ANTIRACIST PRAXIS BY WHITE WOMEN IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

by

CLAIRE DePALMA

(Under the Direction of Merrily S. Dunn)

ABSTRACT

The suffering racism creates is endless. For too long, the burden of speaking out and taking action against racism has fallen on Communities of Color. Higher education needs people inside the system to actively resist its racism by implementing antiracist policies and practices. White people, and white women in particular, comprise a majority of student affairs professionals, and our investment and engagement in social justice has the capacity to make meaningful change. The purpose of this study was to explore how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis. I used Linder's (