

grade level is 3rd grade. Rachel does not recall a significant exposure to Black and Brown people within her childhood or adolescence, as she was raised in predominantly white spaces.

Participant 2, who will be called Mary for the purposes of this study, was born in rural Appalachia, in a town called Rosman, North Carolina, into a working-class family. Both her father and her mother worked in textiles at a local plant, covering different shifts so they could take care of her and her sister. Their community was mostly poor and white, with very few people of color. Mary was raised in very religious household, primarily Baptist in her youth. Currently, Mary is 43 years old and has 16 years of experience in the field of education. She has taught third grade, fifth grade, and sixth grade, has taught academically gifted classes, and now serves as an instructional coach. Her favorite subject to teach is math. Mary does not recall a significant exposure to Black and Brown people within her childhood or adolescence, as she was raised in predominantly white spaces.

Participant 3, who will be called Becca for the purposes of this research, was born in a small town of about 3,000 in Western Massachusetts 2 hours outside of Boston into a working-class family. Her father owned a restaurant where he and her mother worked tirelessly week after week to make ends meet. As Becca grew older, her father became an HVAC repairman. Later in life, after Becca had moved out of the home, her mother began working as a dental assistant. Becca was raised in a religious household, where Catholicism was part of their weekend life, as they attended weekly mass, but also was a part of her education and schooling. Their community was somewhat diverse. She recalls her father having friends of color who he played music with. However, Becca does not think she thought deeply about race or color at all until much later in life. Currently, Becca is 34 years old and has 7 years of experience teaching and 11 years in the field of education. She has taught 9th grade and 7th grade, has served as a

paraprofessional, a substitute teacher in various grades, a tutor for third and fourth graders, and is currently serving as an online teacher for migrant students who need support learning English or are anticipating taking the GED in the future. Her favorite subject to teach is English and her favorite grade levels are middle grades. Becca does not recall a significant exposure to Black and Brown people within her childhood or adolescence, as she was raised in predominantly white spaces.

Participant 4, who will be called Donna for the purposes of this study, was born in Marshfield, a coastal town south of Boston, into an upper -middle class family. Her father ran a mass Audubon and her mother worked as a nurse. Currently, Rachel is 46 years old and has 18 years of experience in the field of education. She has taught science in middle school, high school, and in kindergarten-third grade. Her favorite subject to teach is science and her favorite age to teach is middle school. Donna was not raised in a religious household. Donna does not recall a significant exposure to Black and Brown people within her childhood or adolescence, as she was raised in predominantly white spaces.

Participant 5, who will be called Audrey for the purposes of this research, was born in Charlotte, NC into a middle-class family. Her father worked in low-income housing and her mother worked at a local preschool until Audrey was in middle school, at which point she went into real estate. Currently, Audrey is 33 years old and has 11 years of experience in the field of education. She has taught kindergarten and first grade and has also served as an interventionist K-5. Her favorite subject to teach is reading. Audrey was raised in a religious, primarily Baptist household. Audrey does not recall a significant exposure to Black and Brown people within her childhood or adolescence, as she was raised in predominantly white spaces.

Participant 6, who will be called Tammy for the purposes of this study, was born in Roanoke, Virginia into a middle-class family. Her father was a social worker and her mother was a teacher. Currently, Tammy is 51 years old and has 20 years of experience in the field of education. She has taught first grade, second grade, and third grade across all subject areas. Tammy was raised in a religious household, eventually growing up to become an ordained minister prior to moving into education. Tammy does not recall a significant exposure to Black and Brown people within her childhood or adolescence, as she was raised in predominantly white spaces.

Participant 7 , who will be called Gina for the purposes of this research, was born in Charlotte, NC into a middle-class family. Her father was a mechanical engineer and her mother was a stay-at-home mom until both of her children went to school, at which time she returned to work as an office assistant. Their community was semi-diverse, with a large immigrant population. Gina was raised in a religious household, and also attended Catholic School for part of her formal education. Currently, Rachel is 36 years old and has 11 years of experience in the field of education. She has primarily taught middle school math, but has also taught ELA and Social Studies as well. She is currently teaching undergraduate students in the College of Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her favorite subject to teach is math and her favorite grade level is 6th grade. Gina does not recall a significant exposure to Black and Brown people within her childhood or adolescence, as she was raised in predominantly white spaces.

Participant 8, who will be called Amanda for the purposes of this study, was born in Hawaii into a middle-class family. Her father was a minister, missionary, and officer in the Southern Baptist Association. Her family was very religious and were heavily involved with the

church throughout her entire childhood and adolescence. Their community at that time was very diverse, with many Hawaiian and Asian influences. However, in Amanda's early childhood, her family returned to the mainland and settled in Sevierville, Tennessee. Currently, Amanda is 60 years old and has 16 years of experience in the field of education. She has taught ninth grade, tenth grade, and twelfth grade science, although seven years of her teaching experience were at a private Christian school where she also taught Bible for one year. Amanda recalls significant exposure to people of other races and ethnicities in her childhood, although much of that was from her time in Hawaii, with significantly less exposure and involvement with people of color once her family returned stateside.

It is important to note here that different participants went through these experiences and racial identity development at different times in their lives, and also at different times sociopolitically. Due to the age difference between participants, some participants may have a more intimate knowledge of historical racism within our country. Partially as a result of this generational difference between participants, their stories may look different and they may have come to the realization of their whiteness, privilege, and complicity at a later point in their lives. Additionally, regardless of age, participants may be at different stages within their identity development, therefore shaping their self-analysis and understanding of their racial identity within sociopolitical systems and within their classroom. While these differences may not be addressed explicitly within data analysis, it is important to keep in mind when reading participant responses. This study was meant to center their lived experiences and find themes across their histories and development. However, some variance in their critical consciousness was also expected. Finally, as each participant shares their experiences and they are asked to reflect on their identity development, especially over the course of the two, in-depth interviews and written

responses, it felt as if they were still uncovering aspects of their identities and beginning to understand how the intersectionality of their identity was shaped and cultivated through their socialized and acculturated experiences. This indicates and solidifies that racial identity development, or rather individual identity period, does not have a predetermined destination, but rather is a process by which we continue to move and grow as we encounter and resolve tensions created within ourselves via socialized or acculturated experiences.

Table 3.1

Participant Demographics

Participants	Age	Location	Social Status/Class	Years of Experience	Religious Background	Gender/ Sexuality	Degree?
Rachel	29	Brooklyn, NY and Mooresville, NC	Middle Class	10	Yes-Catholic	Female Heterosexual Single	PhD (ABD)
Mary	43	Rosman, NC and Mooresville, NC	Working Class	16	Yes-Baptist	Female Heterosexual Single (divorced)	PhD
Becca	34	Western Massachusetts	Working Class	7	Yes-Catholic	Female Heterosexual Single (engaged)	Masters
Donna	46	Town South of Boston called Marshfield and Jackson County, NC	Upper Middle Class	18	No	Female Heterosexual Married	Masters
Audrey	33	Charlotte, NC	Middle Class	11	Yes-Baptist	Female Heterosexual Married	Masters
Tammy	51	Roanoke, VA and Mooresville, NC	Middle Class	20	Yes-Baptist	Female Heterosexual Married	Masters

Gina	36	Charlotte, NC	Middle Class	11	Yes-Catholic	Female Heterosexual Single	PhD
Amanda	60	Hawaii; Sevierville, TN; Gastonia, NC; Durham, NC	Middle Class	16	Yes-Baptist	Female Heterosexual Married	PhD

Data Collection & Analysis

Data Collection

Before I began to collect data, my first step in the process was to gain approval through the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's (UNCC) Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB at UNCC reviewed my research proposal and confirmed that my study was in alignment with their policies and practices for human subject research. The IRB at UNCC also ensured that all necessary precautions were in place to maintain confidentiality of research participants.

After this, but before I began my research, I also had research participants complete a consent form via Docusign. The consent form detailed the purpose of the study and also informed the participants of the potential risks associated with the study. This consent form also detailed the research process, time dedication, transcription, and member checking processes.

Data was collected through two, semi-structured, in-depth interviews either in person or via Zoom. Following the interviews, I transcribed them. I then sent them back to the participants for member checking. Observations were also recorded using field notes taken on location. When reflecting and reviewing observation notes, reading and re-readings of complete transcripts, in-process writing and initial and integrative memo writing (Emerson, et al., 2011; Wolcott, 1994) for both the interviews as well as the double-entry journal responses was also

employed. Construction of annotated timelines of autobiographical events based on the first

interview were developed. Follow-up questions were formed using analysis from the first

interview, memos, notes and reflections, and timeline analysis (Sheridan, et al., 2011). All

interviews were analyzed through an iterative process (Wolcott, 1994; Tracy, 2013) where key

themes were identified within the data that provided meaningful insight into the individual

experiences these educators had when forming or recognizing their whiteness or white identity,

and then their journey to dismantle oppressive systems created as a result. Intersecting or

overlapping themes of gender, religion, and class were also analyzed to determine if there were

identifiable themes or patterns between each participant's racial development and the intersection

of other pieces of their identity.

Both empathetic and suspicious hermeneutics were employed (Willing, 2017) throughout

the data analysis process. Empathetic hermeneutics, and the voice of the research participant,

centers their analysis and experience as reality, while suspicious hermeneutics attempts to frame

or interrogate the participant's experience against the backdrop of social, political, and cultural

factors in an effort to reveal the unspoken or even unrecognized truths within the participant's

story. The process of suspicious hermeneutics embraces the idea that "the consciousness of what

one really is [involves] knowing thyself as a product of the historical process to date which has

deposited in [each participant] an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory" (Gramsci,

1971, p. 324).

Data Analysis

During the two semi-structured interviews of research participants, I employed a

humanizing paradigm, or a commitment to the co-construction of knowledge, human agency and

voice, diverse perspectives, moments of vulnerability, and acts of listening (Kinlock & San

Pedro, 2014, p. 23) throughout these interviews. The first interview with each participant varied

from 1.5- 5 hours and took place either face to face or via Zoom. The initial interviews centered

the participant's autobiographical journey towards antiracism through a critical lens or

self-analysis. Following this initial interview, I utilized Google documents to identify parts of

participant stories that needed clarification or perhaps were more difficult for the participant to

discuss face to face in an effort to better understand their journey and intent during the initial

interview. Participants responded to these questions in a double-entry journal format, in writing,

which allowed time for self-reflection and an opportunity for their own self-reflection related to

the interview questions and their personal experiences related to their identity development.

Following this process, timelines were created using data from the initial interviews and

double-entry journal responses. The second interview varied in length from 30 minutes to 2.5

hours depending upon participant response and reflection. This interview focused more on

participants' pedagogical practice and how antiracist pedagogy and paradigms impacted their

classrooms and professional persona.

Within each interview, I took field notes and made observations of participant affect or

responses to specific events and experiences that influenced their identity. This information

proved useful when employing both empathetic and suspicious hermeneutics, as several

participants had not reflected or had at least not recently reflected on how specific intersections

of their identity had impacted other aspects of their identity prior to the interview process. When

considering the impact that media, literature, and outside forces have on creating and

maintaining the social constructs of race and whiteness, as well as the invisibility surrounding it,

I felt that it was important to engage how each of these external stimuli created or contributed to

the development of each participants' racial identity development over time.

Trustworthiness & Validity

Trustworthiness within qualitative research ensures that the interpretation of the data is dependable (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015), while validity within qualitative research ensures that the interpretation of the data are "justifiable, relevant, meaningful, logical, and conforming to accepted principles" (Cypress, 2017, para 16). Using member-checking during the data collection process, I attempted to maintain the accuracy of participant stories and to honor their individual journeys (Patton, 2015), thereby ensuring accuracy. Additionally, following each interview and throughout the iterative process of data analysis, I practiced reflexivity through bracketing and bridling (Finslay, 2008). When considering the concept of whiteness, and race as a social construct that seemingly none of us have yet to escape, this *lifeworld* experience towards recognizing oneself as raced and identifying how one's race impacts others seemed to be an opportunity to explore the *space between* the two. I employed bracketing so that the phenomenon of becoming racially aware as a white person could be "carefully described as [the participant] experienced consciousness" (Vagle, 2018, p. 9). Reflective journaling to bridle my own involvement with the research participant and subsequent data in order to reflect in real time on how I was making meaning of their lived experiences, as well as my own, within this phenomenon, took place during data analysis and following interviews as well. Heidiger's phenomenology stresses that "phenomena are lived out interpretively in the world, and hence the world should not be bracketed but fully engaged in the phenomenological inquiry" (Vagle, 2018, p.9). Vagle (2009, para 4) further confirms this when he states "the researcher is always already in an intentional relationship with the phenomenon under investigation" and cannot then "decide to invoke intentionality nor escape it; the researcher can only try to make some fleeting sense of it as he or she reflects on it." Since I could not separate myself and my own lived

experiences completely from the research process or the phenomenon, I felt that reflective journaling throughout the entire data collection process was necessary for both trustworthiness and validity of the data.

Throughout this process, I found myself *bursting forth* (Vagle, 2009) towards new meanings and themes identified following both the interviews and data analysis. This *bursting forth* (Vagle, 2009) specifically occurred in my own consciousness and at times in the research participants as well as it related to the phenomenon in question and my own understanding of identity as a white, woman educator and the social constructs that have influenced not only my development but the development of white women educators identities in general.

Subjectivity Statement

The purpose of a subjectivity statement within research is for the researcher to acknowledge and unpack their position, perspective, and potential biases that may interfere or impact their perspective as a researcher. It has been defined as the "amalgam of the persuasions that stem from the circumstances of one's class, statuses, and values interacting with the particulars of one's object of investigation" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). Your background, as a researcher and as a person, will no doubt impact what you choose to research, and the methodology and theoretical approach to your research. It may even impact your interpretation of the data itself, as it may shape the way you interpret the findings (Malterud, 2001). The goal of the subjectivity statement is to encourage reflexivity, or the researcher's continual explanation and examination of their influence on a particular project. It is important that when conducting research, and developing your subjectivity statement that the researcher also identifies ways in which their positionality may limit or skew their research (Roulston, 2017). This may aid when

choosing collaborators on your research project, as you may be more able to choose people who are able to see past your implicit biases and/or blind spots.

This research interest originated out of my own personal journey towards anti-racist/ abolitionist pedagogy. Having been raised in not just a predominantly white town, but truly an all-white town, with Evangelical parents, the concept of myself as raced was foreign to me. Not only did I not recognize myself as privileged, but I did not believe that I was in any way, shape or form racist, as only "bad" people were racist. While there were many eye-opening moments throughout my journey growing up, specifically as I entered University, the journey did not really begin until Trayvon Martin was murdered. This specific incident, with all of the anger and hurt it unleashed nationwide and within my own educational community I was teaching in at the time, was the triggering moment towards self-reflection that sparked analysis and concrete change in me as a person and as an educator. Not only did I begin to ask questions of my colleagues and students of color, I began to question my white peers about their belief and value system as well. As a result of these interactions and my own research, my eyes began to open in regards to my own privilege and my own complicity within systemic and structural racism within schools and within my community.

As time has worn on, especially in light of recent political events and this most recent election (2016), it has become increasingly clear that many white people remain stuck in a place of cognitive dissonance as it pertains to their whiteness and complicity within the system. Not only does it become increasingly clear that they remain stuck and unwilling to see beyond their social sphere, but it has also become increasingly clear that the church, and religion has participated in creating a culture of "kindness" and desire to "not offend" that protects bias and

shields white people from the discomfort of candid conversations about race that would promote their individual growth.

As a result of my whiteness, my background, and my journey to being "raced," and all that that means for people of color around me, my desire is to specifically affect white people, with my research, and dismantle this cognitive dissonance in such a way as to effectively begin to reform the K-12 educational system and dismantle oppressive systems and practices that their cognitive dissonance and implicit bias have maintained. In order for that to be possible, I genuinely believe that more research needs to be done in regards to creating that triggering event, which sparks change. Can we create that event within our teacher education programs? Can we create that event in our K-12 classrooms in order to open the dialogue, and promote individual change? Regardless, the work that must be done lies with my people.

Risks, Benefits, and Ethical Considerations

Benefits of the study include the potential of being able to create or hypothesize a way to recreate the journey to self-awareness, whiteness, and antiracism within pre-service teacher education programming. In the event that strong themes across a variety of educators are identified, this could have significant implications for educational reform nationally, ultimately making educational spaces safer and more productive for students of color. If critical consciousness, or double-imagery can be triggered through specific experiences and/or specific professional developments, this has the potential to create a concrete path towards the more abstract culturally sustaining and relevant pedagogy.

Ethical considerations, as with any qualitative study, involve the potential impact or influence that I may have on the research participants while conducting the study. My presence alone could have a significant impact on the research participants' interview responses as well as

their lesson-planning and classroom behaviors. In addition to this consideration, due to the current educational and political environment surrounding critical race theory nationally, this study has the potential to expose white educators who are pursuing and engaging in antiracist practice and pedagogy. In order to allow for this risk or ethical consideration, I would need to explicitly include this within my research consent so that participants were able to consider the implications that their participation could have on their current and future employment.

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has detailed the use of interpretive phenomenology as well as the specific means of data collection and analysis that were employed within this study. Since this study aimed to center the voices of antiracist, white, female educators within K-12 educational spaces, the use of interpretive phenomenological research was detailed, as were the means for accounting for trustworthiness, validity, and reliability within the data analysis. By including member checking, triangulation of the data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, timelining, double-entry journals, observations during the interviews, my prior subjectivity statement, and reflective journaling, to bridle my own involvement and experiences with the data, as well as firm dedication to the co-construction of knowledge between research participants and myself, trustworthiness and validity as well were ensured.

Chapter 4- Results

Chapter 4 analyzes the results of the 2 in-depth, semi-structured interviews, responses recorded independently to follow-up questions via double-entry journals, timelining, and my own observation and reflective journaling during data collection and data analysis. The interviews within this study focused on the identity development and subsequent shift in pedagogical philosophy and teaching practice of white, female self-identified antiracist educators who have a minimum of 5 years teaching experience. This interpretative phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences and internalized development as a result of these experiences of each participant and how they made sense of their own socialization and acculturation as they moved towards a positive racial identity and towards antiracist teaching practice. This chapter presents the findings of the study and attempts to answer the below research questions:

1. How do intersections of their identity shape the way teachers view themselves in the classroom?
2. How do the varied intersections of white identity inform philosophical and pedagogical paradigms and instructional practices?

In all, 8 white, female educators who self-identify as antiracist participated in this study. Through an iterative analysis process, 12 codes were formed which were condensed down into four dominant themes. Chapter 4 will serve to unpack the themes identified as these white women discussed how their identity development and their move towards an antiracist paradigm and subsequent instructional practice intersects/intersected with the multiplicities of their identities including gender, religion, class, and place.

When asked how each participant identifies, their responses also revealed nuances that may not already be explicitly stated in the above information. Therefore, within the next

paragraphs I will briefly mention how each participant chose to identify themselves to better

contextualize how they see themselves and understand their own multiplicity of identities at this

point in their individual journey. Each participant was asked "How do you identify?" within the

initial, autobiographical interview.

Rachel stated "...as a white female? I feel a lot of times when you talk about identity, I tie

your job to it. I've always tied myself also to being a teacher, so I guess a white female and

education."

 Mary stated

I am a Christian, white, educated female. Her mid-forties, early forties, I guess. And

that's about it. Mom, teacher, wellness advocate. I guess I could name mom, teacher. I

could go deeper, but mostly those are my main characteristics.

Becca stated

I mean, I'm a white lady (laughs) like so many of us are. No, year, I'm a straight white

lady, okay? I'm bilingual. But that came through, like, school. That didn't come through,

like, personal or familial cultural experience. I don't know.

Donna responded saying

How do I identify? Female? White? Those are kind of the big identifiers for me and

straight. But some other important things are like social justice and environment and

feminism. All of those things are my core values.

Audrey stated "I identify as a white, female educator." Tammy responded by saying

the following:

Okay, let's see what… I am a female, now retired. A stepmom, dog mom, step grandma, wife, Christian. Not necessarily, like, loyal to a certain religion denomination or something. I grew up Baptist. I was actually ordained Baptist. Okay. But switched to being Methodist. And I'm not real happy with what they're doing, so I'm just kind of like I don't even want people to sometimes.. I'm ashamed to say that I'm a Christian person because of what's happening…

Gina said

Um, I guess if we're going over big picture, I would identify myself as a white, cisgender female, straight female, as well, if that's pertinent. I also feel like whenever someone was just asking me to identify myself, I still also identify myself as a teacher no matter what. It's just…it's been part of my identity for so long, but I just share that as well. And again, I think depending on like, who you're talking to you like, who's asking you like, what the context is when someone asks you like, how you identify, you know, it kind of brings out what I think is pertinent. So sometimes, you know, you might be talking to a group of people and they're talking about family heritage. And so then I might even be more specific to say that, well, I'm… my family is of Eastern European heritage. I have Polish and Slovakish ancestry. Those are the traditions I've always grown up with as a child, though I've never spoken those languages and I was born her to American parents…kind of thing. So I think it kind of depends.

Amanda responded by saying

I am a white..no way around that one… European ancestry, female, former evangelical

Christian. I was raised very, very, very deeply in the evangelical culture. We can talk

about that more later if you'd like. And in my deepest heart of hearts, both a teacher and a

scientist. But I'm also a mother of three sons, a mother-in-law of two daughters in law, a

Godmother and a Lala to four little boys, with our first girl coming in February, a wife,

and a daughter of two deceased parents.

Within each of these responses, each participant identifies how they see themselves, often

already including elements of their story that have impacted who they have been and who they

have become through time, familial influence, and ancestry. Prior to analysis, even within these

brief statements of self-identification, it becomes clear that these white women identify as more

than their ethnicity or racial construct, that their identity involves multiple intersecting elements

or roles. It is worth noting here that each and every participant identified themselves as white

first, and then added other identifiers afterwards. All participants chose to identify themselves as

females, while others chose to include other identifiers such as sexual orientation, religious

affiliation, education, heritage and/or language, and other roles that they play in their day to day

lives. It is within these spaces, where their race intersects the other aspects of their identity, that

my research lies.

Findings

Four themes have emerged within the course of this study when considering Research

Question 1:"How do intersections of identity shape the way self-identified antiracist educators

view themselves in the classroom?". Two themes have emerged within the course of this study

when considering Research Question 2: How do the varied intersections of white identity inform

teacher experiences, philosophical and pedagogical paradigms, and instructional practice

amongst self-identified antiracist educators? These themes are nuanced and layered, supported by rich data, and are thus comparatively unpacked. These themes include the following: gender, religion, proximity to Black and Brown people, and education and agency. Each theme will be unpacked individually through the lens of CWS as well as through other aforementioned supporting theoretical frameworks. It is important to note that while each theme was identified individually, these themes, as parts of one's individual identity, are subsequently intertwined with one another so as to not to be easily separated or teased out completely. Therefore, as I attempt to unpack each theme, there may at times be a need to return to other themes in order to explain the nuance or complicated relationship between race, an antiracist paradigm, and other individual components of each participants' racial identity.

Recognizing that participants might not have previously deeply reflected about how they formed their identities and ideologies surrounding their own race and antiracism, I began each interview by asking participants to recall the first thing they remembered from their childhood and to tell me why they believe that memory was important or significant to them. Following this, I asked participants to tell me about their life from that point to adulthood. Again, the interviews were structured like this in order to possibly reveal to the participants themselves as well as to me the researcher, how they might have developed their own identity as white women, and their attitudes surrounding racism even if they had not explicitly analyzed their personal histories and identities previously.

Table 4.1

Findings: Research Question 1

Findings	Sub-themes
Gender	Relationships with father

	Personal agency and autonomy Outsider mentality
Religion	Abandonment or rejection of organized, Western Christianity in light of a more humanizing paradigm for both themselves, as women, and others
Proximity to people of color	Authentic relationships with people of color Racialized events Travel
Education and Agency	Reading and Self-Reflection

The first theme identified when considering Research Question 1: "How do intersections of identity shape the way self-identified antiracist educators view themselves in the classroom?" was the impact gender had on white, female educators' identity development. The findings revealed that the white women in this study who self-identified as antiracist also had to varying degrees intentionally divorced themselves, whether intentionally or subconsciously, from normative culture for white women, perhaps making them more open to interrogation of other hegemonic norms and expectations surrounding their role as educators and their role within whiteness itself, lending towards an antiracist paradigm. Within this theme, sub-themes of close relationships or identification with their fathers, an expressed and obvious understanding of their personal agency and autonomy both at work and in their personal lives despite being female, and a pervasive *outsider* mentality stemming from their inability or unwillingness to "fit in" to gendered, white norms were also identified.

Another theme identified for Research Question 1 was either a distanced or non-existent relationship or identification with organized religion. Out of 8 participants, 7 were raised in a religious household. However, only 1 of the participants has more than loosely held ties to organized religion now, after they have fully embraced antiracism. This one individual

participant participates in church and still has firm religious beliefs, but their experience in church has been vastly different from the others in that their church has also fully embraced antiracism and has interrogated their complicity within systems of oppression and is working actively to dismantle them. The sub-themes identified within this theme include the intersectionality of religion and gender and religion and personal agency.

The third theme identified for Research Question 1 was proximity to people of color. Each participant within this study identified definitive relationships and experiences with people of color that impacted their perceptions of themselves as white women or as white, women educators. Some of these experiences related to travel and some were related to racialized experiences. However, every participant also experienced authentic relationships within their workplace with people of color who helped them see their whiteness, their complicity within inequitable systems, and felt subsequently challenged to move forward, whether these relationships were with students or other school staff. Self-reflection and agency to make change were also key themes identified here in relationship to these experiences. The participants in this study were provided with opportunities to grow and develop as both people and educators when they found themselves in close proximity to people of color. As a result of their deep reflection, their desire to do better by their students, and their sense of power and agency they were able to make concrete changes both within themselves and within their classrooms.

Finally, the fourth theme identified in relation to Research Question 1 was education. Each participant holds an advanced degree and referenced literature, pedagogy, and reflection as part of their coursework or even independent studies pertaining to their identity development and their development as an antiracist educator. For many of the participants, reading about systemic racism, systems of oppression, and engaging academically surrounding humanizing paradigms

and emancipatory theoretical frameworks helped them frame their own experiences surrounding gender, religion, race, and ethnicity and helped them frame what they were seeing play out in their classrooms, therefore solidifying their mobility towards antiracist ideology and pedagogy.

Gender

The first theme that emerged from the data in response to Research Question 1: "How do intersections of identity shape the way self-identified antiracist educators view themselves in the classroom?" related heavily to how these individual teachers see themselves as individuals, and therefore how they view themselves as women, and specifically women in education. Gender was overwhelmingly a part of their identity development and also a part of how they viewed themselves in the classroom as shown in their original responses related to how they identify. All eight participants stated that they identified as both white and female, clearly demonstrating how significant in their minds their gender was to their overall identities. However, gender for these eight participants appeared to be nuanced intersections to their personality that informed them of their supposed roles within their own social and family groups, their relationships, their marriages, and even within society at large. Initially, I will discuss at length how gender played a role in each individual participant's identity development. Then, I will discuss how their individual stories indicate commonalities or themes about their response to their gender and assumed roles as a result of their genders. Finally, I will attempt to unpack these commonalities through historical and theoretical perspectives to make sense of their stories and the multiplicity of their identities as white, female, antiracist educators.

First, it is important to understand that white women historically have been taught that their place within society is to remain both morally upright, pure, fit and attractive, but to also operate in a supportive, submissive stance to the white men in their lives (Watson, 2013;

McIntosh, 2018). This is well-documented within feminist literature, even amongst Black

scholars, as a simultaneous source of both privilege and oppression for white women (hooks,

1985; 2014). If white women are unable to fit the social or physical expectations associated with

their gender and race, then they are not able to benefit from their whiteness in the same ways that

other white women do, potentially making them an automatic *outsider* within their own cultures.

Within this framework of understanding and historical underpinning, support for the white men

in their lives is nearly synonymous with support of subsequent systems as well. Therefore, for

white women to engage in interrogation of the educational system or to even engage in an

interrogation of themselves as women and what that means is an act of rebellion against white,

female normative culture in and of itself. My data suggest that these women's willingness to

engage in the educational system as *outsiders* contributed to their antiracism. More succinctly,

their ability to disassociate with expected gendered roles or their inability to obtain all aspects of

white femininity (thin, quiet, supportive, submissive, neat, pale, well-behaved, etc.) within white

culture appear to have made them more open to interrogate other forms of oppression and reject

them.

For example, out of eight participants, four participants identified as a self-professed

tomboy in childhood. For the purposes of this study, the term *tomboy* is used to describe or name

a female who willingly chooses to operate in dress, behavior, and speech outside of the normative culture for young females. Becca states the following:

> I was very tomboy-like. Not fussy about what my appearance was like…. I thought I, was, like, a very tough kid. Now, when I say tough, I wasn't raised in a place that was tough. It was just outside and it was the nineties, so we were just outside all the time. But like anything you can do, I can do better. Like very competitive with myself and others. Outspoken, always outspoken.

Within her description of a *tomboy,* she explicitly calls out elements of her personality that she felt fit that description. She mentions that she was "tough," "competitive," and "outspoken." Later on, in her follow-up double-entry journal question I ask her about this statement: How was this perception of yourself changed over time…or has it? What do you think might have led to those changes (or not)? She goes on to state that while

> tough is still part of it, although I think what I valorized about that has changed as I've come to understand it as a learned survival mechanism. I am definitely competitive, although it shows up differently (like, not in bowling or board games…now it's more with myself/my performance). The self-image/personal style thing is still alllllllll over the place, and is complicated by being a plus-size person.

Following this statement, she mentions her appearance again as it relates to understanding herself as a white woman. She says the following:

> Or did I… was I not sure that I was hashtag not like the other girls that I couldn't even tell? I promise you there's somebody that helped me because I've always been a bigger person, too. I know we haven't met in person, but, like, I weigh, like, a good 200

pounds…210. And that kind of changes what happens with your femininity, too, because I'm still a little white girl, but like not a hot little white girl, not everybody's taste, right?

She also states that

Weight, like attractiveness, age, race, etc….informs access to white female privilege. I'm still white, but for example, when tending day bar as a 20-something for contractors, I may not get the same reception, the same level of forgiveness for an error, I may have to work harder to be perceived as personable/charming than someone who's thin and/or attractive. I think I'm still teasing out for myself what this means about how I express myself through clothing/personal style/ how it intersects with my femininity, how my clothing seems to impact how I'm perceived in different spaces.

Through this discussion, Becca identifies herself as both a *tomboy* as a result of her "competitive," "outspoken," and "tough" demeanor. However, when pressed, she also identifies that she felt like an *outsider* because of her weight and appearance. She expresses that she knew, even as a child, that she was "not like the other girls" and that she did not meet expected norms for white girls. When considering this tension created by not fitting into a perceived, expected norm, it appears that she chose to identify with a more masculine persona, a *tomboy*, rather than suffer rejection from other girls in her social and family circle. As a child, Becca was not aware of how these feelings and perceptions surrounding white femininity informed her sexuality, but as she grew into adolescence and early adulthood, this also became obvious.

She shares the following: "Well, and what do big white girls with a mouth do, right? What they're supposed to do is put on their little pony and date men of color." When asked how she first heard or knew of this social expectation and how she believed it had influenced her and her

relationships through time, she responded stating that

> It made me think that I might do better romantically if I got out of my own community, because I wasn't their 'type." Now? I don't know… I wonder how much of attraction was influenced by that, or how much that's problematic…

She further expands on these statements by saying "It's terrible to realize that someone of your personality is based on being hashtag not like the other girls.. But…" Again, I pressed her on this, looking for further understanding of why or how she felt this way. Was this implicitly or explicitly stated to her? How did this impact her view of herself as a person or as a woman? How has she shifted and moved in relationship to others who are non-white as a result of feeling as if she is not fully privileged by her whiteness due to her size and personality, her perceived failure as a white woman? She responds saying

> Well keeping in mind that #notliketheothergirls is a lie, right? I'm not girly. I'm not afraid to debate or go back and forth with anyone. I'm not someone who goes along and gets along no matter what. I'm not afraid to do things that get dirty or maybe hurt physically. I'm not put-together all the time. I'm not into church and on a level, people don't just automatically like me.This is a tough question! I don't think I even scratched the surface.

It is clear within each of these statements that Becca understands or is beginning to understand that the expectations for her as a white woman are somewhat different than they are for others, specifically for men, for her to benefit from all the privileges associated with being white. She recognizes that even her tough, competitive persona may be a response to this understanding, a way of protecting herself from the negative effects of not living up to the *ideal white woman persona* that she has been socialized and acculturated to be, despite it being possibly beyond her control when it comes to her physical appearance and possibly even her personality. Becca even

states that she is "not girly," however, she is clearly female and still identifies as a female. Therefore, she is at least somewhat aware that her assertive personality, size, and weight limit her from even accessing full femininity as a white woman. This awareness then also impacted her perceived ability to be attractive to white men, date white men, or marry white men. When she states "I wonder how much of attraction was influenced by that, or how much that's problematic.." this indicates continued, personal reflection as she is currently engaged to a nonwhite man. It is evident then that she is still deconstructing how even her response to these expectations or her failure to live up to them might have even subconsciously impacted who she was attracted to as a result of the perceived rejection from white men.

It is worth noting here that, when speaking about gendered expectations and norms for white women, 5 out of 8 participants also recall their parents explicitly telling them that they did not feel comfortable with them dating men of color at one time or another, despite the potential stereotyping and trope of *bigger* or *heavier* white girls dating men of color. Imagine being white and told that you are not to date, marry, or procreate with Black and Brown men but simultaneously being told that because you are a heavier, taller, thicker white woman you will only be attractive to men of color. This ideology stands to further *other* white women who do not necessarily look or present like white women are expected to look, making them feel as if they are outsiders to their own community and culture, and still not able to access, without negative repercussions, other communities or cultures. Outside of Becca, participants did not explicitly mention this within their interviews, and it was not a question I explicitly asked. Therefore, I cannot be sure that this was not a topic of conversation in their homes as well. However, for at least more than half of the participants, the expectation was that they could be friends with people of color, but dating them and having children with Black men specifically was off limits

to them as white females unless they again wanted to risk losing their community or associated

privileges with being white.

Mary mentioned being a *tomboy* and related it to a negative experience within her

church where she was made to feel like an *outcast* as a result of her clothing and her

femininity.

I know in the follow-up thinking through more of how my position as a white female,

um, Christian growing up in the Bible Belt, I've, ah, reflected a little more about how that

may have impacted because I know I shifted my views, knowing that after I was raised

and I saw other views, I wanted to still believe. But I felt it was more cultish how I was

raised or not necessarily true…That these certain rules that I had to follow as a woman,

like how long my skirt was or if I couldn't wear makeup. I didn't feel that those were

necessarily right, like, that I should be judged as part of my religion. And that kind of was

kind of probably the beginning point in college where I wanted to definitely learn more,

visit more churches, really understand. I wanted God in my life. But to me, that meant

like, my religion had to be true to myself. Not like me going to a church just because that'

how the rest of my family only grew up. If I was being judged because my skirt is above

my knees, like that really rubbed me the wrong way that someone called me a slut

because my skirt was not that short. Um, I guess it's just kind of affected me because I

have just been raised to, like, hide myself. And I couldn't wear…it was more about

clothing, but I realized it was deeper than I, uh, I couldn't wear a bikini. I couldn't wear

makeup. I couldn't like be my true self. And I know people will be like, there's no way.

You were total redneck. I was. I was a total tomboy. I was never allowed to wear makeup

or to be myself. Um, I thought that was my religion. And I just realized I never thought

that was related right. To, like, racism. But I think all that is, like I know you'll call it not

privilege, but all of it is just, like, socialization, a lack of being educated, a lack of, um,

staying in one environment. Everybody's environment is the same, and they don't see any

other environments because it's like this micro world. That's their only world.

Interestingly enough, Mary mentions that she was a *tomboy* as a result of not being allowed to

wear makeup or be herself. She describes this as a persona she adopted to fend off

hypersexualized stereotypes of white femininity, referencing a time when she was called a *slut.*

She mentions that she felt she had to *hide herself* as if her femininity was a source of shame or

ugliness, created by her church or religious upbringing, that must not be shared with the world

around her. Compared to Becca, who felt that her physical body was too large or too heavy to be

fully accepted as both white and feminine, Mary felt that her physical body was portrayed as too

attractive or tempting to be shared or exposed in any way if she was to be accepted as both white

and feminine. These two stories show the intricate relationship between white women's bodies

and their ability to access whiteness. Per these accounts, not only must white women be petite,

thin, and attractive, they must also be morally pure and chaste if they want to access privileges

associated with their race. Otherwise, depending on their size and perceived attractiveness, they

will be labeled as either *too large for white men* or deemed as sexually promiscuous and dirty (as

indicated by Mary when she stated she had been labeled a *slut).*

Mary went on to say that this negative experience, combined with her eventual divorce, led her

to realize that "the whole world is not that way, and that, uh, I could still keep my identity and

believe in God, but still be able to feel beautiful on the outside and the inside and know that

that's okay." She further stated that this was what helped her in understanding racism and

systemic oppression:

Um, and I guess that's kind of what led me to think, like, I'm not the only person who feels this way. Even though it's religion I wasn't maybe as persecuted for my race or sex, but I guess that many people with whatever these identity issues are, feel the same way. Like, they're treated wrong because someone has a prejudice based on their environment or based on something they read instead of really, truly understanding the situation or the context of the person. So, I guess that was an experience that really helped me just kind of be able to move forward is really just moving into adulthood but reading more situations….and read and think about, uh, the turning point mentioned before my childhood and think about what it feels like to be kind of the outcast. It really was powerful for me. It helped me realize that no one should ever feel like that and we should be more, um, knowledgeable. Not just caring, like I've always had the caring, but we should be more knowledgeable so that we can actually come about and be able to make systemic change. So, these issues stop right in our schools, in our world.

Clearly, for Mary this was a transformative experience, to understand her whiteness and femininity afforded her both privilege and power, but only if utilized in a way that was deemed acceptable and morally upright. Otherwise, she would be seen as an outcast, dirty, and sexually promiscuous and discarded from her community and her faith.

Both of these participants were able to identify how the intersectionality of their gender and associated expected norms impacted their overall identity and racial development. Through critical analysis of what was expected of them as white women, whether explicitly stated or only implied, and reflection on how this either reinforced their privilege or served to deny them privileges associated with their whiteness, these women were also able to make connections to other marginalized communities, further understanding the ways in which whiteness works to

oppress and harm not just people of color, but also white people (specifically white women) as well.

Since this conceptual understanding is deeply embedded within the psyche of white women, is directly tied to intersectional identities of white people, and is also deconstructed through critical thought and analysis of interconnected systems and sociopolitical influences, this serves as an example of what I would call *critical whiteness feminism.* Therefore, throughout the rest of this study, *critical whiteness feminism (CWF)* shall be defined as the critical analysis and deconstruction of historical, political, and gendered social systems and expectations that serve to make whiteness and oppression visible to white women and operationalize their *critical consciousness* towards antiracist action. Since white femininity is directly tied to historical and political, socialized and acculturated expectations of white women's physical bodies, temperament, morality, and sense of agency, then CWF can operate as a theoretical framework for all four identified themes including gender, religion, proximity and engagement with people of color, and education and agency.

Gina also mentioned being a tomboy when discussing her childhood experiences and identity. She was speaking about her sister and stated

> She was kind of the girly one like I want to wear dresses and do this thing. So I had to not be bad too like in my mind because I need to differentiate myself. So even at times too, I had like an alter ego when I was really little because I thought for some reason that my dad deserved to have a son. So I would like put on a baseball cap and like, you know, like my t-shirt and shorts and stuff and like pretend to be like, I think my dad seems jocks are a little jockey. Like I just thought.. You have two girls, I'm sorry. So I was always more of like a tomboy.

Here, similar to Becca, Gina states that she was not "girly" like her sister despite being clearly

female. She attaches this to the way she preferred to dress as a means of expressing herself as an

individual, who was different from her sister. Furthermore, she mentions that she felt that her

father "deserved a son" as if she perceived that having two daughters was somehow

disappointing to him. Within these statements, it appears that Gina, as a child at least, perceived

that being a girl was somehow inferior to being a boy, at least in her father's eyes. Therefore, in

order to gain his approval, she attempted to pretend to be a boy or a "jock" for her father's sake.

Although she laughed as she was retelling this story, when pressed she had not previously

analyzed why she may have felt that way as a child or what implicit or explicit messages she had

received that made her feel that way. Regardless, the message of white femininity as being

inferior to white masculinity was still identified.

Similar to Mary and Becca when they speak about their looks, dress, and weight,

Amanda is teasing out within these interviews the ways in which her whiteness operated as a

means of oppression rather than a privilege, if she were to operate or behave outside of the

socialized expectations for white womanhood. Amanda also mentioned that she felt like her

father "deserved a boy" after I mentioned that some people have stated that there were multiple

girls in the family .. and so they felt like they needed to be the boy that their dad deserved. She

replied stating that was "definitely my story" and further mentioned that "it's much easier to be a

tomboy than to compete with the girls." She expanded on this by stating that

> I was a tomboy. I despised 'girly' things - but I also grew up to be a woman who chose to
>
> 'stay home' and raise her kids despite getting into a top medical school- and working my
>
> ass off to get there! And I became very active in the crisis pregnancy center movement. I
>
> still wrestle with the question of when life begins…I love being a mom and a

[grandmother]. But my idea of femininity? I don't know. Mom and dad said we could be anything despite our gender- but even within that there were these unspoken rules. Dress modestly. Don't speak harshly to your husband or children. Be kind and gentle. But achieve all you can achieve….Lots of mixed messages.

Here, we can clearly see that she wrestled with the tension between being family-oriented and operating as a traditional mother figure, while also engaging in activities that were somewhat counter-culture to white femininity such as attending medical school and being ambitious. Looking further back to her childhood, it appears that this tension was always present, informing her of her worth as a white girl (less than that of a white man or boy), and informing her of implicit rules and expectations that must be followed if she were to have full access to her community and associated privileges of whiteness. When speaking of "mixed messages" Amanda also mentioned multiple times throughout her interviews and written responses that her father was very progressive for the time period and that she did not feel limited by him at all as a result of her femininity. However, in comparison, her mother, who she later calls a misogynist and "preferenced men until her dying day," was not as progressive, and therefore served as a source of criticism throughout her life on the ways Amanda failed to perform white womanhood well. This dichotomy within her household, as it relates to white femininity, is represented again later as a young adult, when Amanda must choose between her dreams and "calling" to serve as a missionary in Africa or stay home with her husband and raise a family.

When asked how her mother's perceived misogyny impacted her as a child, adolescent, and adult, Amanda stated that

It kept me in a place where I felt trapped. No matter what, the man must be respected.

Thankfully, I married one who deserves respect. But I still wrestle with self-respect, if that makes sense. And I still have to stop myself from asking for permission to do the simplest things..isn't that crazy?

Here, she is even able to identify discordant responses to her mother's paradigm in her adulthood, hinting at a lack of respect for herself as a white woman due to the deeply ingrained, socialized, and acculturated expectation to place her husband's or father's needs above her own. Within the interviews, it seems that she is beginning to recognize that her own needs or even her own person were not seen as valuable in her mother's eyes unless they were attached to that of the white men around her, and how that has influenced her own ability to make decisions or express agency over her own decisions and life.

When she shares details of her time in medical school as a young, married woman. She states that "It was a real psychological struggle with the fact that I was married to someone who did not share my commitment to being a medical missionary." She explains that as a result of this tension, created by her social location as a white female, with all the associated expectations of white femininity, her first year in medical school was a "crazy stressful year" where she was "deeply troubled by the idea that [she] could not fulfill [her] calling and stay married." She mentions that as a result of feeling out of control during this time due to this deep, internal conflict she began to manage her stress by controlling her weight, again mentioning her mother as an additional stressor stating that

layered on top of that [stress] was my mother's obsession with weight and being 'appropriately dressed." My mother was VERY appearance driven so to manage my stress I controlled the one thing I could control- my weight.

She was unable to get her weight below 125, which led to further stress and depression and

eventually this led to her attempting to commit suicide. While the participant did not state this during the interview, I do wonder if this participant recognized that they were not fulfilling their responsibilities as either a white woman and/or their calling as a Christian successfully and if she therefore felt the need to better fit into white culture and expectations, by making herself smaller, thinner, or dressing better, subconsciously triggered this mental health event. Clearly, the participant linked her mother's misogynistic expectations of being thin and appropriately dressed for the men in her life to this other difficult decision as she was mentioned it in relation to this event. However, how these two things are linked is unclear.

When pressed about this event in our following interview, it was evident that this discussion had triggered more reflection and self-analysis through the lens of CWF, surrounding individual identity and how these socialized messages, implicit or otherwise, are received by white women and how they impact our consciousness throughout our lives on numerous levels, some known to us and others not as much. The participant reflected on this experience later during our second interview and related it to antiracism explicitly stating

> I remember feeling so distinctly at that point in my life that there wasn't a good way out. These competing commitments, right? This commitment to medicine and a commitment to marriage and then a commitment to family, that they were like they were mutually exclusive. Not just that I couldn't do all of them, right? And I think that that is relevant. I don't think it's accurate, but I think that for white women, our brains can tell us that we cannot. It's not that we can't stay in the community because we're going to but right there you get to this point of mutual exclusivity. So, to take an antiracist stance which I'd like to expand that idea to more thinking about how to live in full authenticity with if you are

becoming critically conscious and aware of systems and particularly aware of racist and

classist systems. And you're really beginning to understand that that's what's happening.

And to want out of whatever sense of morality you have to act on that. That can get to a

point where it's in direct conflict with being part of a particular community. And so it can

seem like that same kind of thing… you don't have…like you can't do both, but you

can't stay in that community and be your authentic self. And I think what I may have

begun to learn through that experience was that was the case. That there were things that

were mutually exclusive. I did have to choose one or the other, but in choosing a route,

there was a new life opportunity that opened up that was incredible. And going through

that again with getting to this point where, okay, I can't be fully who I am and stay in this

space and stay silent, and if I speak up, it's going to reach a point where we're out of

here.

This response from Amanda expounds on the fact that white women are often placed in roles, or

even born with traits, that feel contradictory to the socialized expectations placed on them,

therefore making their lived experiences feel impossible or feel as if they are forced to move

beyond or outside of the expected role of a white woman despite the cost they know they will

have to pay, relinquishing their community, acceptance, and privilege associated with their

whiteness. While this particular participant seems to feel positively about this experience at this

time, stating that there was "a new life opportunity that opened up that was incredible," for

many, this may be an incredibly foreign and scary experience, especially if going through it

totally alone. However, for this participant and the participants in this study, it seems that much

of their lived experiences as white females may have already been "at odds" with the expected

norms for them as white women, rendering them without a choice. Having been born with a

competitive or strong personality, enjoying makeup, clothes and wanting to feel pretty and be

seen, being tall or heavy, having big goals and clear ambition, being inquisitive and questioning

religious expectations, etc. all placed each of these women outside of normative white culture,

therefore forcing them to either assimilate or remain an "outcast" or "outsider" and unable to

access privileges associated with their race, including marrying a white man or being seen as a

morally upright and good person.

The other three participants did not identify as a tomboy during childhood, but operated

outside of gendered norms for white women by the very nature of their lived experiences and

even professional choices. Rachel reflected on her mother during her childhood stating that her

mother

> put herself on the back burner for her family and children. She stopped working
>
> shortly after my brother was born and was always available as the primary caretaker to us
>
> (children and father). She lost her entire identity and is currently struggling with that now
>
> that her children are all grown, and she's bored with nothing to do and no friends of hers.
>
> She left her interests behind her in her early 20s and is still struggling to find things that
>
> make her happy now.

She explains how

> seeing [her] mom take on the role of a mother-weak, lost women whose only identity is
>
> that of 'mom' has impacted [her] to be selfish. [She] want[s]s to be all the traditional
>
> traits of a mother, but [she] want[s] to keep [her] identity and [she] wants to be selfish.
>
> [She] [doesn't] want to lose [her] people, [her] happiness, and the woman [she's] spent
>
> 30 years finding just because [she] cares for others [she] loves.

In this way Rachel sheds the socialized and acculturated expectations of being selfless and choosing to love her husband and family more than herself, or to be subordinate. She states explicitly that her mother's "meekness has made [her] self-interested and self-assertive." This is evidenced in the fact that Rachel is currently pursuing her doctorate in education and remains romantically unattached at age 29. By prioritizing her own education and career, her own needs, her own happiness, her own self, she is inherently still rejecting expected norms for white women.

Donna, an anthropologist and now science teacher by trade, also expressed evidence of operating outside of gendered norms and expectations detailing her time at a boarding camp one summer as a teenager where she was exposed to many diverse people including people from

> different countries, girls who they already knew that they were going to Morehouse or Spellman and figuring out all of this stuff that I had never, ever heard of before… probably not even until my master's program. Yeah. So all of that was, like, huge for me. And then I feel like that was kind of my rebellious time too.

When pressed about what she meant about her "rebellious time," she responded that she thought

> [t]he rebellion was more closely related to feeling strong ties with other young women-I still keep in touch with a couple of them! The safety I felt in those relationships may have allowed me to be more vulnerable, asking questions and having open conversations about race.

This section of our interview is especially interesting, as it depicts her ability to have strong female relationships across racial and cultural boundaries as an actual act of rebellion. As a result of this *rebellion,* Donna eventually moved into continued advocacy and work related to women's rights, abortion, pornography, and women's health. She mentioned that she met her

husband

> at a job in Tennessee, and he said, we all thought you were a lesbian. And I was like, oh,
>
> because of the work I was doing, it never occurred to me that that translated, like, gender
>
> and sexuality just don't stay separate in my mind, I guess so it was pretty funny. I was
>
> like, no, but cool.

Here, it becomes clear that her perception of her work and her ability to form close relationships

across racial and cultural boundaries with other women, in fact, also *othered* her with white

males and those who were not involved in women's health and advocacy work as her future

husband said "we all thought you were a lesbian." Fortunately, this did not serve as a means to

keep her from MEETING? her husband and their subsequent happiness together, but the reality

is that it could have prohibited her from finding a mate within her community. Curiously, her

strong relationships with other women and her ties to women's reproductive rights and sexuality

placed her, in her husband's eyes, outside of white femininity, despite being inherently feminine

intersections. This, therefore, when viewing through CWF, reinforces that white women's bodies,

their reproductive health and associated choices, and their absolute loyalty in relationships to

men were all expected, socially constructed norms that she failed to perform well. Thankfully,

since her husband was also progressive, this did not impede her ability to get married and have a

family, as was her desire. However, it is clear that it potentially could have served to do so in

other circumstances.

> Tammy, having been raised in church, decided to go to seminary. She describes this

experience stating

> So the people I worked with, it was kind of like mostly of white, middle class. But this is

where it gets interesting. This is the first time that I was seen as an *other* because I was female. Okay, so I was on staff at a mostly white church, but everybody was male except for me. And they were all ordained ministers. The cool thing was they were all what I would now call progressive because none of the men that I worked with or worked for, they were just so wonderful. They were supportive. I never felt, like, weird sitting in a meeting with them. They were just so much fun and so cool, and they just kind of, like, took me under their wings. Especially the youth minister. He was like one day, we were doing something together for Bible school, and he was like, you know what? He's like, I got to go visit some people in the hospital, so you're going to get a crash course on hospital visiting. So, like, he took me, he taught me, and it was amazing. And I had such a great summer. And by the end of that summer, all them, all four of them men, came to my office, which was like this little… I didn't' really have an office, but this little room that they had set up for me for the summer, all of them came by separately to encourage me to go on to seminary and become a minister. And it was … it was cool. It was amazing. But guess what? It's not like that everywhere. And unfortunately, I guess because my home church, they were wonderful. They supported me. They raised money for me to go to seminary. They ordained me. They were supportive, too. Just wonderful, wonderful. And then you get out there, and people aren't like that. All of a sudden, you might be in a church. Most people that are in seminary work part time as like a youth minister, a children's minister, or whatever. And a lot of those places are super conservative. One place was, like, openly against females doing anything in the church except teaching children. And that's the only thing we should be allowed to do. We're not allowed to teach men. We can't be over a man. I wanted to learn how to do everything.

Like in my internship. I wanted to learn how to do marriages, funerals, baptism,

communion, all those sacrament type things. And the preacher that I worked for was all

for all of that. But the people in the church, they were not happy about it. There were

people that refused to take communion when it was served by a woman.

Tammy goes on to say how she was eventually forced to resign due to difficulties created

by members within the church due to her gender and position of leadership within the church.

While Tammy declined to go into detail regarding the specific accusations surrounding her

looming dismissal from this position, she genuinely believed that they were a direct result of her

gender and associated mistrust of her as a female in leadership. This resulted in her current

struggle with religion and her struggle to find her place, that was evidenced in one of the initial

interview questions where she stated

I was actually ordained Baptist. Okay. But switched to being Methodist. And I'm not real

happy with what they're doing, so I'm just kind of like I don't even want people to

sometimes.. I'm ashamed to say that I'm a Christian person because of what's

happening…

She mentions that it is difficult to tease out elements of individual identity because "a lot of it's

all intertwined. The female thing, the gay thing, the Black thing. It's hard to unravel it

separately," she states as she tries to unpack where she is in relation to religion and the church

following this negative experience. She goes on to explain that the sense of being *othered* within

ministry due to her desire to become an ordained minister and to operate outside of the cultural

expectations for her gender, impacted her perception of that specific church and denomination,

and possibly opened her up to interrogating other aspects of religious beliefs, specifically as it

relates to marginalization of people groups, later on in her journey following the Trump presidency.

Tammy also references gender pertaining to being outspoken or opinionated. She alludes to women having strong opinions as being inappropriate when she states "How dare you have an opinion and speak it in the south as a woman?" She also states that she doesn't "identify as southern and white even though [she] is. [She] feels like southern women cook, clean, have babies and know their place." According to her, she is "none of those things" despite being "feminine-hair, jewelry, clothes, etc." She further details how her first marriage was negatively impacted by her unwillingness to conform to these same expected, gendered norms. She explains that her first marriage was spent taking care of her husband and that this is why it did not last. She states

> I realized I was not equal and not what I wanted so when he refused to work on it, I left. [My husband now] is so different because we let the other be themselves without judgment and both of us are equal partners. No one is in charge.

It therefore becomes evident that despite having been raised by parents and a local church that empowered her, she was also met with contradictory expectations surrounding her relationships, religion, and gender which shaped identity and possibly her ability to empathize with those who have experienced similar marginalization. Within these spaces, and possibly despite them, she was able to find her own sense of identity and agency to make change in her own life, cultivating new relationships and even moving on to marry someone who sees her as an equal in the relationship. Again, like other participants, Tammy has suffered marginalization as a result of her refusal to adhere to standards of white femininity.

Audrey shared the least about gender within her interviews and written responses. However, she did mention multiple experiences where she had experienced marginalization as a result of her gender including healthcare, social relationships, and even when attempting to access services through retail chains as a female. Her classification of these things as marginalization and discrimination as well as her perceived lack of power within these situations

definitely played a role in [her] development and understanding of discrimination. Having experiences where [she] felt [she] was discriminated against helped me have a small understanding of what it must feel like to be discriminated against ALL of the time, especially to think about Black women who have to fight both sexism and racism constantly.

Within her social circles, now that she identifies as antiracist, she also mentioned how she feels that she now makes people uncomfortable. She explains how below:

Yes but in white culture, I feel like it made people feel uncomfortable. I have friends from college that are super white and super country club and super conservative who I cannot be around anymore because I make them uncomfortable, and I'm just like, okay, well, I'm cool with this friendship being over because we have nothing in common, but I'm not the issue here. I'm not going to change my energy because your energy is scared of me… I think it's just, like, the outspokenness and the, like, lack of boundaries. Like, I'm not going to.. I don't know, not going to avoid a topic because it's something that you think women shouldn't talk about… and that's a big part of it, right?

Within this context, it becomes increasingly clear that for a white woman to have strong Opinions, let alone strong opinions about race or racism, and to be bold enough to speak about it within social circles literally puts her at odds with the culture she has been socialized and

acculturated to participate within as a white female. Amanda mentioned this as well during her interview when she stated that if you were socialized as she was, to "even mention race, is racist" thereby again making you an outcast or outsider amongst your peers and community.

Interestingly enough, each female participant spent significantly more time speaking about their fathers during the interview, with many of them mentioning a special connection with their fathers that they did not also share with their mothers. Even those participants who did not explicitly state that they felt a stronger connection to their fathers, spent significantly much more time during the interviews talking about their fathers, their work, and their influence on their lives during the course of the initial interview. While no reason for this was necessarily given, if examining this through a critical lens or through CWF, this could potentially be for one of two reasons: Either these women recognized, even as young girls, that their father was the leader of their household, who was empowered to exercise personal agency over his life and create change and therefore sought to become like him, or they recognized that they were intended, as daughters, to serve their fathers and therefore operated in close proximity to their fathers throughout their childhood and adolescence.

When pressed about the significant amount of time spent discussing her father compared to her mother, Rachel stated that she "relate[s] more closely to [her] dad personality-wise." Stating that they "share similar traits than [she does] with [her] mother." However, she also states she is not close with either of them but that if she "wanted to impress either of them, [she] would like to impress [her] father more." Stating that that "comes more from a place of spite than longing for approval though." While Rachel did not clarify this statement, it does indicate that despite their similarities and potential closeness at a much younger age (she details how early on, when she was as young as three years old, she became the primary caregiver for her father as he

recovered from a serious injury), that their relationship had become increasingly strained over the years. Rachel also spent significant time detailing her father's school, work, and life history to explain their socioeconomic status and social location growing up. His position as a New York City Policeman definitely played a part in Rachel's understanding of gender and power dynamics between men and women and also between white men and minorities. She stated that growing up "all his friends were [Italian Americans] and we didn't have my mom's friends. She didn't have friends.. She had friends with my dad, plus partners' wives, which were also white women." Within these statements, it is clear that Rachel recognized that her father, despite being physically disabled for much of her life, was still the powerful one in their relationship.

Mary spoke about her dad saying the following:

My dad was very quiet, and I guess I get my intelligence from him. He was doing math and was a carpenter and probably could have been an architect or engineer. Very bright, but just liked to play his guitar, like to have a few too many beers or whiskey while he did it. So he kind of developed a problem with alcohol. So my parents didn't get along too well, and they split up.

She also mentions how the trauma of physical abuse at the hands of her father really impacted her as well. She reflects on it by saying

Probably the other thing in my childhood that really impacted me now, looking back on it, is I know sometimes through trauma I went through some physical abuse when my dad was an alcoholic and I actually ran away. My dad had gotten really drunk and my parents were fighting one night and my dad threw a glass and hit my mom in the head, and there was a lot of violence. And the next day I decided to run away. I was only ten. I mean, I didn't really go far. I just decided to forget I'm usually very honest, right, and not

sneaky, but I decided I wanted to escape the situation. And I forged a note with a friend in my class to ride the bus home with her because I had stayed the night with her family and they seemed really nice and I just didn't want to come home and get hit again with a paddle with staples or God knows what. Because I didn't do anything wrong. And I was mad at my mom for letting my dad stay there and treat me like that, right? And I was obviously mad at him because he had been good to me until he started drinking. And I knew I didn't deserve it, so I was like, well, it keeps happening, so I'm just going to leave. And I realized that was really even though social services did investigate, my parents ended up splitting and my mom was angry with me because I called them. But at least in the short term, it stopped the problem, right?

What is interesting in this recounting is that not only was the trauma of the abuse real, but the trauma of her mother being angry with her for telling, and the lack of help actually provided via systems of support, social services, was most likely traumatizing as well. Once again, Mary responded outside of the expected, gendered norms and therefore was unable to access the privileges that would usually come with being white as a result. She did not maintain the silence surrounding the abuse in her home, protecting her father, as her mother did, and therefore she lost relationship with both her father and her mother as a result. This relationship, with both her father and her mother, went on to later inform her marriage and her identity in other ways, which I will discuss later.

Becca spoke at length about her father, his expectations, knowledge, relationship with religion, work, others, and the family. When questioned about the intense focus on her father during her initial interview, Becca responded saying

As a kid, definitely ID'd more with my father- he is also the 'intellectual' of the two. I

think his perspective definitely reinforced the 'demographics/intersectionality don't

matter, only effort and smarts matter' idea. Now as a woman in a heterosexual

relationship/ in the workplace, I understand my mom more. She is also a better caretaker

of our relationship-my dad is more of a drop-in whenever and pick up like we've seen

each other yesterday kind of person.

She also mentioned that he was

the visionary (ex: let's have xxx apply to private school and see if she gets a scholarship,

manages retirement/long-term financials) and she *(meaning her mother)* executes on the

day to day (bills, taxes, calls from tenants). In terms of his attitude towards her *(her*

mother) education… my dad made it extremely clear that he was much, much, much

smarter than her *(mother)*, but that wasn't specific to school. Towards me, it was more

like..with the capacity/ability I'd shown, college is in no way optional. I was a

'smart-person' like him. It absolutely impacted my identity around school/academics,

because expectations were high and there was no academic obstacle I couldn't solve

through skill or effort, so no excuses.

Again, in this retelling of Becca's childhood and parental interactions, it is evident that her father

expressed more agency and power within the home than her mother, perhaps creating the desire

for Becca to engage more heavily with her father so as to benefit from those things as well.

Donna described her relationship with her father as academic as well. She describes it

below:

My relationship with my dad has always been academic. He and my mom had a terrible

relationship, and they're like the poster parents for people who stay together too long

because of the kids.

She stated that her and her mother had "never been very close." Stating that they had always

"had kind of a rocky relationship. And it's kind of funny now because she moved closer to me in

her older years and we still haven't gotten much closer." When pressed on this she responded

saying "our personalities just don't mesh. I mean, that's really what it is. And I wonder if it's

because I'm very similar to my dad and my brother is very similar to her." There was no

elaboration on this dynamic, even when pressed multiple times. Responses were vague and

whole time periods were left unanswered. It is important to note here as well that Donna was not

able to recall any memory from middle school, except a family trip abroad. She felt that this

related to some trauma that she had experienced, but been unable to recover. Therefore, there are

many unanswered questions here.

Audrey mentioned, more than most participants, both parents and their positive

influences on her life and identity development during her interview. However, she specifically

mentioned her father's work as an influence towards antiracist work in her future:

My dad worked in a low income housing for a long time in his career with apartments,

and I think that also kind of shaped how we viewed Charlotte and how people lived very

different lives in Charlotte and how we were very lucky to live the life that we lived and

just all the different pieces of the poverty that was happening that is in Charlotte. I didn't

think of it then as poverty, but I knew that there were people that live differently than I

did.

Tammy, stated the following when pressed about her relationships with her parents:

Mom is critical and judgmental. She was a teacher. Dad is nurturing and compassionate.

He was a social worker. We were at church all the time. I liked it but I knew I didn't

have a choice and I was guilted by mom a lot over everything. We did do a lot together

and had fun but it wasn't ideal for me emotionally or spiritually.

Again, we see that Tammy felt closer to her father, despite having fun and spending

significant time with her mother. The aspect of guilt here, although not elaborated on, is evidence

of some perceived lack or failure on the part of Tammy. I question whether these failures were a

result of failure to live up to gendered expectations as well.

Gina also spent significantly more time speaking of her father than her mother during her

interview. She stated that she was

a naturally curious child and like curious in that sense of like, I want to know how that

works. I'll take it apart and figure it out, like, right to be that person who just like gets my

hands into something and tries even if it doesn't work. So I'm very much like I

mentioned even my dad being very like do it yourself kind of mentality. So I've lived

alone a lot of my life and I don't like to have to rely on other people for things so like,

okay, this is broken. I could probably fix this or I could probably do this, you know, I

guess maybe part of it's just the stubborn independence. I grew up with to then like forces

you to say you, you can't just let yourself do nothing like you have to .. you have to try…

Later she would add

…my dad would be the one that says well you just have to dust yourself off and keep

trying like, you know, if that's something you really want to learn to do, you're gonna

have to keep trying. My mom would be the one that you know, even when I started in

grade school, it was like, I can't do this and she was like just like you can quit whenever

you want to.

Within these retellings, it again appears that Gina related to the sense of agency and power that her father demonstrated in their household. His confidence and agency was mirrored in her independence and natural curiosity.

However, when pressed, she stated that she is close to both parents in different ways. She stated

> I've always felt like half of me identified with my dad and half with my mom. That still seems true. I am analytical and quirky like my dad. We have always bonded over music and we both have similar senses of humor. I am nurturing like my mom and tend to put others needs ahead of mine.

Within this context, it feels as if she related more to her father, even though there is still some evidence of her mother's influence as well, but she felt inclined to define ways both parents influenced her equally despite their differences. It seems evident within her words and narrative that she developed a strong sense of agency and independence from her father at minimum.

Amanda, likewise spoke in much more detail about her father throughout the course of her interviews. Amanda spoke about her parents stating

> So there was no abuse. But there was… dad was more emotionally and intellectually connected to my sister and I than my mom. But my mom was very, very bright. My mom had majored in chemistry and became a music teacher. She probably very.. And so there was that, like, to tease a part of Dad's connection to us, if that makes sense. There was never a sexual feeling behind that. But this intellectual, you're the person that I can really connect to intellectually.

She goes on to say

> He was a fascinating, larger than life, but behind the scenes person. People in the XXX

wouldn't necessarily know his name. He did most of his work behind the scenes, and he

was extremely… he was really proud of me for becoming a teacher. And he loved… he

would water the plants in my classroom, and he would come about every two to three

weeks. He would slip in the door and water all the plants and then slip back out. And it

took me a long time to realize that he liked to hear me.

Clearly Amanda's connection with her father was special and had a large impact on who she

became and how she views herself to this day. Her father served as a missionary when Amanda

was a child and supported very progressive views related to the desegregation of schools,

women's rights, and Amanda's abilities to achieve big things. These ideas and concepts were

mentioned over and over throughout my time with her. Similarly to some of the other

participants, it seemed that a large part of her sense of personal agency, ambition, and autonomy

came from the relationship that she shared with her father as a child and throughout her adult

life, while her relationship to her mother appeared to be more challenging and a source of tension

related to her gender, marriage, and personal identity.

Compared to participant responses about their fathers, only three participants spoke of

their mothers in a positive way during the course of the interviews and follow-up questions. Two

participants stated that they felt that their mothers were more nurturing in relationship than their

fathers, and one identified that her mother and her were close when she was a young child and

that they still remain close today. The others however, openly stated that they were closer to their

fathers or were not close to either parent respectively. Within the context of gendered and racial

norms and expectations these relationships between both mother and father and their daughters

could have been crucial for these women as they developed their own racial identities and

learned best how to navigate the social and cultural norms of white women safely. Instead, it

appears that possibly as a result of a closer relationship or self-identification with their fathers, all white men privy to exponential privilege and power, they did not naturally conform to the normative, expected culture for white women, instead acting with a sense of agency and independence, rejecting socialized and acculturated norms of their gender and race. One participant even went so far as to say that "white women don't get models…and that's what we need more than anything" when speaking about her own identity development towards antiracism. Her mother, then, was not able to provide such a model for her during her childhood, adolescence, or adulthood, but rather offered more critique, as so many of the participants mentioned, to her inability to perform white womanhood well. Perhaps their mothers knew the cost their daughters would have to pay if they behaved or presented as different from expected normative white, female behavior. Perhaps they had been so thoroughly socialized and acculturated to white femininity that they were truthfully incapable of seeing anything other than those expectations as acceptable when interacting with the outside world. Regardless, through their own individual experiences and stories, these women identified a multitude of ways in which they challenged societal expectations and means of engagement with the world around them as white women and redefined what that engagement looked like for them as they moved through the world. Additionally, through the tensions created by analyzing and deconstructing their identities through the intersectionality of gender and race, these women were able to use their gendered and raced positions, as white women, to make connections to marginalization, thereby opening themselves up to deeper reflection and self-analysis surrounding implicit bias, racism, and structural inequities.

Religion

As mentioned previously, it is difficult to tease apart many of these identified themes one from the other in such a way that they stand alone, as each of these themes have ways of overlapping, encompassing, and linking ideas and themes together through individual and collective experiences in the present and over time. Religion then, or more specifically Western Christianity, is no doubt intricately linked to the gendered roles and expectations of white women in the ways mentioned previously by operationalizing gendered norms and expectations for both the women and men that choose to subscribe to them in ways that frequently maintain whiteness as privilege and/or oppression. Within this study specifically, four out of eight participants have chosen to walk away from their religious beliefs or their participation within organized, Western Christianity. One of the remaining four participants, Donna, was never religious, having grown up in a household that prized science and rational thought over religious beliefs. Therefore, even though she did not abandon her beliefs like the other four participants, for her, religion was not a part of her identity development at all, short of her own reflection about it through detached observations and second-hand experiences. Of the other three participants, two still consider themselves Christians. One, Tammy, has quit regularly attending church or participating in organized religion except for attending occasional community service events and online services. The other participant, Mary, who still considers themselves as a Christian has attempted to find another church to attend in hopes of finding support for herself as she deconstructs damaging messages and beliefs that have been reinforced by her previous religious experiences and church community about her femininity and agency. Audrey, the only participant still fully invested in her church and the faith of her childhood, was raised in a church that has fully embraced antiracism and is currently collaborating with other churches and people of color to dismantle aspects of racism and systemic oppression within their four walls, but also

encouraging their congregation to do so actively in their lives and throughout the community. It is quite possible that several of the other participants might have continued to engage with their church and maintain religious beliefs as well if their church had responded similarly to racial injustices that have become increasingly more visible in recent years amongst the white community.

In total, 6 out of the 7 participants who were raised within the church identified a shifting relationship with their religious beliefs and identity during this study. Why did these women all talk about religion when discussing their racial identity? While the reasons for walking away from religious practices and communities or shifting their relationship with their religion vary to some degree for each participant, all of them have chosen to do so as they have become more confident in their identity as antiracist women. For most participants (four out of six), this shift also had to do with their femininity and/or moral obligations related to marriage, gender, and associated behaviors.

For one participant, Rachel, while her parents participated in church, they did not have a positive relationship with religion either. Therefore, her experience was more one of obligation, with little reinforcement within the home, compared to the other seven participants. Therefore, the church and religion, in her experience, did not inform her gender or racial identity as it did the other four participants. Rachel was raised Catholic and was confirmed to the Catholic church during her adolescence. However, as she grew up, she made a conscious decision not to continue her participation within the church at that time. When pressed on this she stated the following:

> My parents both grew up Catholics. They both went to Catholic school, they were
>
> married in Catholic church. But neither one had a positive relationship with religion. So
>
> we didn't go to church as like a family or anything like that. But I was pushed to make

my sacraments. I did make my sacraments… that ended in middle school. And I

remember my parents said you're done with that. Is this something you want to do or

not?

She went on to say that she "never enjoyed it" and that she

Always felt like people were doing the right thing because otherwise they were punished

and that always felt really silly to me. Like don't do something just to avoid being

punished for it. Well, I mean, there's this mythical guy in the sky and I'm going to do

things to make him happy so I get rewarded later. So in my twelve year old head I was

like, I would rather worry about how the people on earth that are near me feel than where

I'm going to rank later in his little list.

Rachel states that instead her "moral compass was always pretty like myself just being

kind. That's really it." She also says in the above statement that she would rather please the

people here on earth than a "mythical guy in the sky," indicating that she, even at a young age,

was to some degree aware that her action or inaction had an effect on those around her either for

good or evil, thereby revealing a strong sense of agency. Interestingly enough, she then

immediately related this experience with religion to her political beliefs as well. She mentions

here that as she got older she "steered into that self-reflection piece and started looking for

research" to support her political beliefs. She mentioned how she loved to read and she loved to

learn and within that space of education and reflection, religion or treating people in an unkind

way did not make sense. While she did not state this explicitly, the implication here is that

religious and political beliefs are associated with treating people badly and that research and

rational thought led to treating people humanely. This sentiment shows up in conversations with

several other participants as well.

Becca, similar to Rachel, was not raised in a religious household. She states that "no one in [her] family [was] religious. [They] never grew up in church.." When discussing her moral identity she mentions that she had two really good friends who were both ethnically different, one who was Iraqi and another who was Korean, and hypothesizes that her close relationships with them "helped shape some of that identity and purpose in [her] life." She also mentions that she has always been interested in being fair stating the following:

> I've always been very interested in being fair, which makes me a good middle school teacher, too, because fairness is important. And so I would notice inequity a lot of time, like, why can't the girls help carry the trash can kind of stuff.

Similar to Rachel, Becca seems grounded in a sense of moral responsibility that champions being kind and treating people with respect. Despite, or perhaps because of, their lack of religious upbringing these two women adopted a humanizing paradigm, naturally embracing equity, fairness, and kindness.

While Becca was raised in the church by devout parents, her story is also somewhat similar to Rachel's experience. Becca attended Catholic school and Catholic church during her childhood. She explained that her father chose Catholic school more so because the quality of education was better than that of the public schools around her and because she was too young to start kindergarten in traditional, public schools despite being ready. Therefore, her family opted for Catholic education instead. When speaking about her family's relationship with the church she stated the following:

> My father is really religious, and my mother was raised by people that went to church, but she was raised Episcopalian, and so I think for her, it was like, church is a part.. That's a thing we should do. And he's like, it's got to be Catholicism, so that's fine.

They're not terribly dissimilar religions than Catholicism.. But my father's like, no, that's what it is. He goes multiple times a week now as an adult.

She details that her father, who was evidently very devout although also private about his faith, would force them to attend mass sometimes multiple times a week, sometimes even driving across town to attend multiple masses, because the previous mass did not "tick the box" of what was acceptable within Catholicism.

My father knew where every single church was in Western Massachusetts and what time they had mass. He knew who had a 7:00 am. He knew who had a Saturday evening. He knew who had a 10:30 and who had a 9:30 or he'd look it up. And this is back when that meant calling like a hotline, right? There's no internet. But we always went to church. But where that church was, had we been there before? Not necessarily. So sometimes we would go in the town where my school was. Sometimes my particular town is so small I think the only church is the one that was built in like the 1700s or whatever or the 1800s, right? It's a congregational church. So you couldn't even go to the Catholic church in my town because it was too small. But sometimes we'd go to one in Amherst or we would go in Greenfield or we would go in Deerfield or if we happened to be running errands somewhere else, we'd go over there. But we went like I can count on one hand the number of times that we didn't go. In fact, sometimes we would visit my grandmother and we would go to Episcopalian Mass with her and we'd still have to go to Catholic mass after that because that shit doesn't count and you have to go once a week or you have to go to confession about that.

Becca discusses briefly, while describing this way of worshiping and attending church as reinforcement of her outsider mentality (which was also reinforced by her physical appearance

and weight as a white woman). Since her family did not commit to one specific congregation, their religious community was non-existent. Rather, this was seen as something that had to be done to escape punishment ("once a week or you have to go to confession about that").

Moving into adulthood, Becca discusses how and why her relationship with religion has shifted:

Because at the end of the day, if I want every kid to feel welcome and some of the kids don't feel welcome or whatever, my thing that I want is I don't get to go like, yeah, but that kid's a dick. Or like, oh, but that kid well, all the trauma that they've been through, how can I possibly get through to them? So it reminds me a little bit of the law class, where at first he would be like, here, pick an ideology about federalism or whatever, and then follow it to the end. And I'm like, yea, I don't like that. Okay, I unpick. And he kind of was like, a little salty. Like, what do you mean you unpick? You can't unpick. And I'm like, I actually fully can. Like, I fully can unpick if that's where it goes, all right. I don't think that one's right anymore. I think I'm wrong. This is also why I'm not religious. I don't have time for this shit. Like, there's bills to pay and hungry people. Like, I don't, can't worry about who is up there and what. I'm going to do the best I can do. And I don't have time to naval gaze about whether God created the world and set it in motion or about whether he's watching really close. I don't care. We have shit to do and things to fix.

Within this explanation, while not explicitly stated, Becca mentions *unpicking* religion and uses examples of attitudes and practices that lack humanity and empathy within the classroom to explain why she has done so ("I don't get to go like, yeah, but that kid's a dick. Or like, oh, but that kid well, all the trauma that they have been through, how can I possibly get through to

them?") indicating that she feels that religion has not reinforced her beliefs about teaching and the human experience in general. She also mentions that she does not have time to waste reflecting on whether a religious deity is watching her and judging her, because to her the work of increasing equity and meeting the needs of people is the more important task ("..there's bills to pay and hungry people….We have shit to do and things to fix."). Similar to Rachel and 4, her ideology now centers around engaging people, specifically her students, through kindness and equity rather than through a religious paradigm.

Gina, was also raised in a Catholic church and went to Catholic school, and has since chosen to no longer participate or engage with her church or religion as a whole. Much of this, per her report, was in part a result of how her parents' divorce impacted her mother and father and their relationship with the church in its aftermath. When she was a young child, however, she wanted to be a nun when she grew up. She explained that she was

> …at an age where like [she] didn't like boys. [She] didn't want to think [she] was gonna ever marry a boy you know, and to [her] it was like, that's the only way you get to be an adult grown woman.

However, she has not openly practiced as an adult since she was 21 or 22. She attributes this to the guilt she saw her parents experience following their decision to divorce amicably stating:

> And while she is by no means the only like divorced woman that we know from like my childhood growing up, right, because it just made me feel really upset that I'm like, the church is making two very good people who made a very good decision for themselves and for their family feel guilty, feel bad, and I just disagree with that. And so it started making me kind of look at other things too. And I'm like, well, do I really agree with this? Do I really agree with this? Do I really believe that that's true? And it started to feel

like if I'm gonna go sit here and say these words and participate in these sacraments and I

don't really believe them, then there's been no, that's not.. I'm not gonna do that.

Gina goes on to discuss how she still believes that religion has to some degree shaped her life,

specifically pointing out cultural celebrations and holiday events that often take place at the

church with her family. However, despite her attendance at church during holidays and family

events, Gina has effectively chosen to move away from the church due to the negative emotional

impact it had on her family. Again, while not explicitly stated, it appears that Gina has chosen

instead to embrace empathy, compassion, and kindness over what she felt was alienation and/or

punishment for her parents who made what she felt was a necessary choice if they were to live

in peace and happiness.

In comparison to Rachel and Becca, the rest of the participants were all raised in religious

households. Participants 3 and 7 were raised in Catholic homes. Participants 2, 5, 6, and 8 were

all raised in Protestant homes, in the Baptist church. Between the two, Catholic and Protestant

religious experiences, there seems to be some variance. Participants from a Catholic faith

discussed religion as a private endeavor that linked them to their family or their community

through cultural events, but did not overtly address morality through consistent dos and don'ts.

Even Gina, whose parents felt guilty about their divorce, mentioned that her parents felt guilty,

but that they were by no means the only people within their church who had been divorced,

implying that the church itself did not exercise punishment or judgment as a response to their

decision. Participants within Protestant churches spoke more extensively on acceptable behavior

and judgment pertaining to expected moral expectations within their church communities and

leaders.

Mary was raised in a Protestant, Baptist church as a child. However, during college she had a negative experience at church that began to make her question her denomination and later her faith as a whole to some degree. She explains that she

> Was in the choir. I was brought up with all that. I wore a skirt above my knees home the first semester in college. Someone told my mom that I had become a whore. It honestly took me until that part. Like, I didn't go back to church with my mother for years because I was like, that's kind of judgmental. Like, I had a sweater on with sleeves. I'm like really? I can't deal with that. That's not what worshiping God is about. It's not about judgment. So my whole goal was to find a place that I felt was accepting. But like, still preached the Bible, right? Still had a relationship with Jesus, but not so churchy and so judgmental that I felt like I couldn't be myself.

She detailed that she felt judged for everything within the Southern Baptist church, from moving away to dating someone outside of their denomination. Moving from this experience, she goes on to explain that she left the Southern Baptist church and began to explore Methodist and Catholic churches. She explained that in these churches she has seen that, in her experience, they are more relationship and community focused and are less judgmental, specifically mentioning how she doesn't feel "like everybody knows everybody's business. And people, they don't stand up and preach. They'll read verses from the Bible, but he's never going to stand up there and say, you must submit to your husband, right?" This was a pivotal change for Mary because she had been married to and living with an abusive husband because she felt that the Bible and her religion did not support divorce, and that her church and family would judge her for leaving him. She further explains that one of the pastors at one of these churches had been integral in her eventually leaving her husband when she told her "you're okay to divorce because this is

abusive. This is not how God wants you treated." She explained that "having someone [she] respected as a Christian pastor tell [her] this really meant a lot to [her] because she wasn't judging me like I was a failing one. Because culture is going to say that you are, right?" However, despite some positive experiences participating in a new congregation, she also stated that her

> faith was so much stronger when the man I supposedly loved was, like, laughing at me when I was sick and talking about me on the back, and like… not loving me. I couldn't put up with it. It was destroying me. I was physically about to die. I was not safe because the emotional abuse was terrible. And I was like, I can't. And God doesn't want that for you. He doesn't want you to suffer. And some people should treat you right. I'm like the Bible says anything but the opposite about how to treat people. But people just take things out of context, and it's not really religion. It's more cultish, I guess.

During our second interview, Mary mentioned that she had continued reflecting on our conversation surrounding her marriage, the church, and religion and how her

> Position as a white female, um, Christian growing up in the Bible Belt, [she has] reflected a little more about how that may have impacted because I know I shifted my views, knowing that after I was raised and I saw other views, I wanted to still believe. But I felt it was more cultish how I was raised or not necessarily true. That these certain rules that I had to follow as a woman, like how long my skirt was or if I couldn't wear makeup. I didn't feel that those were necessarily right, like, that I should be judged as part of my religion And that kind of was kind of probably the beginning point in college where I definitely wanted to learn more, visit more churches, really understand. I wanted God in my life. But to me, that meant like, my religion had to be true to myself. Not like me

going to a church just because that's how the rest of my family only grew up. If I was

being judged because my skirt is above my knees, like that really rubbed me the wrong

way that someone called me a slut because my skirt was not that short. Um, I guess it's

just kind of affected me because I have just been raised to, like, hide myself. And I

couldn't wear… it was more about clothing, but I realized it was deeper than I , uh, I

couldn't wear a bikini. I couldn't wear makeup. I couldn't, like, be my true self. And I

know people will be like there's no way. You were a total redneck. I was. I was a total

tomboy. I was never allowed to wear makeup or be myself. Um, I thought that was my

religion. And I just realized I never thought that was related right. To, like, racism. But I

think all that is, like I know you'll call it not privilege, but all of it is just, like,

socialization, a lack of being educated, a lack of, um, staying in one environment.

Everybody's environment is the same, and they don't see any other environments because

its like, this micro-world. That's their only world.

Within her reflection here, it seems almost as if Mary is trying to tease apart how her gender,

race, and religion all have impacted her. I mentioned to her during the interview that it felt like

she was still deconstructing the impact religion has on her view of herself and her identity even

now. She agreed and reiterated that she is just now realizing that she can keep her identity, feel

beautiful both inside and outside, and still believe in God. She mentioned that because of her

being made to feel like an outcast in this environment she has realized that

no one should ever feel like that and we should be more, um knowledgeable. Not just

caring, like I've always been caring, but we should be more knowledgeable so that we

can actually come about and be able to make systemic change.

As Mary continued to grow as an individual and develop a secure identity, she did not appear to abandon her faith, but instead shifted her ideology surrounding faith, church, and community so that she could sustain her own identity and sense of self. Per her own report and self-reflection, she has thus been able to embrace a more humanizing approach to herself and subsequent relationships with others.

Tammy, like Mary, has also not completely abandoned her faith, but has chosen to step outside of her church community and organized religion as a result of several personal experiences with the church and also as a result of the current political environment surrounding race within the United States in recent years. She mentioned this almost immediately during our first interview, when responding to the question: How do you identify? In her response she stated that she was a Christian but then went on to state that she was ashamed of even saying that because of how the people in the church, who claim to be Christians have behaved in recent years regarding race within politics. For her, Christianity has been full of dichotomies. In one space she has been supported and celebrated as a female, Christian minister while in other spaces she has been rejected, lied about, and defamed for attempting to be a female pastor or minister. This initially led her to spaces, still within the Protestant church, where she was accepted. However, over time, having observed the way Christian people in her church and within her community have responded to racialized violence and racist political rhetoric.. refusing to call it out at best and at worst participating in it themselves, she has moved progressively farther and farther away from a church community or organized religion. When reflecting on this, it appears that Tammy was able and willing to tolerate religious persecution that was personal to her, but was unable to continue to do so once she realized that this marginalization and oppression extended to other people, groups, and situations. Previously a pastor and deeply involved in the

church since childhood, she now only attends church occasionally online and participates in some community service events. She has expressed an explicit desire to distance herself from their rhetoric as a result of their patriarchal and racist behaviors and expectations.

Amanda probably had the deepest ties to religion as both a child and as an adult. As The eldest participant and also as a missionary and pastor's daughter, she was deeply tied to the Evangelical (Protestant) movement within the United States as a whole. There is no doubt that these experiences within this community impacted who she is today. Amanda, as stated previously, was born in Hawaii as a missionary's child. At the age of four, her family moved back to the mainland and continued to be heavily involved in ministry, specifically the Southern Baptist Association. At that time, the Southern Baptist Association (SBA) was much different than it is today. Then, during Amanda's childhood and adolescence, the SBA was invested in many more progressive movements and embraced progressive ideologies surrounding racial relations in the United States, abortion, women's rights, etc. However, this did change in the 1980s, prompting a significant shift in their religious dogma and political involvement. At that time, when Amanda was in college, the SBA became much more conservative, embracing many of the ideologies and platforms associated with right-wing, Christian Nationalism today. Despite the changes that took place within the SBA, Amanda insists that her parents, especially her father, still maintained a more progressive outlook and would have been considered *antiracist* and *liberal* at the time, if those words had been in our cultural vernacular. Amanda remained within her church and church community well into adulthood, only leaving the church and removing herself from practicing organized religion in recent years. Like Tammy, the response of the church and church leaders within Protestant circles to racial violence and racist and bigoted political rhetoric eventually led to her and her husband's disenfranchisement with the church as a

whole. As she has stepped away from her involvement with the church, she has reflected on how the church has impacted her identity development.

When speaking about her journey she details why her and her husband decided to walk away from the church and organized religion:

…my husband has very much been on this journey with me, we made a very specific decision to leave our church, and we did a little bit of searching, trying to find other places. Like, we went to one different church that we had. And really part of our leaving…the trigger for my husband was not as much of race. Mine was more of probably a more of a race just leaving leadership who would not come out against Trump, no matter how ridiculous he got… This was a church plant with a young pastor, not Fox News spouting. It was not that way at all. You would think of these folks as progressive to an extent, but what they would not do was call it out. The one thing they called out was after the Access Hollywood[1] tapes. And what I began to realize very quickly was when people would call something out in my world was when it involved white women being harmed, that's when they would speak up, right? But when you're talking about men, Mexicans are coming and raping. When you're talking about there's good people on both sides that they would not say anything. Right? But when you're talking about groping a white woman right, then we can say something, because that goes against our whatever…. And that really meant particularly with what conversations that Trump provoked, we just had to leave. And we tried a couple of other places. I remember we went to this one church. We thought we would be really happy. I had a pastor that was

[1] *Judge Oks use of Access Hollywood tape in Trump Defamation Trial*. POLITICO. (n.d.). Retrieved March 21, 2023, from
https://www.politico.com/news/2023/03/10/access-hollywood-tape-trump-defamation-trial-00086584

very intellectual, and we were really drawn to that. And we were coming in on… there

was kind of the men hanging out on the porch thing, and we left and we left them and I

said, you know, the most racist people we know go to that church because they were men.

He had been in a Boy Scout troop with them. And so he'd done this sitting around the

campfire when people are just kind of themselves, and he's like because he was just

realizing all the men that we saw that were our friends in the community that were there

at that particular church were racist. And so we went to one other place, and we just saw

the same fence sitting.

Her identification of men in religious positions who were willing to speak out only in defense of

white women, again intersecting with her understanding of herself as a white woman and all of

the moral, political, and social implications associated with this social location, coupled with the

historical knowledge of the ways tropes like the *Black brute* and *rapist* (Miller & Lensmire,

2021) were used to prevent miscegenation as a means of protecting racial purity and white

power, ultimately is what led her to leaving the church altogether. She mentions that for her

husband the issue was less about race and more about sexuality. He did not feel he could

participate in an environment that denied the humanity of those who identify as LGBTQ+. For

both of them, the lack of love, kindness, and humanity found in these church spaces felt

diametrically opposed to what they believed and who they desired to be.

Amanda mentioned that this decision was difficult, but freeing for them. Even when we

were speaking during the interview she paused and said

Sorry. I'm like tightening up in my back and shoulders. It was a very crazy five years, but

it was and I say that, I don't say it at all, like, in a pitying way at all, because it was the

most freeing thing for about the 15 years before that..

I took this as an indication that this had been an extremely difficult and perhaps even somewhat traumatic experience for them to walk out of, especially with her background deeply invested in the evangelical faith and movement. She went on to explain how it felt:

> Well, '03 is when I went to the public school. And we had begun to question a lot of things and push back on a lot of things, probably even mid 90s, looking forward, because we just were always asking these questions. But then as I'm getting to know my students who are Muslim, my students, all of these different things, it really had become this living in two different worlds, right? And by the time when I get into the doc program, it would feel like whiplash, right? To go from the university to Bible study. And you just sit in there thinking, how much do I say? What questions do I ask? Do I push back tonight? Do I just sit here and keep my mouth shut? And then you'd wait in about 45 minutes and you're like, I can't keep my mouth shut anymore. You just let it out. So to actually just say, no, we don't believe this and we do not fit, and we are going to stand on the side of decency and humanity and non-judgmental. It was incredibly free. So it's hard. It was lonely, but it was really, really free.

It is important to note that even though both her and her husband felt strongly about leaving the church as a result of their deeply held beliefs surrounding love and acceptance of humanity, she also stated that "being able to walk away was actually easier because my dad was deceased and my mother was almost nonverbal." She believes that "if they both had been living and in their right minds" it would have been more difficult for them to leave even though her

> father very much in today's language… we didn't have this language in the 90s.. My dad would have very much identified as antiracist. Very much. But my dad was also [an

important figure]. So my father was a leader in the denomination. And so our depth in it

was not just in the local church. It was deeply entrenched in this organization.

In addition to sharing that it would have been more difficult to leave the church if her parents

were alive and capable of protesting, she describes her church as a "village," and says that

part of what made it super, super hard to leave was we had actually taught most of

those children in Sunday School, so they were like the 20 and 30s were actually

kids we taught. They're our kids' age. But the cost of staying was just too high.

And I think part of what helped me to leave, if you're looking at what supports a

white woman, is knowing seeing that other culture out there, right, and knowing I

could never fully be a part of it, right?

She goes on to talk about how even now, amongst other family members and close friends their

decision to leave has caused friction and has led to the end of relationships with some people

they have known and loved for many years. Therefore, as a result of walking away from

organized religion, she has also lost access to friends and family members outside of the church,

as they do not approve of their decision. When considering this through a critical lens or even

again through CWF, Amanda was again not provided full access to privileges associated with her

whiteness, but was instead punished, for refusing to participate in expected norms associated

with her gender and her race- to be morally pure (by their standards) and upright. These expected

norms included distancing herself and her theology from those in the LGBTQ+ community as

well as tolerating the dehumanization of people of color and other marginalized groups or at

minimum the silence surrounding it.

As the conversation went on, Amanda discusses how in her mind the evangelical church

has adopted an attitude that they are the "oppressed ones." She has mentioned how the

development of her critical consciousness has helped her see that she was being taught to believe

that she was oppressed as a Christian. She explains her thoughts in detail below:

> …my critical consciousness helped me see that we're being taught that we're oppressed,
> when it's exactly the opposite, you can't unsee that shit. I was just like I'll never forget
> after I realized that, and the next time I went back, and it was like he wasn't five minutes
> into the sermon, and it was like, I know what you've been through this week and how
> you've been. And I was just like, oh, my gosh, I've been listening to this for 15 years,
> and it's a lie! And when the shootings happen and you realize, I don't remember what
> helped me understand this, but I began to realize that one of the most dangerous things
> you can have is like.. like a pit bull who feels threatened. Like, you don't want to be
> around a Rottweiler who feels threatened, right? Because that is a dangerous animal. So if
> you teach a white male evangelical who actually is a person of extreme power in our
> system…that he is threatened. Yeah. What do you produce? You produce a Dillon Roof,
> right? You produce whatever that dude's name. Thank God they didn't say it a lot that
> went to Buffalo. Like that's what you produce because you've got people who can easily
> be a guy, who, you know, can move about society very easily, who do have a lot of
> power, but you taught them that… That they are oppressed. Like it is so dangerous. And
> that's why when I like, the last time I went back in the church that we were in for so long
> and I heard that in five minutes, like, I never walked in again. Like that was the thing.
> That was the thing that I was like, you are literally producing this very dangerous creature
> in our society, and I cannot be a part of that anymore.

For Amanda, she began to see that the church was literally reinforcing and replicating white

supremacy through their messaging and also through which issues they chose to champion

(victimization of white women) and which issues they chose to ignore (the dehumanization of people of color and people in the LGBTQ+ community). She also began to notice that, as Lensmire (2017) mentions in his work, openly racist talk was still something her church community engaged in when they perceived that they were in white spaces (boy scout troop meetings, etc.) As a result of these specific concerns that were diametrically opposed to her convictions surrounding humanity, empathy, and kindness, and also offended her *critical consciousness* both she and her husband chose to leave the church. Despite this being a difficult choice for her, Amanda also expressed that this decision was not only a learning experience for her, but an opportunity to live in full authenticity, something that she mentions pertaining to gendered roles she identifies with as well. See her reflection from our second interview below:

> …. and going through that again with getting to this point where, okay, I can't be fully who I am and stay in this space and stay silent, and if I speak up, it's going to reach a point where we're out of here. But again, once we did that, what we found on the other side was, yeah, and I almost typed this out last night, but it just seemed too long. This principle became super clear to me somewhere around 2015 in reading Brene Brown's book. I don't think it was Dare to Lead. I think it was before that. But she is actually in that book, quoting an evangelical Christian who now would probably identify as progressive Christian outside of evangelicalism named Jen Hatmaker. And what she quotes… so she's quoting Jen and maybe a blog or maybe a book. And what she describes Jen talking about is how you're in this space, kind of like a castle, is the way I think about it, or a walled city, and you gotta get out of it, right? And those first few steps are super scary and feel really alone. But take a few more and a few more, and what you end up finding is hundreds of thousands of other people like you living in this joyful,

authentic, creative space. And when I read that, I was beginning to find that. And it just

gave me so much hope and courage to keep walking out into that space. And it's exactly

what I found, you know, that once you get there, you can live in such full authenticity.

Like all these questions of, you know, these questions that you run into all the time in the

evangelical community now. Like, I've got this niece that's getting married and she's gay

and she's marrying her same sex partner. Can I go? I mean, you hear that kind of debate

now all the time among Christian women, right? Like, how do I love these family

members but not seem like I'm affirming this sin and all that shit? It's like all that is over,

right? The statements are so simple. But like, love is love, right? That stuff is over. And

you just get to get to know people. You're freed from evangelizing them, and you're

freed from judging them, and you're freed from this constant, like this they live this way.

Is it okay for me to even be around? All of that is just done. And you'd just get to be and

it's so freaking cool.

Through each participants' experiences with Western Christianity, it becomes clear how

religion has operated in their lives to reinforce implicit messages surrounding femininity,

morality, patriarchal norms, belonging and whiteness. For some, those who were less invested in

the church during their childhoods and adolescence, walking away from organized religion or

religion as a whole was an act of logic and rational thought, founded in a desire to love people

and treat them with kindness and dignity. For others, those who were deeply invested throughout

their childhood, their deconstruction and eventual abandonment of certain ideologies as well as

their community was intensely freeing and also painful. While each story is different, there are

echoes of women yearning for a place to belong, a community that humanizes them as women

and allows space for those who are different from themselves to also be valued and respected as well.

Proximity to People of Color

For each and every participant within this study proximity and authentic relationship with people of color through travel, work, or even the students in their classrooms provided opportunities for deep, internal reflection and transformation. For participants 1, 2, 4, 7, and 8 the relationships with students of color within their classrooms proved to be a very integral part of their identity development as it relates to their racial identity and their desire to make changes, both within themselves and within the system. For participants 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8 adult relationships formed either in the workplace or as a result of their position within the classroom also proved to be significantly impactful. For participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 travel to destinations where they were the minority and relationships were formed across cultural lines and barriers proved to be transformative as well. For participants 1, 2, 3, 6, and 8 experiences with overt racism towards people of color in their lives also proved to be impactful. As Morrison (1992) and Lensmire (2017) pointed out, white people often learn about themselves and the systems of whiteness and oppression as they interact with Black and Brown people. This became clearly evident within this study as each participant detailed their experiences and interactions with people of color and described the impact those experiences had not just on them at that time, but have still impacted who they are today. These interactions and relationships with people of color served to disrupt the invisibility of whiteness (Hancock & Warren, 2017; Lensmire, 2017), therefore making their own whiteness visible and subsequently inequitable systems and structures visible as well.

For Rachel, negative, racialized experiences within schools and her positive interactions with her students and Black and Brown coworkers were incredibly impactful. She stated that her first job after graduating college, teaching in an urban school

> was the first time I've ever chosen students who had me outside the traditional standardized education that I learned in undergrad. I had lots of students who were going through [Multi-tiered Systems of Support]. A lot of students had some kind of external support, but I have no knowledge or understanding of the amount, any of that. I remember being given a binder of acronyms when I started and being the first time I ever saw a 504, and the first time I saw a kid with an IEP, any kind of specialized instruction.

When pressed, she also mentioned that these students were also predominantly students of color. She explained that her school was going through a transitional period where the majority of middle class, white students were being pulled out and going to a new, local charter school nearby. As a result, the students who remained in the school were students who struggled, mostly Black and Brown. She explained that many of the teachers, mostly white, wanted

> ..easy students that were on grade level, and they didn't want to have to meet anyone where they were. They wanted to teach grade level, have all the fun cutesy events, and continue on their way. So, after that summer, they all left. And during that six month period. Griping and a lot of complaining publicly about parents. And I heard how negatively they speak about families that were there when I was a baby teacher, I was fresh out of college. They spoke very negatively.

She goes on to say that she saw

> People who hated children… they very clearly did not seem like they wanted to work there. Some of them stayed though. You can see how that impacts the learning

community. But it's interesting that you can see the pockets of hate and how hate finds

hate. And I feel like in teaching, it's really easy to find someone who agrees with you and

very easily sour a team.

I questioned who, professionally, she gravitated towards in that space. She replied that she had

gravitated towards a Black educator who worked next door to her on her grade level. She

explained how this relationship impacted her as a young teacher, new to the field:

So when I worked with my coworkers, who we shared a door with, she introduced me to

things like Freedom School, like different practices that piqued my interest. I'd never

learned about them, right? Little things to build communities in our classroom with, I

guess were also things that were not taught….. When the new teacher, which was my

next door neighbor, was moving in I was helping her unload all of her stuff, and I was

looking at some quotes. Never had I seen so many diverse books. Well, first of all, when

you go into teaching, when I was a teacher, no one had books for me. There was no

classroom, any books I bought, or books that I had to buy in undergrad. But growing up, I

mean, any books I read, they all looked like me on the cover. The library the school had,

and the school had a library that was representative of the population, which is where I

live, right? It never occurred to me that I had to search out books for other children to

represent other children……. She was like, well, you have to meet these authors. You

have to go find these authors, buy those things, go to their websites, by being intentional.

So intentional. Super intentional with your money, which is just something I guess I

never thought about.

She also mentioned how some parents charged her with doing right by their students, as a white

woman, teaching Black and Brown students stating

And during my first ever open house, I had a husband and wife say to me I just want to

be very honest with you. I have a terrible track record with white women teaching my

kid. And I was like, what did I do? Why are you bringing this to me? I didn't do that to

you…. So in my head… I was affected. I have done nothing to you. Wait until I give you

a reason. I mean many years later now down the line, I totally get it. It was justified….

By the end of the year he tells me he's never been happy with anyone like he's been

happy with me… obviously humans love that kind of feedback. And you hope that every

teacher treats kids like they're their own kids, but I'm sure that did put a bug in my ear

for the rest of the year.

These events and relationships with teachers, parents, and students of color as well as other racist

educators, "coupled with everyday struggling" in the classroom and reflection about what was

working, what was not working, and the challenge to learn new strategies to reach her student

population led to personal growth towards self-analysis and a desire to do better for the kids in

her classroom. As a result, she started her graduate program at the university and her continued

journey towards antiracist pedagogies.

Mary identified negative, racialized events as well as positive relationships with students

of color after becoming a teacher both as formative to her identity development as well. She

mentioned two specific events from her childhood that stood out to her when thinking about her

identity development. In one event she mentioned that Black children in her neighborhood

referred to her as a redneck. In this retelling, she stated that she had no idea what that meant, but

she observed her father become upset over it. As a result, he told her not to spend time with those

children. Since she did not understand what that meant at the time, this was just a puzzling

experience for her. As she has grew older, and began to realize that she looked and sounded like

many people who would be seen as *rednecks* or even bigoted and racist individuals, she expressed a desire to be anything other than that. As a result, she chose to leave the area that she grew up in and pursue an education that would distance her from this negative stereotype of white, Appalachian people. Despite her acknowledgement of the stereotype and her understanding now of why she might have been called a redneck by those children then, she expressed that she does not feel shame about her heritage as a southern Appalachian, but rather she feels "proud of the Appalachian heritage." She explained that she "didn't want [her] roots to make [her] see the world with a narrow view." She stated that "now [she] can still view [her]self with this heritage but know [she's] okay being more educated."

In another event, she mentioned a Black friend she had made while young and how she had invited him to her birthday party. She stated that she was

glad that only one person in [her] family said, like, some derogatory name about him and that everyone else was accepting, because I didn't see any issue of it. But I do remember hearing comments from people in my family like, that's not right. Even though you are friends, you shouldn't be in relationship with someone who's a different color. [She] remember[ed] a few comments like that, but [she] really didn't question it till [she] got older, because [she] was friends with everyone.

As she grew older and entered high school, she mentioned that she also witnessed one of her Black friends and bandmates assaulted. She explained the situation and how she felt as a result of it:

They played the same section as me. One got a rock thrown at her. So that's when it hit me personally. People were still throwing rocks. And I didn't realize that the town I originally was from was so racist. And it made me very angry. And I was just

questioning, why is this happening? Like this is not right. Why did they deserve this? Like, I couldn't believe people were still treating people that way after reading about it in school, and I never saw that in my high school, so .. people are really still like this in the world. So that made me on guard and made me realize I wanted to go. I originally wanted to go further away for college, but my mom got sick, so I didn't. But to realize and be conscious of, like, I want to make sure I don't give off that persona as a Southerner. Like, I was actually practicing learning English. Like, I wanted to talk proper. I want to make sure that my language doesn't sound like I am racist. I don't want people to think I think any different of them. And not just as a Christian too, but it kind of bothered me, so it still sticks out.

As Mary grew older, and began teaching however, her students and the differences she witnessed with schools that predominantly served students of color also had an impact on her identity development and trajectory towards antiracist pedagogies. She explains how once she was in a Title 1 environment it "pushed [her] when [she] saw some of the biases and [she] saw how it was impacting, [she] guess[ed], systemically a school district that was failing." As a result of this experience, she wanted to "learn more about how this happens and where it's happening and what [she] can do about it." She explained how the very act of "getting outside of [her] own classroom into, like, whole school district level, you see so much stuff." The more she saw and the more she learned, she wanted to be a part of fixing the system so that it was more equitable for students of color.

For Becca, despite having grown up in a progressive area where many liberal ideologies were presented within her coursework throughout high school and college, travel served as an important catalyst to her development as an antiracist educator. She details how she spent time in

Bolivia and also in Korea and how those experiences not only led her to pursue a profession in teaching, specifically teaching multilingual students, but also shaped her perception of people different from her and perception of herself. The data suggests that these experiences, coupled with her previous experiences within white culture where she found herself outside of white, feminine norms as a larger or heavier girl, might have also created within her an openness to dating across racial and cultural boundaries as well.

When speaking of her time in Bolivia she stated that it was "transformative for a lot of reasons. Primarily, like, just being a part of a more communitarian culture was a complete head trip." She explains her time there in detail, split between two families and two classes as well, and how it impacted her:

> And it was just exposure to a different way, like, just a different way of life. The first folks I was with there…. I was placed with two different families, which was like, standard structure for how the program worked, right? But the first one was very like, I was staying in a woman's home. I had, like a host. I had a couple of host brothers. I had a host sister that didn't live there, but she was like a mother who was a modern dancer and he was a guitar player. And the older brother was, I think, just kind of sold stuff and made money. But her ex-husband and the father of the two younger children who were, like, 18 and 22, was like, an author. Like a big author who, like drank red wine during the day and, like, this artsy family. Oh, this is the best this the best thing that ever could have happened. They had a cousin that owned an Irish bar and I was like, yes, you could not have placed me with a better family. This is great. This is exactly like what I want it to be. And so I was learning about all this stuff and then I chose my little project. And my project was about indigenous communitarian justice. So there are places in South

America where they're like, hey, listen, we're not really into the police here. We are a community that has been here for hundreds and hundreds of years, and, like, if somebody raped somebody and we determined that they need to be murdered, we would really like to handle that on our own. But also, robbery is handled differently, right? So I was trying to write a paper about a place in Bolivia where they were letting folks do that, and in order to be near the part of the country I needed to be near, I wound up staying with a family that was in a really different position. So this is a family that had been internally displaced by a natural disaster and was now living in… so half of Bolivia is very mountainous. There are mountains all over, so you kind of can pick a biome at whatever elevation you're at, but kind of to the northeastern side… more mountains, more indigenous. Any images you have in your mind of, like Peru, more similar. Also, people look different, right? They're smaller. Kind of what you picture if you picture Bolivia. The southeastern half of Bolivia looks like it's flatter. You can have cows and stuff. It looks kind of more tropical, but also lighter. All the beauty queens come from there. They have petrochemicals. So, like, what money exists is there, and it's extremely socially conservative. Like, we want to look like Miami. We want, like, polo shirts and a lot of skin lightening, and we want to look like everybody wants to be Sofia Vergara look like that and look like a white American that just happens to be in Miami. And these broke indigenous people who are demanding things.. Like, it's just a lot…. The [other] family that I lived with while I was there was in a really different place. Socioeconomically. It's not like the other family was loaded. I don't think that they were particularly wealthy, but they were this, like, artsy intelligentsia one of us is like, going to reiki training, like this kind of hip artsy thing. Whereas this was more like a working class family. They were

living in a former vacation property that had belonged to a politician that had kind of like

fallen into disrepair and they just lived in parts of it…. And they were find and able to

cover their costs and stuff. They got a stipend, obviously, for hosting me and for working

with the program and talking about things.

Within this context, it appears that Becca is able to recognize how the construct of whiteness and

white supremacy have played a part in the socio political environment around her. She explicitly

states this when she says that

It looks kind of more tropical, but also lighter. All the beauty queens come from there.

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lot of skin lightening, and we want to look like everybody wants to be Sofia Vergara look

like that and look like a white American that just happens to be in Miami. And these

broke indigenous people who are demanding things.. Like, it's just a lot….

However, while living with the second family, Becca is also able to recognize that despite the

differences in their phenotype and presentation, racialized issues within their community,

centering whiteness, were still pervasive. She explains in more detail below:

But hearing about they had a lot of racially motivated issues because they're living in the

wider part of the city. And what happens is because there's money and petrochemical

stuff out there is folks who are displaced by either environmental stuff or other issues

come there and they can't really get into the system. So they start living in these

unplanned communities that are basically just like shanty towns…and these are folks that

are of more indigenous roots than the other folks. And so it becomes this very racialized

dynamic where it's like those dirty Indians are doing, look, they can't even take of

themselves. The street looks like shit, there's trash everywhere. What are they doing?

They have to illegally steal power and stuff. So these folks were not living in that

neighborhood and they were kind of the ones that were like trying to like, orient me to

what this situation was and be like, yes. And we had to leave. And, like, there was the

time where they came and flooded the house and said that they were going to cut the

electrical. Like, they threw water under the door and then had cut the power, and we're

going to put the power in the water to try and intimidate them out of these boys. And I

heard all these crazy things, and this is, like, my first exposure to, like because of my

mind, right. None of yall are white, right? Not by our definition anyway… and so that

was kind of a head trip because it was racial and it was just stuff that had actually

happened to people I was talking to.

Becca is able then to recognize that despite the locals' inability to present as white by Western

standards, that those who were deemed *white* or *lighter* within Bolivian culture, either through

their skin color, through their economic advantage, or perhaps through both, were subject to

certain privileges that those who presented darker or more indigenous were not. Additionally, she

mentions that the family

kind of encouraged and then panicked, but they kind of encouraged [her] to date, like, a

member of their family. And then when that happened, [they were] kind of like, freaked

out that it was going to cause trouble or something bad was going to happen, but [she]

wound up in a relationship while [she] was there.

When pressed about this situation and why the family might have freaked out after she began

dating their son, she added

He was a blue-collar guy, limited education. I think at first they thought it was funny or

maybe possibly beneficial in the future? But then they panicked because there were 2

adults who were dating who were under one roof? Honestly, as much as he was a kind

person, I think a big part of it was that I had never had someone take things to the

relationship level before. It also allowed me to hang onto that experience, which was so

influential, in a more tangible way. I think it definitely contributed to my "not like the

other white liberal arts students" understanding of myself.

Here, she explains that while this relationship did not last after her return to the United States, it

did allow her to understand herself and her identity within whiteness and in relationship to white

norms (as an *outsider*) moving forward, potentially even making her more open to dating and

eventually becoming engaged to a non-white man later in life. Becca summarized her

experiences in Bolivia by stating that overall the experience

flipped [her] entire understanding of what family was, what [she] wanted to do, because

[she] was immediately like, okay, [she] was doing this program because [she] thought the

program itself was interesting. Now, [she spoke] pretty good Spanish. Grammatically. It

[wasn't] flawless, but it sound[ed] pretty good, especially for someone who [didn't]

have a reason that they [spoke] Spanish, right? And [she] was like, "I love this. I want to

speak Spanish every day of my life. I like this. This is something that's interesting to

me."

Following this experience, as Becca was attempting to find her way professionally, she

was presented with the opportunity to teach English in Korea. She decided to take the position

even though she "didn't speak one word of Korean." She knew "nothing about Korea. All of

[her] international city stuff had been based on Latin America and, like, the post Soviet Block."

When she arrived there were "a bunch of other foreign teachers from they call it the seven

English speaking countries, which according to them, are the United States, Canada, New

Zealand, Australia, the UK, Ireland, and South Africa." In this space she describes how "race….

Was a topic of conversation all the time." Her account of her experiences there are below:

> There is obviously a huge connection with America because of the Korean War. You
>
> know, the race and phenotype and features and just bodies are just just like topics of
>
> conversation in a way that even maybe used to be more common in America, but is pretty
>
> considered not appropriate. So like a lot of like Oh…You have a high nose. Kids are
>
> talking about you have a high nose, you have big eyes, you have light. Explicitly white,
>
> supremacist influenced constructs of like beauty and what looks nice and what looks
>
> smart. Also, like, within hiring, it's like, known that there are issues. Right? Because I
>
> was working in public schools and public schools, I think a little bit less so. But the
>
> private academies, they explicitly want attractive white people. Like, even sometimes
>
> Korean adoptees people who are Korean. And something else. Black teachers, like, not
>
> always what you wanted because it doesn't look good on the brochure. It's not attractive.
>
> Our literal service here is on all the TOEFL exams. Korean students score really well, but
>
> they can't talk because it's an incredibly perfectionist culture. And you would never try to
>
> speak unless you were going to sound good, which means nobody ever sounds good
>
> without extensive private tutoring. So it was kind of like I mean granted, Korea has a lot
>
> of different influences, but it was sort of like the schools all work with the exam system,
>
> and in order to pass the exams, kids started getting private tutors. So now everyone has
>
> private tutors. Everyone goes to school and then leaves school and then takes classes for
>
> hours. Even adults. If you don't know how to cook and you want to learn how to cook,
>
> you pay an academy, a cooking academy, to teach you. And it was a complete cultural

shock that I had never experienced. The priorities are not actually that different than, like, white supremacy culture, but it's so heightened and it's so explicit, and it's just in your face. And also, there's, like, all of these cultural norms that are just super different. And so this is the first experience of, like, people on the street coming up. You just feel so other. Just super, super other. And that was a fucking wild experience. And when you're not used to that and you've never been exposed to that, people process that in a lot of different ways. Some people, it turns into like, well, you know, that's racism. It's racism against foreigners. It's like, okay, well, and my government runs their whole military. I don't know if that's really the term, right? Because everybody here wishes they had my passport. It's a trip. Plus, you're dealing with Europeans, and Europeans and race are a whole other fucking situation. You got South Africans. They got their own thing. And so we're grappling with this while kids are coming in and being like, oh, miss, you have a big eye and a high nose, but very fat! Americans. Very fat. Just like, this is what we're talking about. Pretty trippy experience. Really cool experience. And allowed me to settle and get myself economically in a place where things were a little less crazy. And that's how. I mean, that's where the teaching happened, right? Like, the first six months were incredibly difficult. I never thought I never planned to work with children. I didn't particularly like kids. This is just what I was doing. And about six months in, I was like, I have got to start doing something differently. I can't get them quiet. They won't do anything. There's 33 kids in a class. They don't know what I'm saying. I was working in a very working class public school. It wasn't like a fancy schmancy. They've had a bunch of English outside of school kind of thing. And this is a school system where you can hit kids with sticks. Not me, but Korean teachers can hit kids with sticks. They were just

getting rid of the sticks, but the teacher still had the sticks and would still use them if

someone was really out of line. Like, wow. But after doing this for a couple of years, I

was like, okay, there's parts of this that I really like, the teaching part. That being said,

you teach about 22 hours a week. It's a full-time job. You only have 22 hours of classes.

You don't speak any Korean, so you can't really grade. You can't do any of the paperwork,

you can't do any administrative stuff that teachers have to do. You're just sitting there the

rest of the time. And I was like, my brain is, like, beginning to atrophy. This has been

great because I could pursue hobbies. I made some… a ton of friends. Like, I did all of

this cool stuff, and like, what's the next thing? So the next thing in my brain was going to

be. You know a lot of people will go get a job in China or Vietnam or Japan. And I was

like, Well, I want to get back to South America or to a Spanish speaking country. Maybe I

can do this. I'll do an ESL degree, and I'll become like a professor, and I'll just bop

around different places. So the plan was to come home and do that. And then I think I

decided, like, I actually need to learn how to teach teach. I did a TSEL cert while I was

there, took advantage of whatever development I could get my hands on. But I looked up,

like, teaching fellow programs and wound up at a no excuses charter school in Boston.

When looking back on these experiences now, after her time teaching children in the classroom

in the United States, Becca heavily credits these experiences for helping her develop her critical

consciousness towards whiteness and white supremacy and the impact of both on the non-white,

non-English speaking students in her classrooms. Having since dedicated her life to working

with multilingual students and English learners she has reflected on how these experiences

helped her understand how her white, female, suburban, American world marginalizes these

students and has since actively worked to create safe spaces for these children within her

classroom. Additionally, the racialized responses of Korean children during her time there helped her to also understand the way whiteness operates as a means to privilege and marginalize simultaneously. While she was a white, American woman and part of the most privileged society in Korea, she was also heavier and therefore scorned for her inability to replicate the *desired white female* they had fetishized in their culture. Becca was able to make connections to our culture across these similarities and as a result was able to critically analyze how these supposed desired features were in fact "a lie" as was mentioned previously in her responses to white femininity.

Donna also traveled abroad during her early adulthood. This also proved to be a valuable experience for her as she further developed her racial identity and her identity as an educator. She traveled with her family to Africa during her eighth grade year, attended a school of science and math where she was exposed to many students from various countries and cultural backgrounds, and then later to Madagascar as an anthropologist. Each of these experiences outside of the country were integral to her identity development in various ways.

When speaking about her time in Africa, Donna states

> As a family we visited East Africa when I was in 8th grade and we spent three weeks in Kenya. And when I came back, I was different. That was a seminal moment in my life where I was like, you just come face to face with your privilege. Lot of ways. And to have relationships, even like vacation relationships are just kind of cute and fun, like camp relationships, kind of. But to have those relationships with people who were so different from me, I had never had that opportunity before. And that was huge. So I kept kind of looking for the next traveling opportunity, the next challenge, starting about then.

Later, in high school, Donna mentioned that she was able to go on another adventure, this time in the United States, where she interacted closely with people of color.

> And so in high school, I was able to go to, I don't know, an academic kind of boarding camp that they had, and pretty much they took two people from each school district across the state. It would be kind of like what the School of Science and Math runs in the summer, maybe. And it was kids from all over Massachusetts, and one of their goals was to make sure that everyone was represented. So a lot of people who I hung out with were people I had never spent time with before, like kids from Massachusetts who were from all different parts of Mass. There were people who were born in different countries. There were girls who they already knew that they were going to Morehouse and Spellman and figuring out all of this stuff that I had never, ever heard of before. I didn't know what a historic HBCUs was. I had no idea coming from where I had come from. And that was I didn't know what they were until college. Probably not even until my master's program. Yeah. So all of that was, like, huge for me. And then I feel like that was kind of my rebellious time too. Like, we planned to sneak out and go swimming in the pool, and we got caught, and that was, like, the one thing that I've ever done where I got in trouble, that kind of stuff. But, you know, that was another huge moment for me. So I was 16 probably during that time. It was really interesting.

It was during this summer camp where she began to make connections with people of different races and was able to hold conversations about observed differences within a safe environment. She stated that the "safety [she] felt in those relationships may have allowed [her] to be more vulnerable, asking questions and having open conversations about race. She details this experience below:

And that's when I started actually talking about race for the first time with people. And I remember having to talk with this woman, or she was a kid like me, and I was like, we were having an honest conversation because she lived in a blended family and she was really comfortable talking about kind of all of the different nuances with race. And she was used to talking to stupid or, like, uninformed white people. Right. So anyway, she and I had a big talk where I was like, can I describe someone? Like, if I say that guy, it's not narrowing it down. If I say the tall guy, that doesn't narrow it down. Can I say the Black guy? And she's the first person I remember this like it was yesterday. She's the first person who pointed out she's like, yes, but you can't say that guy if he's white and that Black guy if he's Black because that shows that you think that there's a difference. And I was like, of course. That was kind of my first eye opening experience, was having just a couple of really good conversations with somebody,

Moving past college and into early adulthood, Donna traveled again, but this time to Madagascar. Similar to her other experiences with travel, she felt that this experience also shed light once again on her privilege as a white woman in the United States and all that that meant to those who were not white and also not American. Within this trip, also in part because she was largely the minority, she was able to observe and learn about damaging "slash and burn agriculture." She details this account below and how her whiteness affected the people she came in contact with there:

I went to Madagascar and worked for a year. And I was working for a Canadian dude. So we were the only white people where we were working because we were studying forest fragmentation and slash and burn agriculture. So wherever we and there's no roads, right? You have to walk between rice patties and every road… every.. they call them roads,

every path leads to the next person's house, right? And then eventually you get to the edge of the rainforest that they're burning so that they can plant more rice and sweet potatoes to feed their families, right? And so I was I was 25 and I thought of myself as pretty nice and like with it. But you don't live in a developing country as a person..even like at that time I was unemployed…I was living on a dollar a day. A dollar a day got me like two cups of coffee and a croissant in the morning and a delicious dinner at night. It's just different. Just living that was not comfortable at all, but it was more like really coming to terms with my privilege in a way that is visceral and not shame based, but just like the reality is fucked up and that's just all there is to it. And I had these experiences with people where I'd be walking and we'd be going to a new study site or something and the people we worked with were Malaghazi, but they didn't always know everyone in the community. So we'd walk up to their house and the parents were always in the fields, but they would always be kind of the oldest daughter in charge of all the kids in the cooking. While the parents were working and those kids would see me coming, they would gather up the babies and like if they had a pig, pigs are worth a lot. They gather the pig and they would close all of their doors and windows and there's no glass or screen, like they're closing the shutters because they saw me. They had never seen someone so tall and white coming at them and, you know, like, it's on the equator. So like a year on the equator. My hair was pretty bleached blonde. Like I was.. I was very different from folks they were used to, and they were teenagers. Pretty much like, what's happening? Get in the house and they lock themselves in. Probably actually genuinely afraid.

While in Madagascar, as a result of her ability to speak the language, she was able to have "good conversations with people who actually lived there." In these conversations she

learned how white missionaries had visited the area and had built a church for the community. Despite their good intentions, the people there did not feel it was useful. They expressed to her that if the missionaries had asked "[they] could have told them what kind of roofing [was] going to work best and what [they] could fix with materials [they had then]." She expressed that "that kind of conversation, [she] thought [made] a big difference. The leaning in.. building relationship." While these travel experiences were eye-opening for her, it is important to understand that the relationships formed as a result of these experiences were what Audrey emphasized as important to her development. Her ability to speak the language and have frank conversations about outsiders, her ability to ask questions and hold critical conversations about race and difference, and also her observations of how her whiteness impacted individuals in these spaces were what served to open her eyes to her whiteness, her privilege and her ability to create change. In essence, these experiences were key in developing her *critical consciousness* or *double-imagery* as a white, antiracist, female educator. As a result of these relationships and experiences, she also mentioned that she felt better prepared to take action when she began to teach. She knew that building relationships was important and she solidly understood her privilege as a white, educated female in the United States. So when entering the classroom, as an anthropologist turned educator, she was immediately able to apply some of this knowledge to her pedagogical practice.

Audrey also details the impact travel had on her identity development, mentioning both time overseas and time in a larger, more urban city as integral to her racial identity development and her development as an antiracist educator. She describes her time living and teaching in spaces where she was the minority, "where the student body was 100% Black and the staff was probably 90% Black" and only "four of [them] who were white, so that was the first time [she

had been] the minority in any environment really." She describes these years as "very formative." Interestingly, however, her experiences in both Spain and in Washington DC as an educator did not really hit home to her until she returned to her home in Charlotte, NC. She discusses this experiences in depth below:

> I don't think I realized it until I moved back to Charlotte. Like when I moved back to Charlotte, I left college, lived in Spain for two years, went to D. C.…. Where it's very diverse, where I was, worked in a school, where I was the minority. Moved back to Charlotte, and boom, I'm whitewashed by everything I do, the restaurants I go to, the staff at the school I'm working in, the dry cleaner I go to, the grocery store I go to. Everyone is white. And that was the first time that I was, like, just looking around constantly, being like, everyone is white here. Everyone is white here. And I definitely didn't think about it growing up until I moved away and moved back. And then I was back into the same neighborhood. I just bought a house a half a mile from where I grew up. Like, I'm still in this neighborhood. But that was a shock when I got back from DC. For sure. And then I think that was when I really started thinking a lot about antiracism.

Similar to Donna, this observed difference in white spaces versus Black and Brown spaces, and her interaction with people of color for a period of years in those environments where she felt safe and "proved to [her]self that she could live in those spaces," even without initially knowing the language in Spain, "gave her a lot of confidence" and motivated her to become active in her pursuit of equity and antiracism. She explained that she no longer identified with the "scared little white girl walking into a school where everyone expected [her] to fail except for the principal who hired her" as a result of these experiences. Her connection to people of color, and

the subsequent confidence it gave her, moved her from someone who believed all people are deserving and equal to someone who realized that believing in equity wasn't enough; antiracist *action* was necessary.

Tammy also identifies both racialized events that disturbed her, proximity to Black and Brown people in the workplace, and authentic relationships with people of color as catalysts to her identity development and racialized deconstruction. Different from other participants, Tammy actually shared about a time that she caught herself being racist towards another staff member after she began working at a predominantly Black and Brown school. She discussed how she had previously worked, for the majority of her career, in schools that were predominantly white and therefore she had been shielded from evidence of overt racism and difference for the most part. However, towards the end of her career she began teaching in a Title 1 school within her district and her immediate response to working with Black and Brown staff shocked even her. She was over 40 years old at the time. She recounts this experience below:

> like it was the first time that I had been around Black teachers. How is that even possible? I remember this is absolutely freaking horrible. But I remember being in the library, like, that first day where the whole staff there, and I remember looking around, seeing some Black people and thinking, why are the custodians in here now? Oh my God… and I can't believe I told you that because I'm ashamed that I thought it….

Moving from that experience, rather than wallowing in shame and retreating into herself and her white community, she recognized that she had work to do, deconstructing deeply ingrained and previously invisible bias and racism she held towards Black and Brown people. She states the following:

I don't think that I really saw or realized anything until like I started working at Cloverleaf and I had coworkers that were Black and that my kids were… I had more Black and Hispanic than white [kids] in my class. So trying think at the beginning after being mortified at myself for thinking the Black people were custodians…. horrible, I think after that I was kind of questioning myself and trying to grow from that and trying not to be like that, being on teams with other people that were Black. Like my friend Brunner, he ended up moving up to fifth grade. But then after that I taught third grade with a Black woman who is also a Muslim. Which was very cool for me because I'd never known a Muslim person, and she and I had amazing conversations. And she's probably well, besides my assistant, Ms. Higgins, and her and Mr. Brunner, who's a fifth grade teacher, those three were probably the people that I've been closest to that were Black or that were not white. So I guess just like, hearing their experiences and hearing their voice, that's when I started to question things more and tried to be on their side, I guess, if you want to take that, because all that stuff, all the Trump administration, all that shit happened when I was at Cloverleaf. One of the white women that I work with. When we were all in the team meeting and my Black friend was sitting there, we were talking about some of the racist stuff, and I asked her if she was worried about her daughter because her daughter worked in Charlotte. My Black friend and one of the other white teachers goes, we don't have that problem in this country. We just had Obama as a president. I was like, So that really fixed everything for you? I wanted to be like, oh, my God. That's when I was first like, okay, I am in a different place than some of these other white people. Yeah, that's when I was like, oh, my God. There are way more racist people in this country and around me than I ever would have even thought. Yeah, I was just like

and not only that, but I'm like, how can you say that in front of a Black woman who you

say is your friend? Do you not see how hurtful that is?

Reflecting on this experience, I asked Tammy how she changed as a result of this experience.

She replied and stated that she thought

if she said that now, [she] would challenge her. [She] didn't at that time. [She] just

thought in her head, oh, God, here we go, that kind of thing. I think now I would say

you're wrong. We do have a problem with race.

In addition to the relationships mentioned here, she also shared about other relationships she

developed with students and parents she met while teaching that made her whiteness and

privilege visible for one of the first times. She states each of these experiences, where she was

able to listen and hear how her experience as a white female educator were different and more

privileged than their experiences shed new light on ways in which she was able to move through

the world in different ways than they were. She began to realize that racism was still alive and

well within our world, and that even people she was close to (her own family, friends, and church

community) were active participants within it. She states:

And I'm like, I'm crying because of what my friends go through. They have to worry

about their kid being shot just because they're Black. It just blows my mind. And people

and like you said, having friends that won't even admit that, that's something that we

participate in and that we created actually, as white people, we created that shit. It

blows my mind. Blows my mind.

These relationships were crucial for Tammy to understand her privilege and complicity within a

racist system. While these relationships marked the beginning of her journey, she has maintained

these relationships, even after retirement, and has continued to do the work to deconstruct these implicit biases within herself as a result of these experiences.

Gina detailed rich, meaningful relationships with the students in her classroom and critical conversations with Black and Brown educators in her school as catalysts to her racial identity development. First, she mentioned that a Black educator within her school talked to her about how her whiteness impacted the school community, including both students and their families. This conversation was eye-opening for Gina as she had never considered how her race or her appearance shifted the safety her students felt in her classroom previously. She shares the account below:

> I stayed at the same school for 11 years. And those first couple years I remember feeling like, what is wrong? Why do these families like not trust me, like why are they not helping me out when I say that they need to work on this at home, you know, and it really kind of took this sense of one of my one of my mentor teachers actually looked at me she's like, 'Honey, I'm going to tell you some real truth right here like they are so used to in this community…people who look like you talk like you have your college education and all this coming in here to our school. That is, you know, a lot of students from low income homes, a lot of kids who've never left this area in their entire life like they've generations of people who own land here, and this is where their family's from. They're used to people like you coming in and leaving, so why should they trust you?' And so a huge part of it from then on was like, Oh, you're right. Like, it's not about like, they don't have to trust me, right? They don't have to think I'm just gonna stay here. I had to earn that. And if I want my kids to be able to do hard things in my classroom, then I have to

make sure they feel comfortable and safe in my classroom space. And that shouldn't

matter. You know, whether they look like me, or talk like me, you know..

This experience as well as her experience and relationships built with her students were the most

impactful for Gina in her racial identity development. She expresses how even though she had

had experiences with people who were non-white and even though she knew from an early age

that her skin was white, she had no idea what that really meant to the world around her. She even

mentioned that she realized that her honors and AP classes in high school were all white, which

was vastly different from her gym classes, the lunchroom, or the hallway. However, even with

realizing these differences, she did not have the *critical consciousness* at that time to reflect on

why things were that way or what that might mean. She speaks about her experience in the

classroom, when she began to realize what her whiteness meant below:

It wasn't until I started teaching and I feel like then I had this responsibility for a

classroom of students who were largely not white. That and I cared about those

individuals and I like would get offended if anyone wanted to say anything bad about any

one of my students, you know, for whatever reason about them that it was like I had to

start really looking into, you know, how our lived experiences were different in some

cases. And so I think that a lot of that came from like having those that hate versus those

that need to put it like those very loving relationships towards my students who were not

white. And so I could not you know, I couldn't justify certain things when these were just

statistically getting you mentioned before, like how you can like, okay, what is this global

statistic, whatever, it's easy to kind of point things out there. When you think that there's

actual people in your classroom that have names that have voices that you're used to

hearing who come and hugged you and have these like funny stories that we share with

each other. Like I think you just become invested in, in those students in a different way than if they're just people in a building like when I was a student, you know, in a school with people, it's the other students who were different races. There was nothing that forced me to interact in a deep way right with the other classmates, you know, you might have casual conversations, you may end up at the same social events. You know, they might come to your house, but it was like to really like force yourself to have these like I know your family. I know about your background. I know what things make you upset. I know what things make you happy, like you get to have those. I mean, not every teacher does that. But I think you get to have relationships with your students and then you start to notice a little bit more …

Clearly, her relationship and love for her students operated as a pivotal moment for Gina. Understanding her children as human beings who were marginalized by systems and people who did not see them as human or value them the way that she did, was ultimately what opened her mind and heart to move towards antiracist pedagogy and increased studies in ways to dismantle these oppressive norms within educational spaces. However, working alongside Black educators who also held her accountable for showing up and building trust with students and their families, was also an extremely valuable experience in her development as a teacher and an antiracist educator.

Amanda's experience is somewhat different than the rest in that she was actually born in Hawaii and lived the first, formative years of her life in a very diverse, nonwhite space, after which she returned to the mainland which was much less diverse. Reflecting on that time, before their return to the mainland, she recalled her sister getting to play the role of Goldilocks in a play during her childhood. She asked me

And why do you think she got the role of Goldilocks in the little play? Because she was

the only white kid with blonde hair in the school. We were extremely aware of race from

a very early age because all of the people around us did not look like us.

She also explained that the population in her church and community in Hawaii during that time

was made up of many different ethnicities including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and

Black people. She described it as

extremely stratified by which group got to Hawaii. Like, and then the Hawaiians are, you

know at the bottom. And daddy taught us all that. Like, we had so many discussions

about that that he understood. And then throw some military families from Alabama,

that's a Baptist church in Hawaii, and my dad was a master of working with that.

She mentioned that her father, who was a southern Baptist minister, "did not want to come back

to segregation. He wanted to raise his children as minorities. He liked raising us in a minority

environment." However, he chose to come back regardless. Gina explained that his paradigm

then, would be considered antiracist now and that many of his deep, personal friends were also

men of color who also were in ministry. Therefore, her involvement and relationship to and with

people of color was a chord that ran through her entire life, not just the classroom and/or

workplace. Upon her return, and her entry into school, since her parents were supportive of the

desegregation movement within schools, she participated in the busing movement and attended

schools alongside of Black and Brown students regularly from first grade through high school

graduation on a rotation basis, every two years. She ended up going to six different schools

during her K-12 experience as a result. She mentioned that this experience with bussing and

desegregation specifically had a "tremendous impact on [her]. Just huge. Because every day [she

was] going back and forth between these two worlds." She mentioned that even during this

movement to desegregate schools, however, within the building, classes were still segregated.

She stated that even though she felt proud that they were reintegrating the schools, they "were

still being raised in a very white centric bubble even within that." She specifically recalled an

experience she had in kindergarten pertaining to her race and ethnicity:

> I go to kindergarten, and of course, a huge problem.. My identity is I'm from Hawaii,
>
> right. So what do you think my little friends are saying? You can't be. Right. Because you
>
> don't have brown skin and long black hair. And I'm like, you idiots. 1s It is not about
>
> where you live. It is who your parents are.

She also mentioned in the second interview that she thinks that as a result of this experience, as

well as their return to the mainland during the Civil Rights era, right before Dr. Martin Luther

King's assassination, and then her participation in the bussing movement of the 70s, she

> always had a sense of 'you're white and that impacts how you move about in the world
>
> and how you're perceived.' It wasn't fully fleshed right, but it was there. It was there
>
> largely because of the Hawaii experiences. I'm not saying I was a total antiracist and all
>
> that. I'm just saying I knew I was white and that that had something to do with things.

However, she also stated that it

> wasn't until I was teaching in the late nineties and went back to Hawaii just on a trip with
>
> my husband and walked into my dad's church, that I realized how impactful that that
>
> those early years had been on my racial identity. Because number one, I grew up in a
>
> place where I wasn't the majority. I spent my earliest years in a place where I was not the
>
> majority. I spent my earliest years with many Japanese American, Korean American and
>
> Chinese American. Predominantly. It was our friend group. 2s And when I walked into
>
> that church in the late nineties, I realized that that, that rainbow in that room was what the

world was supposed to look like for me. Yet at four and a half, I was taken to this

Nashville, Tennessee, and that, you know, we literally get there in January, and King is

assassinated, you know, in four months? We left in 67 and moved to Nashville in January

68, and King was assassinated in Memphis five months later. I mean, we came back into

the midst of the civil rights movement, right? Like, the craziness of it, all of that. But I

came to the mainland really, for me, for the first time, to this very Black and white world,

right, where I was used to this very multiracial world. And I think that really did a lot in

how I see the world and why I was so comfortable in an incredibly diverse classroom,

like, why I loved that setting even as Gaston County just grew so much more diverse,

even in the years that I was teaching there.

Clearly these experiences where she was the minority and also exposed to a diverse population

had an impact on her. However, as she grew older and began teaching, she also formed deep,

meaningful relationships with people in her school community that also shaped her identity and

helped her form her *critical consciousness* surrounding race, gender, religion, and her

intersecting identity with each of those things. She told a story of her experience building a

relationship with a student in her class that opened a window for her into another world,

expanding her vision and her heart in unexpected ways:

There was a young woman in my first year of teaching, second semester, who was

pregnant, who actually asked to stay after school and talk with me and told me she was

pregnant and really struggling with what to do. We had good conversations about it, and I

just really tried to be supportive with her. We ended up having a shower for the last day

of school, and she reached out to me. She graduated and reached out to me and asked me

to be the godmother of her daughter. And so [her daughter] is now 17, and I don't know

why that never came up in our conversation, because XXX, [her] mom, I used to tell

people, I got a doctorate…. I got a doctorate in XXX from XXX. But I got a master's in

urban education from XXX. XXX was one of the first people I ever knew that was super

comfortable interpreting. We would sit and watch when she was pregnant. She had three

more kids, a couple more really quickly, and then it's pausing and the last one, chance.

Because …and she literally named him XXX. But don't name the poor kid that. But we

would watch Tyler Perry. Not movies, but the old plays. When the Tyler Perry's plays

were sometimes recorded, she knew about how to access some of those. Or maybe she

had a VHS. I can't remember. And we would watch those, and, I mean, I loved them

because it was so much like, old R&B in them, and I would be like, oh, that's so what's

happening there? And she would explain this stuff, and she literally translated Black

culture to me, and she's super comfortable doing that. Her mom at that point, was married

to a white man. There's four of them, and they all have different dads. It's a crazy story.

XXX has, like, 20 something brothers and sisters by the person that's her biological dad.

He was just this blue eyed, light skin Black man in Spartanburg, South Carolina, who

apparently had a lot of children, her family heritage coming up from South Carolina and

the cotton fields and all of that, and then becoming part of, like, the Black community of

Gastonia wasn't the whole Gastonia story, because there's some very prominent Black

families that were very strong in leadership in Gastonia, in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, in the…

and so looking back on it now, I see that. But her story I mean, her grandmother was still

living in the projects at that point. Was so much like most of the kids I was teaching. And

because I was going to pick up [her daughter] from her grandmother's house, her great

grandmother's house apartment, like, I'd get out of the car and in the projects and the kids

would be like, Ms. XXX, what are you doing here? And I'm like, my goddaughter lives out there. Oh, man, it built so, so many bridges. So many bridges. And it's just like it is impossible to tell how much I learned about this whole other side of our town and how people not were living like this poverty, but like this fully fleshed out incredible… Like it's so hard to explain. I mean, yeah, were there economic challenges? Extremely. But were there also these incredible families and cultures and gatherings and parties and support, but then also the hard stuff, like so and so and so's cousin came, who then they realized held him up, this other dude up and. It was so complex, but so rich at the same time. Does that make any sense at all? And I'd never had a window into that. White people don't let get let into that often to see it from the inside. Right. But I cannot tell you how many graduation and parties I went to, how many college showers, weddings that [my husband] and I were the only white people there. And somehow many of my Black students just accepted me and invited [my husband] and I to their family stuff. And I'd get.. somebody would be selling tickets to some chicken fundraiser for whatever, and I'd buy one and not you know, most teachers would buy one. They wouldn't go to the event. You know what I mean? You just give them money? I just learned to go to the event right. And there'd be 250 people in this community center eating chicken. And they'd be like, who are you? And I'd be like, I'm XXX's teacher. Oh, man. Well, welcome. We're glad you're here. I did that over and over. And it was like this whole world that we didn't even know existed just got opened up to me. And it really transformed the way I think that's where the asset framework really began to grow. Right. Because I could see how even though there were all these socioeconomic challenges, there was this vibrant, supportive community that in my situation, was actually dying. Like, you know what I mean? Like,

we weren't …white people are real individualistic. They church hop, and they get mad about it, and Black people do the same thing. They get pissed off about stuff and leave churches. But there's some sense of collectivity…….And then fast forward to, like, when XXX started inviting me to XXX's baby dedication and then to XXX's first birthday party. And then XXX has me at her graduation party. And XXX has me at her graduation party. All of those experiences of being the white person in the room really were a catalyst. Huge catalyst.

Amanda mentions within this story how these experiences, being in true community with Black and Brown people, shifted her perspective to be more asset-based when thinking about communities of color or socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in general. These experiences, both those in Hawaii and throughout her K-12 school experience during the Civil Rights era, as well as her experiences and relationships with people of color later in life after she became an educator, helped her better understand what being white meant, her power and agency as a white woman and educator, and how to be an ally and co-conspirator alongside of her friends of color. These experiences were powerful and moved her from being vaguely aware of her whiteness and perhaps even her power and privilege and into a much deeper understanding of what that meant to people of color around her and what that meant she was responsible for in white spaces moving forward. These experiences empowered Amanda to truly become antiracist in word and deed.

As detailed in each of the above accounts, each participant experienced personal and professional growth as a direct result of their interactions with Black and Brown people. For some participants this revealed their own biases and challenged them to begin the process of self-analysis and introspection, for others these experiences propelled them out of that place of

self-analysis and deconstruction and into conspiratorial action. However, no matter where each participant found themselves on their journey to becoming antiracist, each participant experienced both personal and professional transformation as a result of these interactions and relationships.

It is worth noting here that while this study originally also sought to analyze the intersection of geographical place and white identity, there was little evidence within the data to suggest this as a primary theme in these participants' racial identity development. While their geographical locations may have provided opportunities for participants to engage with people of color, or conversely may have prohibited them from engaging with people of color throughout their early childhood and adolescence, ultimately it appears that regardless of their geographical location, the proximity to people of color was more integral to their racial identity development than their geographical location.

This then indicates that while many of the experiences participants shared about their racial identity development as a result of their proximity or interactions with people of color still conclusively places the burden of critical consciousness and positive racial identity development once again on the shoulders of Black and Brown people. While several of the participants mentioned that they did not feel it was the responsibility of Black and Brown people to educate them on oppression and/or marginalization, there was little acknowledgement by research participants of how these relationships, while important to their own development, were still a result of the willingness of Black and Brown people to potentially place themselves in vulnerable and perhaps even dangerous spaces in order for this development to occur. In this way, these women *used* Black and Brown people to learn about themselves, their whiteness, and white supremacy.

Lensmire (2017), details a story where a white mother does something similar when running into a Black photographer in the mall. He discusses how the child saw the man's Black hands and immediately associated their darker color with dirt. In an effort to help her white daughter understand that this is a hurtful misconception, the white mother encouraged her daughter to touch the Black photographer to see that he was not in fact dirty, but rather just a different color or hue. While this was done out of a desire to "help her daughter become the kind of white person who recognized the fundamental equality of all peoples- that there were no 'dirty people in the world[...]' [It] is significant that she *used* this [B]lack person to do this" (Lensmire, 2017, p. 67) since she did not humanize him by pausing to ask his permission or even acknowledging that he might not want to participate in this educational experience for her white daughter. Perhaps then, with further deconstruction of white socialization and acculturation, white women might begin to recognize and more deeply reflect on the burden placed on Black and Brown people as a result of these relationships and interactions and begin to move with more respect and personal agency surrounding cross-racial relationships and interactions thereby providing the opportunity for those Black and Brown people around them to maintain their own dignity and humanity as they develop their own critical consciousness.

Education and Agency

Education was also a pervasive theme throughout this study. Each and every participant mentioned the impact that specific books, classes, opportunities for reflection, and/or specific projects and assignments had on their identity development, especially surrounding their attitude towards themselves as raced individuals and their attitude towards people of color and systems of oppression. 6 out of 8 participants mentioned specific authors and/or books that they had read prior to their personal experiences with people of color that provided retrospective insight for

them as they encountered challenges or reflected on their practice and pursued a deeper understanding of their sociopolitical place in the world. Of the two who had not previously read books on oppression, emancipation, social theory, social justice, or equity, they mentioned that they began to read and research on their own as a result of their experiences. Additionally, each participant within this study has also obtained a graduate degree. Perhaps the value that these participants placed on knowledge, truth, and also on individual reflection as well, since that often plays a large role in higher education programming, especially within education, made them more open to question not just the world and systems around them, but also themselves and their sociopolitical place in those systems. Perhaps because of their social location as highly educated, white women they were elevated to a social status within white circles that allowed them more privileges and thus more agency and personal power to question white hegemonic norms, leveling the playing field between white females and white men, and thus also leading them to question the associated constructs of racial difference and systemic oppression.

In addition to obtaining higher education and being well-read on topics related to social theories, social justice, race, and equity, each of these participants indicated that as a result of reflection on either their instructional practice or reflection on their intersecting identities, they made concrete, tangible changes. This indicates that each participant also felt empowered to act on aspects identified either within themselves, their social circles, or within their school environments as an agent of change. Where this sense of agency came from, whether it be from their extensive educational background, their childhood experiences, or their understanding of themselves as individuals with power (either associated with their race, social positioning, or education) is unknown. However, for these women, education was a powerful catalyst because it was also coupled with a sense of personal agency and responsibility.

Table 4.2

Findings: Research Question 2

Themes	Sub-themes
Humanizing Approach to Students	Relational approach to students Co-construction of knowledge Asset-based mentality Importance of self-reflection Extension beyond race to include other identities and intersections of self
Rigor and Relevance	Phenomenon/Inquiry Based Instruction Increased rigor Incorporation of movement, verve, communal learning, student choice, voice, and representation

The first theme identified when considering Research Question 2: How do the varied intersections of white identity inform teacher experiences, philosophical and pedagogical paradigms, and instructional practice amongst self-identified antiracist educators? was that these women, who self-identified as antiracist educators had embraced a humanizing approach to the students in their classrooms. The findings revealed that each of these participants shifted their paradigm from a standardized, one-size fits all approach to education and lesson-planning and moved to embrace the students in their classrooms as individuals who brought with them their own socio-political histories, cultures, languages, and strengths to the classroom. As part of a humanizing paradigm, research participants also extended their antiracist action and belief system beyond racial difference to include students from other marginalized communities including students with learning disabilities, students from lower socioeconomic status, students who identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community, immigrant students, and multilingual students. As a result of their humanizing approach to their students, research participants also frequently reflected and interrogated their instructional, behavioral, and social-emotional

practices to make learning relevant and responsive to their students' success. Through this interrogation, research participants began to understand that they were learning from the students as well. Therefore, rather than the classroom operating from a *banking model* paradigm, where knowledge and content are deposited into students, these educators moved to embrace a pedagogical paradigm of co-constructed knowledge. This shift gave students agency and increased voice and choice within the classroom.

The second theme identified when considering Research Question 2: How do the varied intersections of white identity inform teacher experiences, philosophical and pedagogical paradigms, and instructional practice amongst self-identified antiracist educators? was rigor and relevance. These teachers, as a result of their antiracist paradigm, did not believe that students of color or students who operated outside of white, hegemonic norms learned better through direct, explicit instruction, but rather the opposite, through rigorous and relevant coursework. Participants all spoke about instructional strategies that engaged students through problem-solving, inquiry, and phenomenon-based learning. Despite the fact that their classrooms might have been, at times controlled chaos, participants all mentioned intentionally creating spaces where students felt safe to work in collaborative groups, take risks, make mistakes, and work through content in a supportive environment. The goals in the classroom also shifted from getting the right answers to understanding the process and developing transferable skills across content and life challenges.

Humanizing Approach to Students

Each participant spoke at length about the importance of understanding that the students in their classrooms were humans, with their own backgrounds, challenges, personalities, cultures, and characteristics. Rather than engaging with students through set systems, procedures, and

expectations each participant spoke about the importance of getting to know their students and making adjustments to their content and instructional delivery to support their students as whole people. Participants did not view their students as test scores or as problems to be fixed. Rather, these participants viewed their students as individuals who had strengths within their culture and within their content areas that needed to be explored and supported. Examples of this paradigm are sprinkled throughout all interviews and written responses from each participant. Some examples of this humanizing paradigm are included below:

Rachel details below what being an antiracist educator means to her:

> I feel like it's a mixture. So I am no expert in antiracist teaching per se, but I would say that you kind of dip your toe in it to begin with. Like, you start with culture responsible practices, and then you kind of step a little further and you go to cultural thinking practices. Then you evaluate your role in those. Because I feel like you critique yourself as long as you listen to you too. So you rationalize. Like you understand your placement and how your life experiences and your perceptions and education have led to a certain baseline in your life. And then you start to sit back, you understand the curriculum that you're given and how that makes you fall on it, and how much leeway you have in the curriculum given to you and what can you do to supplement that? And how can you present it in a way to your children that is sustaining for them and adapting what you can to meet them where they are? And when you have things that are dictated at a different level, maybe how can you use yourself as an advocate to make changes that are to be harder for you to make in the classroom and more of like a systemic issue. But I think understanding your whiteness and your place is ground zero.

Within this statement, it becomes evident that Rachel has not only identified the ways in which she has adjusted her instruction to meet the needs of the students in her classroom, but she has also identified the ways in which her own social location impacts her students, her classroom, and her perception of the curriculum. She goes on to say that her "strongest connection, [she] feels like, between [her] identity and [her] teaching philosophy was the fact that [she] was nonreligious." This further supports how her critical consciousness or *conscientization*

> translated into different sets of morals and kind of a different compass [within her classroom]. And [how it felt] like that made its way in [her] classroom and kind of like [her] classroom practices more than anything else, um, just because everything kind of came back to the students, the way that everything I did had a reason, and it had a logical reason. And most of those focused on how that impacts the students. So whether that be, like, the classroom environment or just relationships within students' lives.

Different from teachers who operate within a deficit mindset, Rachel was focused on what worked for her students and on how she could maximize her own background knowledge and her students' background knowledge in order to create classroom practices, procedures, curriculum, and instruction that they could engage with and provided a logical path forward for each student to grow. She continued by saying that

> we can't continue to do the same thing. Um, we see it, too, in our curriculum. A lot of this curriculum is very stale. It's tried and true and what they continue to use. Um, but I feel like also in the classroom, like, when I continue to teach using, um, what we had to use, but supplementing it in a way that supports where your learners are or their learning styles, which I feel like is what you've just touched on. Um, but just adapting to meet

your learners and to engage them, because some of this stuff is so boring. There's nothing

to it.

Similarly, Mary echoed this sentiment when she mentioned planning culturally sustaining

practices for planning instruction (Paris & Salim, 2017):

I guess definitely my practices, um, have become more culturally sustaining. I'm

definitely trying to be more aware with even planning stations, even doing PD, and make

sure that I'm not just targeting one teacher's classroom or targeting just your middle, your

average white student that we're really looking at it from. Um a multicultural lens or

really looking at what practices we're using or culturally sustaining, even if we're not

calling the PD culturally sustaining, that's always in the back of my mind when I'm

planning …

While each participant emphasized the importance of building relationships with

students, making curriculum relevant and engaging, and building off of student assets, each

participant also focused heavily on flexibility as part of their humanizing, pedagogical practice.

Through these conversations it became evident that for teachers to meet the needs of their

students, it was important to not just know them as whole people, but to also be willing and able

to adjust their instructional plans in order to address their evolving needs. These teachers

mentioned being flexible to meet the social and emotional needs of their students as well as their

academic needs. Each participant understood that the students who came into their classrooms

each day were unique individuals who were fully human, with daily experiences, mood swings,

challenges, and emotions similar to their own.Therefore, what worked for one student, might not

work for another and what worked one day for a student, might not work on another day with

different circumstances. Remaining open, communicative, and honoring students as fully human

even on difficult days was not only necessary for their success as teachers, but was also necessary to their antiracist paradigm and practice. Below, Mary shares about the importance of remaining open to students and being flexible:

> So I just believe being more educated, like, always keeps my mindset open to wanting to constantly reform and change, going to try new things. Um, and reading research more also kind of drives my philosophy now, because, for instance, like, one school I was coaching was like I do, we do.. . And then I was like, this is not how you need to teach this. I just became more passionate and open because not just that I've read it, I've seen it. And, um, I guess it's just led me to understand the philosophy more as, like, a whole circle of everybody, all the stakeholders working together, instead of just me being in my isolated bubble as the teacher, if that makes sense. I guess definitely my practices, um, have become more culturally sustaining. I'm definitely trying to be more aware with even planning stations, even doing PD, and make sure that I'm not just targeting one teacher's classroom or targeting just your middle, your average white student that we're really looking at it from.

Mary and 7 go on to discuss the need for differentiation within the classroom:

Mary:

> We're talking about differentiating. But I feel like as far as people, as far as teachers that are more racist, um, and not just racist, but just stuck in this middle class, like, teaching to the middle, like, teaching to the test that they don't realize maybe that is kind of having that isolated view, and they're not giving all students the best instruction. Um, and I try to

really steer clear of that view, um, because I just think it sticks kids in a box. And if kids

don't understand that one method um, today I did this sheet problem with the algebra, and

I pushed the teachers even to explore it in two ways. And it's like I gave them all things

kids would use, like farm erasers and cities, the strips and post it notes. And it's like if we

just give them a worksheet or, uh, we don't always give them the tools they need either.

We think it's just what we're saying, but a lot of it is the tools we give them, and we don't

give them. We just say hands on, but we don't give them the tool. They need to really

explore and learn a lot of times. So I just feel they're so much involved in really, truly

making sure we're hitting all of their cultural differences because the way they interact

with each other, the way they might talk, the way they might ask questions. All students

need you know, they need you to be aware of that. They …need to be aware if they're

more quiet and timid and that's their culture. There's a couple of [multilingual] quiet kids

and they literally will just look at me now, but they won't raise their hand to get attention.

But if you go to them, they will point to their work and they'll listen to you explain it and

they'll change it.

Gina:

Like, so certain assignments that I want to give, how can this assignment just be taken

home and done nearby every child in my classroom? Are there ways that I can add some

choice or diversity to the way the assignment can be done so that it can allow for kids that

have different perspectives to all be able to approach the project versus saying, I'm just

going to do it this way and just assume everybody can do it? Because that's not

necessarily the case. Or even just looking at the way that everybody is going to interpret

different things that happen around us differently.

Other examples of participants mentioning relationship, flexibility, and differentiation as part of

their humanizing and antiracist paradigm are as follows:

Becca:

 …but for school…. I'm here for you as a human, and I'm here for you for school. You

can come to me about that at any time. Do you want to do that? Are you going to do that?

That's kind of a you thing. And my job is to stay in relationship with you and to make this

option look attractive and feasible….. Everybody has a right to be in the room. My job is

to make you feel like you want to be in the room. So everything else, it doesn't mean I'm

going to lie to you, right? But everything else, it has to be filtered through that. If it

doesn't contribute to that, it's contributing to the other side. And the other side doesn't

need any more weight on it right now… But that was sort of the frame is at the end of the

day, the immovable rock is everybody has a right to be here. And then the next layer of

responsibility is it's actually my job to make them want to be here as much as they can or

to think that I really want them here. Which meant also my affect as a teacher changed.

My management changed, like, how you engage with content changes and curriculum

changes I am supposed to make. Not like. Oh, Captain, my Captain. But you're supposed

to want to be here. Right. And you're supposed to be getting, like, nutritious content

while you're here.

Donna: Like as an educator, I don't think that you can be antiracist without being trauma informed. I don't think that you can come in in a reactive personal space and treat anyone well. You know what I mean? Having an integrated and inclusive environment has to start with the teacher and building it has to be on purpose. I guess all of the ways that I teach, I see them all as going together because that's how I've grown. So using inquiry and SEL, all of it just has to go together to help kids grow up into good humans. I don't know.

Audrey:

 Every behavior that's happening is directly related to a trauma that I didn't experience as a kid. So what am I doing to make sure that I'm taking care of their basic needs, but also helping to educate myself about what's the best thing to do for kids who are experiencing different things?

I think people.. I hope.. they recognize that I build relationships with kids. I think that's something across the board that if you ask people, they would say, that no matter the color, the normal norms, we got some weird kids here. (laughs) I build relationships with kids, and I think that's recognized. I think classroom community is recognized.

Tammy:

I tried to make it a safe space, too, with the people that were in my classroom and, like, their parents, because we I guess, like, you could tell the people that really didn't really care if I was white, just that I cared about their kid and that knew that I loved their kid. And I would go to a lot of sports games. Like, one of them a lot of my boys were playing

basketball and and football, so I go to their games and watch them, and I think their parents were kind of like, all right, that's cool. She really cares about my kids.

Gina:

Like, yeah, you maybe came into my classroom, you didn't know how to do that, but let's put the right materials in your hands. Let's set the right conditions up. Let me be here to support you without doing it for you to kind of make that happen. And so how I'm going to try to bridge that somewhat like, how am I going to make it very clear from the very minute that these kids are going to enter my room that I am open and warm? And I want to learn from you and with you as families. And I'm going to have to continue to keep proving that. And so then it's just recognizing too when certain things happen. But what I started to realize, too, is that a lot of my students, particularly my Black students in my classrooms, were very used to working together, together on everything. They grew up with each other from forever. They call people their auntie or their cousin who really was not a blood relative to them because there was just this very community feel. And so they were not getting up out of their seat to just, like, socialize. They were legitimately trying to work together and help their friends that they could see was struggling on an assignment. And so it was more like the last few years in my classroom, then that's just going to be part of what we do. That's just going to be part of our practice then is like, when we get to these certain parts of the assignment, how can we build that collaboration automatically in there?

 I think one of the biggest things for me is that it's caring about who my students are as humans and making sure that the instruction and the way that we teach fits them as

humans and not just these are my standards I have to teach and it doesn't matter who's

sitting in my classroom. I have to know those children in my classroom and I have to

make sure that they feel comfortable with me…

….focusing on student centered lesson planning, like focus on students strengths. So

when you look at that work sample, sure, they may have gotten the wrong answer, but

let's look and see what they did that was correct. That showed correct thinking, because

we want to build from that strength. So part of it is promoting that asset based approach

to them planning student-centered lessons…

Donna highlights an interesting and often less frequently discussed concept when

discussing building relationships with students. She mentioned that

[w]e teach who we are. Right? So all of that has to influence my teaching and making

sure, like, just watching everything with that equity eye and noticing student reactions or

teacher reactions like, that eye roll and you're like, wait a second, something is not right. I

usually can figure it out, but just being sensitive to that is huge, I think. And the other

piece of it is being able to share a lot of my personal experiences with people, with my

students, and just being who I am.

Donna, like the other participants, understands that in order to have authentic relationships with

students, she had to understand the ways in which her own identity impacted her classroom

environment, instruction, and her interactions with the students in her classroom. Therefore,

building relationships with students meant that they got to know her in addition to her getting to

know them. Mary and 8 also mention this when they discuss co-constructing knowledge with

their students. See below:

Mary:

> I guess I'm very constructivist approach to education. Over the years, I've kind of
>
> broadened my view from just being, like, from liking hands on learning to understand
>
> that even though I have a constructivist opened mindset. Right. I believe more in open
>
> ended types of assessment. I believe in more like discovery-based learning, but I more
>
> developed that into challenge rigor and real life, like relevant learning for kids, I think is
>
> more important.So for some kids, that might need to be a little direct, but I think learning
>
> should be exciting, engaging, real and relevant.

Amanda:

> I think I always had this philosophy, but when I read Freire during my graduate at work,
>
> it just really solidified it that we co-learn, that teachers co-learn with their students, that
>
> the whole process of learning is very both constructivist in nature, but it's also very social
>
> and it involves both teachers and students. And so for me, education is a lifelong process.
>
> But then when we start thinking about education and being an educator, educators really
>
> joining your students in the process of learning….. So figuring out that balance between
>
> you're constantly learning, you're constantly growing, but you've also got to have this
>
> moral center. That grounds you? And how do you put those two things together? That
>
> doesn't become a rigidity thing, but it's like, nope, I'm not going to be a chameleon to fit
>
> into this space, because that goes against these grounding principles. I think I spent

probably 20 years living much more that chameleon lifestyle. And then what the Trump

era did was it just was like, no, that isn't true to my core. So my core identity as someone

who is antiracist LGBTQ, affirming, moving now, really thinking a lot more now about

things like organizing and unions. I was very anti union for the first 20 years in this

profession. Like, beginning to really wrestle with those things, like commitment to

everyone, having the right to food and shelter and a decent salary, literally a living wage.

Like those core commitments. But then around this notion that we're constantly growing

and just letting myself grow. Right. And being transparent about that with

students….And just really being comfortable, being vulnerable with students that's

become, I think, even a whole new part of my educator identity. Now, that's really

important to letting particularly my students of color understand how I'm learning from

them and really making sure I'm setting up instructional situations where I can flip that

and allow them to teach me.

…it made me more able to learn from my students. It made me much more aware that

they were bringing something to the table that I needed to learn from.

 I think everybody has to do with what's authentic to them. I think the danger points is

particularly white women, sometimes white men. This idea of I'm going to let kids

express themselves in this way and now I have been culturally relevant.

A key point discussed by participants as they are discussing how antiracist pedagogy

affects their instructional practice is worth pointing out here as well. The concept of choosing a

side within the sociopolitical systems of community, school, education, and learning is key to

these *safe spaces* they intend to create. The majority of participants, similar to Kendi's discussion

on antiracism (2019), mention that there is no neutral ground within their classrooms. Either

instruction and the classroom environment are contributing to honoring the humanity of students

and assisting them in growing as both people and students, or they are harming the students both

academically and socially emotionally. Becca details this below:

> And there's no neutrality, right? It either helps or it hurts. So my whole thing about,
> like, nurses and teachers would say it's like, it's very self-flagellating, but we're very
> loud about it, right? If I'm in here and I'm doing this because this is what I'm about, if I
> identify something that hurts, I should be attempting to minimize it, if not reverse it…..
> So anything that's not not in service of that is in service of something else. Right.

Within this understanding or *conscientization* of her own identity and how her identity intersects

with her students who are also fully human and have similar multiplicities of identity she was

able to understand that her actions within the classroom either reinforced damaging systems and

stereotypes or created space for students to be themselves and take risks. Becca explicitly

mentioned that this was at times as simple as explicitly stating or modeling what types of

behaviors, ideology, and attitudes would be accepted within her classroom, in order to create and

preserve a safe space for all her students below:

> But I realized the second year, I was like, oh, if I don't do it, they're not going to do it. I
> can't just say, Spanish belongs in here. You have to do it. It's the same way with, like, I
> can't say it's okay to take a break if you're upset and then rage through shit when I'm
> upset. You have to actually model all of it. I was like, oh, okay. And that started the
> process of in a really chaotic turnaround environment, trying to do that in all kinds of
> ways, trying to do that in terms of, like, language stuff, SEL stuff, talking about difficult

topics, talking about race and gender and identity. And so each year, it was like, oh, okay, if I announce on the first day that I don't really fuck with homophobia…the amount of homophobic shit that I need to even address drops by 80%. Like, oh, if I address on the first day, that if I'm like, you're literally not allowed to do stuff that makes people feel like they can't try. And if I address you, I get it..that's your cousin, and that's how you all joke and roasting and DA DA DA DA. And I'm sarcastic, too, and I totally get it. And, like, if it can make somebody feel like they can't try, we're just not doing anything here. I'm not judging you. I don't feel any kind of way about it. It's just not what we're doing. And so started to kind of tease that stuff out and get a little bit more of a clue every single year I stayed in that building… that's the building I was in six years.

Donna also recognizes the importance of creating a safe space for students within her classroom stating "that if kids feel valued and safe, they're going to learn better. So I'm going to do that." She goes on to discuss oppressive systems within schools and the classroom and the need to intentionally work to dismantle them in order to create these safe spaces, indicating again, similar to Becca, that there is no neutrality within her classroom if it is meant to be a safe space:

> So systems, it's like the it's the way everything is set up right around white expectations and middle class expectations. And so, like, educational systems are set up so that we have to celebrate Black History Month, right? Whereas if we were celebrating people's histories, ethnicities and values all the time, we wouldn't have to make one group visible just for one particular amount of time. Right. So I feel like that's a good example of that, like, really surface level understanding of difference from the white status quo. And it's bullshit. I don't know if I can say bullshit, but it is……And then since I know, especially

since I teach these kids for three years, if a student comes in saying, this happened to me, I can say, okay, I hear what you're saying. It sounds like you're feeling this. What is the basis and what do we know that are the facts behind your experience? And then we can make a plan together to kind of, like either act to dismantle something or to protect the kid from something or teach the kid to act differently. Whatever we need to do next.

Finally, as a result of their engagement with their students as people, with their own thoughts, feelings, personalities, histories, and experiences, research participants also extended their concept of antiracism beyond race to other marginalized populations. Participants explicitly mentioned other marginalized groups of students within their interviews that they felt were frequently denied opportunities to engage in a safe space within supportive and rigorous classrooms and detailed ways in which they had intentionally destigmatized their identities. Generally speaking, data collected indicates that the humanization of students as a result of teachers developing their own positive racial identity and *critical consciousness* extended opportunities for all students to learn and grow as students and individuals.

Rigor and Relevance

In addition to a humanizing paradigm, and perhaps as a result of it and the coinciding belief that students in their classrooms were capable of learning and brought with them strengths and tools to do hard things, another identified theme amongst participants within this study was the importance of rigorous and relevant instruction. Not only did these educators hold high expectations for their students, but they expected them to succeed in completing difficult, inquiry-based and phenomenon based tasks. Rather than providing direct, explicit instruction, followed by a worksheet for independent practice, these educators recognized that their students

benefited from being actively engaged and involved in their learning and provided ample opportunities for them to do so. This theme is mentioned by every participant within the study, however, I have only included a few quotes to illustrate these expectations below:

Mary Example:

> …. it's not just hands on, but more inquiry based tasks. I love that I got really into the three act video tasks. And because they bring in real life in any open task, right, because, um, or any inquiry based things without numberless problems. I mean, I've done all kinds of different things to really open up, what do you call it? Not open up, but make an entry point. Tasks give higher, um, um, low floor, high ceilings. With a new article that came out. That's what they do for students with, um, language difficulties and students of other colors to give them all the same, you know, four to enter on, just like they want to today. Whether you're giving them an equitable, whether you're giving them choice of how they solve it, even if they can't solve the whole problem, all students are given a chance to enter mathematics and enter the learning. So then you can guide the instruction from there. Whereas if you don't give them opportunities and you only give them, like, this low level worksheet, they're never going to do the hard problems. So it is just a whole philosophy that I definitely feel it's more, um, task based instruction is definitely more culturally relevant.

Amanda Example:

> I think everybody has to do with what's authentic to them. I think the danger points is particularly white women, sometimes white men. This idea of I'm going to let kids express themselves in this way and now I have been culturally relevant. That's where I

think it's dangerous. Because what Ladson Billing saw in Dreamkeeper Teachers was, number one, high expectations for all students. Right. Number two, frank teaching in a way that affirms and views their culture, the culture of your students, and that can be tons of different groups through an asset lens. Right.

Gina Example:

But then with the inquiry piece for me, it was always really important that I didn't want my students to feel like they walked away from my classroom, having just learned memorized a bunch of like, procedures and facts, you know, and I always say that I don't really care how they perform as much at the end of grade test, I want that eighth grade teacher down the hall to feel like oh, I know I've had a XXX kid because they know this material with this, like natural curiosity and this way to attempt problems in a creative way because that's what matters to me more is that I was able to develop skills in them that stayed, which are things like problem solving, being able to, you know, develop a creative path to a solution.. that to me was important, because that applies to their lives more than…

Tammy Example:

Asking questions or encouraging higher thinking or encouraging going beyond and doing something different. I tried really hard to be aware of the stereotypes.

Audrey Example:

I think high expectations are recognized that I set high expectations because I want every kid to leave my classroom on grade level, and I know they're going to, even though they did not come in on grade level. And I expect every kid to do it. I tell them

even the kid that slept for 2 hours, like you missed our entire literacy block and I know

you need to sleep, but now we need to do this, so we're going to do it during lunch. I

don't know. I would say those are the main things.

Conclusions

This dissertation was guided by two research questions. The first question was "How do

intersections of identity shape the way self-identified antiracist educators view themselves in the

classroom?" Four specific intersections of identity were identified within the course of this study

as being integral in these self-identified antiracist educators' racial identity development. These

included gender, religion, proximity to people of color, and education. Each of these

intersections, and their overlapping nuances proved to create points of tension that created

opportunity for self-analysis and personal growth for the participants in this study. For the

women in this study, understanding that gendered norms and expectations for them were

limiting, often erroneous, and at times founded in racist, patriarchal norms assisted these women

in further understanding themselves as complicit within an inequitable system and encouraged

them to question other systems through a critical lens. This was defined as *critical whiteness*

feminism. This tension, created by erroneous or even somewhat oppressive, gendered and raced

norms in essence assisted these women in forming their own *critical consciousness* or

double-imagery.

Similarly, religion appeared to be a common intersection for research participants. For

some participants, religion was not something they subscribed to even as a child and therefore

did not participate in as an adult. However, for others who did grow up in a religious household,

religion was deeply embedded in their identity. Interestingly, this study revealed that even the

women who grew up within organized religion, chose to walk away from these spaces as their critical consciousness surrounding their gender and race were further explored. Similarly, and perhaps deeply intertwined and embedded within religious practices and expectations, gender and the expected roles within their religious beliefs and religious communities played a large part in their rejection of organized religion and religious community. Proximity to people of color, whether as students in their classroom, negative racialized experiences, deep friendships, or colleagues at work, was also another identified theme. Each participant mentioned how their understanding of themselves as white, their complicity within inequitable systems, and their desire to grow as people and as antiracist educators was spurred on as a result of their close proximity and experience with people of color. Often, in these relationships or because of them, participants began to ask questions of themselves or of the world around them as a result of these interactions, further developing their critical consciousness and therefore pushing them further towards antiracist ideology.

Finally, the last identified theme that answered research question 1 was education. Each and every research participant valued education and had obtained at least one graduate degree, several of them obtaining more than one. During their educational experiences, they referenced impactful books, resources, projects, and opportunities for reflection and dialogue around challenges in the classroom as well as inequity, race, and systems of oppression. These learning experiences, whether formal or informal, also provided opportunities for self-analysis and reflection on their instructional practice, also once again supporting their critical consciousness and in turn their racial identity.

The second research question answered within this study was: How do the varied intersections of white identity inform teacher experiences, philosophical and pedagogical

paradigms, and instructional practice amongst self-identified antiracist educators? This question was answered by two identified themes. First, self-identified antiracist educators shifted towards a student-centered, humanizing paradigm as a result of their identification as antiracist and their understanding of individuals as part of varied sociopolitical systems, places, and experiences. Participants indicated that knowing the students they teach and adjusting their instructional practice to maximize their students strengths, celebrate their culture, and provide space for their voice was the most effective way to meet the needs of diverse student populations. Additionally, within this paradigm, these educators also expressed the importance of knowing the sociopolitical histories of student culture and ethnicities, so as to best understand barriers to learning and provide adequate support. Another theme identified as an answer to this second research question is the importance of rigorous and relevant instruction and practice. Research participants indicated that students, even struggling students, benefit from inquiry-based and phenomenon-based learning and through problem-solving and engagement with the content, rather than direct, explicit instruction. Research participants also rejected individualistic ways of teaching and learning and encouraged communal problem-solving.

Chapter 5- Discussion

The final chapter provides a summary of the findings of this study through the lens of Critical Whiteness Studies, *Critical Whiteness Feminism*, Critical Theory, Critical Race Structuralism, and double-imagery. This chapter also discusses the findings of this study in light of the previously discussed literature and scholarship. The comparison of these findings to existing research and scholarship serves to highlight alignments and areas where this study diverges from previous literature or sheds new light on as yet undiscovered or undiscussed findings related to white identity development and the implications for diverse classrooms nationally.

First, this chapter will review the purpose of the study and chapters 1-4. The next section will focus on how this study compares and contrasts with existing research and literature. Then, the following section will focus on recommendations for key stakeholders, both researchers and practitioners, related to the study's findings. Finally, the last section will discuss implications for future research and will conclude with a final summary.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the ways that some white, female educators make sense of their whiteness, and by default their complicity within systems of whiteness and oppression in educational spaces to form a more positive white identity. This study explored the ways that white teachers understand and deconstruct intersections of their whiteness in order to become culturally relevant and make a positive impact, rather than a negative impact on students of color in their classrooms. Since the third wave of Critical Whiteness Studies "sees whiteness as a multiplicity of identities that are historically grounded, class specific, politically manipulated and gendered social locations that inhabit local custom and national sentiments within the context of the new 'global village'" (Twine & Gallagher, 2008, para. 6), and this study examined

the intersections of class, gender, religion, and place of eight self-identified, white, female, antiracist educators, it was perfectly situated within the third wave of CWS. While there was much research on whiteness, especially the role of whiteness in the classroom and the associated impact of racial mismatch and implicit bias within the classroom, and also some research surrounding white racial identity development devoid of intersectionality, there was previously no existing research examining the multiplicities of white racial identity in self-identified antiracist educators. This study served to fill the gap within the research and began to analyze how sociopolitical systems potentially serve to replicate and reinforce whiteness and racial bias through intersections of racial identity, and also potentially identify how those intersections can be disrupted in such a way as to foster *critical consciousness* and antiracist activism within classrooms nationally. In response to this identified gap, the following two questions were developed:

- How do intersections of identity shape the way teachers view themselves in the classroom?

- How do the varied intersections of white identity inform teacher experiences, philosophical and pedagogical paradigms, and instructional practice amongst self-identified antiracist educators?

These questions were developed to guide the study and provide greater understanding on how intersections of class, gender, religion, and place impact the racial identity development of white women, specifically white women educators who self-identify as antiracist.

Chapter 2 explored the literature surrounding whiteness by synthesizing the strands of literature surrounding racial identity models, white socialization, white female socialization, and whiteness in the classroom. Both the Nigrescence Model (Cross, 1971) and Helms Racial

Identity Model (Helms, 1993) were reviewed, as they detailed specific steps or phases towards

understanding and accepting one's race and eventual move towards activism, whether Black or

white. However, both of these models failed to address the multiplicities and associated

intricacies of identity through intersectionality, thereby ignoring the actual lived experiences that

inform individuals of their race, gender, and sociopolitical location. Thandeka's work (1999) on

white socialization in early childhood detailed how white children were taught at a young age to

ignore their natural inclination towards friendship and comradery across racial lines as a means

of maintaining white supremacy in order to maintain racial purity. Within her work she discusses

how white socialization is damaging to not just people of color, but is also injurious to white

people, especially the psyches of white children. Miller's work (2015) on white socialization

from early childhood onward was also reviewed, detailing how over-representation of white

people in all forms of media further serves to normalize whiteness and inform young children

how whiteness operates in society as a hegemonic norm. Moving into adulthood, Miller and

Lensmire (2021) discuss how the process of *becoming white* is fueled by stereotypes of people of

color to propel social mobility and access to white femininity. Hancock & Warren (2017)

generally take up whiteness and gender, as it relates to the classroom. While they discuss the

invisibility of whiteness within educational spaces despite the gendered and racial dominance

within the field, their work does not delve deeply into the intersections of race and gender within

these spaces. Seidle and Hancock (2011) also discuss the need for white, female educators to

develop a sense of double-imagery, the ability to see themselves as raced and understand what

their race means within educational spaces, specifically spaces where there are Black and Brown

children as a means of providing a more equitable education for all. However, like Hancock and

Warren's (2017) previous work, their work also does not discuss intersectionality of gendered,

racial identity. Lillian Smith (1949; 1994) does engage the concept of White Christianity and race, detailing how Christianity served to create a barrier via Jim Crow laws between Black and white people, thereby creating guilt and shame within the fractured psyche of white people as a byproduct. Her work emphasized, like Thandeka (1999), the negative impact that operationalized white supremacy has on both white and Black populations. While her work was meaningful, and considered cutting edge at the time, there is little in the way of empirical research on the impact of Christian ideology in the classroom.

White female socialization including ways in which gendered norms and expectations were reinforced through religious and moral codes to maintain racial purity and simultaneously place women in a position of complete subservience to their white, male counterparts as well as to white supremacy as a whole was also reviewed (hooks, 1985; 2015; Miller, 2021; Watson, 2013; Deliovky, 2010; Jupp et al., 2020). Furthermore, beauty standards for white women (Cain, 2008; Bourdieu & Bennett, 1979; 1984; 2015; Goldenberg, 2010; Shilling ,1991; Chithambo & Huey, 2013), to be pale, thin, and properly dressed were also reviewed. Kenny's work (1961; 2000) then postulated that white women were not born white, but were rather acculturated and socialized into being white as their morality, physical appearance, obligation to their male counterparts, and sexuality were all implicitly and explicitly taught, only then permitting white women access to the shared privileges of the white man. Again, like Thandeka's (1999), Miller's (2015), and Smith's (1994) work, each of these researchers and social theorists contribute meaningfully to the discussion of whiteness and white identity. However, they do not discuss white identity or white, gendered identity within the classroom, nor do they examine other intersections of their identity development such as class, religion, and place.

Finally, both McIntyre (1997) and Lea and Sims (2008) explore ways in which antiracism or critical consciousness could be developed in white, female educators. However, McIntyre (1997) did not uncover the means by which to motivate middle class, white women to move towards activism or antiracism within their classrooms or educational spaces. Lea and Sims (2008) experienced some success in using art therapy and critical dialogue to establish *critical consciousness* amongst white, female educators. However, there was still no discussion as to how this occurs naturally, through socialization and acculturation, without outside interference. Therefore, after a thorough review of the literature, there still remained a gap.

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the study's methodology. This section focused on detailing the iterative phenomenological analysis (IPA) process where a specific phenomenon is analyzed and interpreted using both suspicious and empathetic hermeneutics to determine the essence of research participants' lived experiences. After addressing IPA, this section detailed the target participants within the research, self-identified antiracist educators who were both female and white and had a minimum of five years of teaching experience. Participants were recruited through social media and in-person based on this criteria. The process for data collection and analysis was detailed within this chapter as well. Data was collected following IRB approval and consent was obtained for each participant. Research was conducted either via Zoom or in person using semi-structured, in-depth interviews, observation written responses, in-process journaling, and reflective journaling for triangulation. Following transcription, the data was analyzed through the thorough reading and rereading of the interview transcripts, journals, and written responses until the data was saturated. Throughout this process, notes were taken, codes developed and themes surfaced.

Chapter 4 presented the findings for the study in detail. In total, there were six themes that emerged through data analysis, four themes and four sub themes were identified for research question 1 and two themes and eight sub themes for research question 2. For research question 1, identified themes were as follows: gender, religion, proximity to people of color, and education. These themes were all identified as intersections within self-identified antiracist, white female educators that had an impact on their *critical consciousness* and the way they saw themselves as raced individuals who had been complicit within a system of white supremacy, but also privileged them and empowered them to make change within educational spaces. For research question 2, identified themes were as follows: adoption of a humanizing paradigm towards students and a focus on rigorous and relevant instructional practices. Both of these themes show the effect that their *conscientization* has on their classrooms and instructional practices as a whole.

Comparison to the Literature

In comparison to existing literature, this research serves to fill a gap in whiteness studies and whiteness within educational spaces by examining the intersectionalities of white women including gender, class, religion, and place. While whiteness and the impact of whiteness within the classroom has been researched at length, as has the socialization of white children by white parents and the media at large, whiteness and Christianity, and general discussion surrounding the prevalence of white women within education, there was previously no existing research on how socialized and acculturated intersections of whiteness affect white women, their *critical consciousness*, and then by default their classrooms. Therefore, while this research does not necessarily reinforce existing literature, it does add to existing literature on whiteness, critical whiteness studies, and also whiteness in the classroom.

Additionally, this research serves to add to the field of critical whiteness studies, through *critical whiteness feminism*. By analyzing ways in which white women are explicitly and implicitly informed of appropriate looks, size, weight, dress, behavior, morality, and sexuality, as a means of maintaining and replicating white supremacy and white male patriarchy. White women were able to recognize ways in which whiteness— through historical, political, and socialized norms— served to marginalize and oppress not just themselves, but also people of color and other marginalized communities as well. Historically, white women have participated in feminist movements that have benefitted them, as fully human, while still maintaining the marginalization of Black and Brown women who were not yet granted full humanity and associated rights, legally or socially, thereby serving to further marginalize and dehumanize women of color (hooks, 2015). This has resulted in criticism of feminist movements both nationally and globally. LeGates (2012) stated that "only the most advantaged women have had the privilege of focusing on gender oppression and thus of defining themselves historically as feminists" (LeGates, 2012, p. 4). As an advantaged class of women, white women have been uniquely situated to define the patriarchy "in terms of its public dimension: 'The military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance- in short, every avenue of power within society, including the coercive force of the police.. [rests] in male hands" (Millet, 2016, p. 13). By this definition, white women are already granted humanity and thus a full spectrum of inalienable rights to bodily autonomy, agency, and access among other things that women of color have not been provided. Therefore, while they may have struggled against the patriarchy for increased rights and access, they did not have to struggle to claim their very humanity. These theories or genres, as there have been many, of feminism (through both first, second, and third waves of feminism) recognizes the humanity of white women, while

simultaneously diminishing or completely ignoring the fact that white women have played and integral role in upholding these patriarchal systems as a means of their own privilege, power, and also at times their own oppression (hooks, 1985; 2015) as well as the oppression of others as they have secured more freedoms through social action, sometimes even despite the support of women of color. CWF differs in that within this theoretical approach the focus is no longer on the emancipation of white women, but rather shifts to include an interrogation of the ways white women have allowed themselves, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to participate in or maintain systems of oppression for all people, including women of color, by assimilating to white, feminine norms and expectations. Through interrogation of their gender and sociopolitical systems meant to support and maintain gender expectations for white women, CWF holds that white women can begin to develop a *critical consciousness* surrounding their role in creating, maintaining, or dismantling oppressive norms for people of color, while also simultaneously freeing themselves from established, patriarchal norms that serve to damage them both psychologically and tangibly (financially, politically, and socially). CWF then upholds the basic tenet that gender emancipation, both within the mind and in action, for white women is a byproduct of the development of their *critical consciousness* as a result of their interrogation of and efforts to dismantle oppressive systems that have historically marginalized people of color, rather than the initial focus of their internal work and dialogue. This includes nuances of behavior and ways of thinking that will take continual deconstruction over a lifetime for white women who desire to dismantle white supremacy, within their minds, their actions, and also within the systems surrounding them as our current socio-political system is inherently set up to maintain and protect white, patriarchal norms through the very nature of white, female socialization. Therefore, CWF is not a destination or merely a way of being in a singular

moment, but rather a theoretical framework to support active and continued deconstruction and reconstruction of the mind, heart, and actions of white women, both within themselves and within their circles of influence, to better embrace themselves, their sense of agency, critical thought, femininity, sexuality, relationships, and other various aspects of their identity in full authenticity while also serving to emancipate those who have been historically marginalized by their complicity. While this theory will continue to develop and evolve over time, this theory surfaced as a common theme throughout this study as white women began to explore the ways in which systems and white, female socialization had served to make them complicit within oppressive systems, as they sought to become better allies and co-conspirators, rather than their own freedom or increased agency.

The white women in this study, whether through their social location that afforded them opportunities for higher education and social mobility, which automatically challenged white, patriarchal norms and expectations or through their own deconstruction as a result of their *outsider* status from white womanhood and associated morality, were able to recognize that the *property interest* associated with their whiteness also afforded them the power and agency to establish social and political systems and ways of being for all people, just as it still affords them the power to question or challenge those systems in ways that may be dangerous or even deadly for non-white people. Within this space of recognition and understanding of their whiteness, their power, and ability to create change, therein also lies potential for these white women to begin to challenge not only overt racism and systemic oppression within schools but to also challenge dysconscious racism (King, 1991) and ideologies.

White women within this study indicated that they were not able to access the same privileges as white men or even other white women if they were not able to achieve the

culturally desired and respected aspects of *white womanhood*. As a result of this understanding, buried within the intersection of whiteness and gender, white women within this study found personal agency and empowerment to move towards antiracist ideology and action. Recognizing that gendered expectations for *white womanhood* either remained out of their reach and were therefore impossible or were in and of themselves a rejection of their full, authentic selves, white women made conscious choices to reject these expected norms and embrace their own identities as well as create places of safety for others to do the same, shedding some of their own privilege and access to whiteness. Therefore, *critical whiteness feminism* can be defined as the critical analysis and deconstruction of historical, political, and gendered social systems and expectations that serve to make whiteness, oppression, and complicity visible to white women and operationalize their *critical consciousness* towards antiracist action.

Recommendations for Key Stakeholders and Practitioners

The findings of this study indicate that white identity, specifically the white identity of self-identified antiracist educators is in fact intersectional, nuanced, overlapping, and complex. While intersections of gender and religion appeared to be impactful across all participants, many of the events associated with their identity development happened organically within their homes and within themselves. However, their proximity to Black and Brown people and culture, paired with their education and willingness to reflect on their identities, provided them with the ability and critical consciousness needed to tease apart where their gender and religious dogma may have served to oppress others as well as themselves and begin to make conscious decisions to either reject those societal norms and expectations or to shift their thinking towards them so as to protect themselves and those they come into contact with.

Teacher Education Programming

When thinking about teacher preparation and programming, the implications for reform are relatively simple. Each of these women expressed a strong desire to continue their education, both formally and informally, in order to best serve the students in their care. Within their educational experiences, reflection, opportunities to read and discuss critical texts and social theorists, and projects geared towards getting them into more diverse spaces where they were the minority all appeared to be impactful for them as they began to embrace antiracist pedagogies. These aspects of educational programming would be a simple addition to teacher preparation programs nationally.

Each participant mentioned that their involvement with Black and Brown students and faculty were huge catalysts in their racial identity development. Since the intent is not to place the responsibility of developing the racial identity of white women educators on the backs of already historically marginalized and oppressed Black and Brown students and faculty, thought would need to go into how to potentially orchestrate opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage with students and faculty of color in spaces where Black and Brown safety is prioritized and yet white consciousness and ways of moving are challenged. However, if classrooms nationally were desegregated, and more opportunities for Black and Brown students were provided in gifted education programming, AP courses, and college and career ready classes, then this heterogeneity would be a natural part of their lived experience.

For each of these educators, development of their *critical consciousness* as it related to their gender, religion, class, and place ultimately had to be developed prior to being able to move into antiracism. This usually occurred as a result of an organic, lived experience. However, it appears that education and reflection did play a large role in this development. Therefore, there is potential that education and critical discussion surrounding the ways white women are socialized

and acculturated into both their gender roles and also moral/religious beliefs, since those were the intersections identified as having a strong correlation to their racial identity development, could begin to create or trigger *conscientization* among white, female educators.

Joyce King (1991) also provides meaningful insight regarding teacher preparation and education by highlighting dysconscious racism with her graduate students and the specific ways she has developed critical consciousness amongst her scholars. Within her article *Dysconscious Racism: Ideology, Identity, and the Miseducation of Teachers*, she details how dysconscious racism is " an uncritical habit of the mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (King, 1991, p. 135). She details how this"lack of critical judgment against society reflects an absence of what Cox (1974;1992) refers to as 'social ethics'; it involves a subjective identification with an ideological viewpoint that admits no fundamentally alternative vision of society" (King, 19991, p. 135). This directly correlates to the themes revealed within this study as research participants spoke about events and relationships in their lives that challenged their ideas surrounding the social order, ways of being and doing- especially within the classroom, within their relationships, and within religious communities, and how these experiences led to their critical reflection or questioning of social ethics or previously embraced ways of being as a result of their socialization and acculturation into whiteness and white femininity. However, rather than leaving this critical consciousness development up to fate, she determined to employ specific, classroom intervention for preservice teachers in order to develop critical consciousness and interrogation of social ethics and hegemonic norms. King (1991), highlighted specific ideologies that preservice teachers held pertaining to current inequities observed in educational systems. These included a belief in the inferiority of Black and Brown children as a result of the

atrocities of slavery (which is albeit different than the cultural deficit used to employ slavery but still yet just as damaging), a belief in the inferiority of Black and Brown children as a result of poverty and lack of opportunity, and a belief in a lack of self-esteem and motivation as a result of centuries of oppression. None of these explanations of racial inferiority sociopolitically or educationally place responsibility on the social systems in place, but rather on the community itself and historical events (rather than current ones) that created a universal deficit within the community. This lack of critical understanding or critical interrogation of systems, ideologies, social structures, or even legislation not only serves to marginalize Black and Brown peoples currently, but also serves to excuse and perpetuate white privilege and power. King (1991) went on to say that

> dysconscious racism must be made the subject of educational intervention. Conventional analyses- which conceptualize racism at the institutional, cultural, or individual level but do not address the cognitive distortions of dysconsciousness- cannot help students distinguish between racist justifications of the status quo (which limit their thought, self-identity, and responsibility to take action) and socially unacceptable individual prejudice or bigotry (which students often disavow) (King, 1991, p. 140).

She goes on to say that "[t]eacher educators must therefore challenge both liberal and conservative ideological thinking on these matters if we want students to consider seriously the need for fundamental change in society and in education" (King, 1991, p.140). By engaging her students in cognitive tasks that encouraged them to question the purpose of education in relationship to social justice and individual identity, to question the concept of educational neutrality, and encouraging students to make connections between society and classroom issues alongside of deep reading and investigation of critical theorists and historical identities, King (1991) was able to stimulate personal reflection and increased critical consciousness amongst pre-service teachers. When linked to the data within this study regarding the necessity of *critical*

consciousness development, frequent reflection and self-interrogation stimulated by lived experiences and higher-education, there is convincing evidence that these strategies, when employed effectively, offer some hope for educational reform through teacher preparation and subsequently increased opportunities and access for students of color in classrooms nationally.

Freire (2018), also discusses the need for *conscientization* and identifies the ways in which social expectations often create a duplicity within individuals, housing both the critical thinker and the *false consciousness* or *false benevolence* of their oppressor. He states that only through critical thought, reflection, and action individuals are able to transform their realities, further supporting both the results of this study, King's work (1991), and the need for the development of critical thinking, critical interrogation, and critical reflection as a means towards emancipatory education and antiracism (Freire, 2018). Preservice teacher programming, then, has a significant role to play in teacher development and the development of antiracist educators.

Finally, after completing this research, the phrases culturally responsive teaching and culturally sustaining teaching feel somewhat problematic outside of academia. While both instructional frameworks are research based and powerful strategies to incorporate into the classroom, for teachers who have not developed double-imagery or *critical consciousness*, these concepts may seem overwhelming and abstract. What difference does the sociopolitical location of your students make to you if you are not aware of your own sociopolitical location and the impact of your own identity on the students in your classroom? Other than reinforcing negative stereotypes surrounding deficit, poverty, or lack, those without an understanding of their own racial identity in relationship to sociopolitical systems of power are not only incapable of effectively employing culturally relevant and sustaining instructional practices, but when they try to, they can actually cause harm to already sensitive and marginalized populations by either

rendering them invisible or relegating them to deficit-based, stereotypical tropes. Rather than using these terms, simplification of the concepts embedded within these instructional frameworks could serve to assist well-meaning white educators with implementation that does not rely on tokenism and/or harmful, but well-intentioned application.

Simplification of these terms could begin with simply teaching about the humanizing paradigm. Encouraging practitioners to form meaningful relationships with their students, to learn from their students, and create opportunities for students to showcase their strengths and interests are all simple and yet effective starting points. Training teachers on how to build lessons with opportunities for student voice and choice, encouraging educators to include students' home language, and share their cultures and traditions as regularly embedded parts of their classroom culture and procedures all would go a long way to helping pre-service educators understand and better employ culturally relevant and culturally sustaining teaching practices.

Educators

Current educators within the K-12 sector could easily begin to apply some of the characteristics participants discussed as part of their antiracist instructional practice. Each educator within this study detailed their use of a humanizing paradigm when speaking of the students in their classrooms. Rather than focusing solely on content and standards, or creating a classroom culture surrounding the teacher's comfort, every aspect of their classroom cultures were built around who their students were, maximizing on their strengths and providing scaffolded support in areas where support was needed. A huge emphasis was placed on building relationships with students, reflecting regularly on your daily practices to determine what was working and what was not working, and a move away from the *sit and get,* rote style of teaching and learning. Additionally, representation within curriculum, opportunities for student voice and

choice, increased rigor through inquiry, as well as flexibility were other key components of their paradigm related to students. These are explicit and simple elements mentioned within this study that could be easily incorporated into classroom practices to support and authentically engage historically marginalized students daily.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research Possibilities

While this study produced interesting results and provided key insight into the racial identity development of eight self-identified antiracist educators, there are some limitations to the study. First, since this study only examined eight participants, there is a possibility that this is not reflective or representative of white women in general. More research across multiple regions would need to be conducted to determine if these results are generalizable nationally. While research participants did come from different states and regions within the United States, there were not enough participants from each region to determine if there were specific trends that differed in their identity development from region to region.

Additionally, this study relied on educators to identify themselves as antiracist. While this is great in theory, there was no evidence collected to suggest that they truly were antiracist in practice. This study would be made stronger by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data from the students in their classrooms, both anecdotal feedback from students about their perceived sense of safety and belonging within the classroom and quantitative data detailing their performance to determine if the educational paradigms of their teachers were actually being implemented and making a difference in student attitude, sense of safety, and achievement.

Chapter 6- Conclusion

While acting as the primary researcher within this study, I often found myself frequently in deep reflection on my own story as it relates to intersections of my identity. Not surprisingly, when considering research question 1, the four identified themes of gender, religion, proximity to people of color, and education have also been significantly impactful to my racial identity development as well. When considering gender, it was initially shocking for me to learn that much of my experience as a white female was echoed in the experiences of my research participants. I also understood the feeling of being an *outsider* within my own culture as a result of my assertive personality, physical appearance, and even educational background. Within my current community, I am one of the few white women that work full time and I am the only white woman in my community that has pursued her PhD. Additionally, I am one of the very few white women I know, outside of the university, that frequently engages in conversations about race, hegemony, privilege, power, and reform. This has effectively ostracized me from my white peers and has placed me in a middle ground between white culture and other cultures, as I am not able to claim citizenship in Black, Brown, or LGBTQ+ communities, and I am also no longer accepted or valued in white communities. This has at times been a painful experience, but now that I am older, I, like some of the research participants, have become more comfortable with being an *outsider* within white culture. However, that was not always the case. For much of my childhood, adolescence, and early adult life, I was extremely aware that I did not fit into the gendered norms for my race. Similar comments about my body, my size, and my personality and even my intelligence were open topics of conversation amongst family members, peers, and even amongst colleagues and supervisors in professional settings. I was frequently told that I would not be attractive to white guys or white men, and reminded that I should be quieter, smaller, less

opinionated, and to keep my head down so as to not draw attention to myself especially in professional spaces. Even after having married a white man and giving birth to a white child, I occasionally will still hear the untoward comment about how someone thinks I "sleep with" or "date" Black men because of either the way I dress, the way my hair curls, and the way my body is shaped. Therefore, as stated previously, this theme deeply resonated with me. I do believe that as a result of these experiences and the marginalization (although that is not a word I would have previously used to describe this), I also feel as if I was inclined to ask questions of white culture, white supremacy, white patriarchy and even religion as it reinforced these ideals and systems of difference and oppression. Perhaps somewhat different than some of the research participants, for me, gender, religion, education, and even proximity to people of color were all so closely connected, intertwined, overlapping, and nuanced that I was not able to tease them apart as individual elements that impacted my identity. For me, even getting an education and moving as an intelligent woman who has relationships with people of color was an affront to my gender and religion as these things were seen as a threat to my sexuality, my consciousness, and my morality. Therefore, my move towards continued education, continued research and development, continued exploration surrounding my gender and religion was all an act of open rebellion towards white supremacy. However, it was within that rebellion that I was able to develop a positive identity apart from white supremacy, apart from guilt and shame, and instead towards my free and authentic self as a white woman who is absolutely passionate about loving people, equity, and education. It was within that space that I was able to own my privilege and power and operationalize to dismantle systemic oppression both within myself and my family, within my social circle, no matter how small, and also within educational spaces and institutions where I work.

Likewise, the two themes identified in response to research question 2 also resonated with me. I also feel as if I have transitioned to a more flexible, humanizing paradigm when considering how I operate as a teacher and even as a school administrator. One of my catch phrases as a principal was actually, "teachers are people first, educators second." I stated this multiple times a week when speaking with teachers in my building as a school administrator because I believed that it was a message that frequently got lost amidst the needs of the students we taught and also amidst the external pressures applied to the process of educating students daily. Teachers, in my experience, were also dehumanized within the workplace by the media, parents, and even by the rigorous expectations laid out for them by local and federal agencies without comparable, adequate support and funding. I realized, both as a teacher and a school administrator, that if I was struggling in my personal life then I was not able to bring my best self into the classroom. As a result, my students and instructional planning suffered. Therefore, this paradigm of knowing your staff, knowing your students, investing in their well-being, and making space for them to feel authentically valued and appreciated in their work or classroom space absolutely made sense to me. As a school leader it was not enough to show up and do what I said I was going to do. It was not enough to serve my faculty, my school community, and my students. If I did not create space to learn about their families, their culture, their challenges, and also their triumphs, then I was not truly investing in them and they did not trust me. However, once that trust was established, I was then able to really do some big things.

Also, within this paradigm the concept of constant, critical reflection hit home. In my experience, the primary difference between those educators who have demonstrated the most success in their classrooms were not always that successful. However, they were the most likely to reflect on their work, make changes, and try new things. If things were not working for a

specific subgroup of students in their classrooms, rather than defaulting to a place of failure and defeat, the best educators I have known have instead chosen to try something new. They have, for lack of a better analogy, thrown everything at the wall to see what stuck. And when they found what worked, what engaged and empowered the students in their classrooms, they ran with it. Their ability to reflect, make change, and resiliency even in failure not only modeled perseverance for the students they taught, but it made them great teachers and afforded them high growth on standardized assessments.

I believe that this work is meaningful for pre-service teacher programming but also for white women in general. These topics are not frequently discussed amongst white women, and the culture of silence surrounding identity and intersectionality in white spaces is extensive and well-protected by religious, social, political, and historical contexts and barriers. These conversations are seen as an act of rebellion against the patriarchy and white supremacy, and are also simultaneously unnamed as such, rendering them invisible and therefore taboo in white circles. However, the more these multiplicities of identity are discussed, the more ability white women will have to develop their own critical consciousness and begin to interrogate ways in which they have benefited from these systems of acculturation and socialization, participated within them and supported them, and also been oppressed by them. From that same space, they can then be empowered to dismantle them.

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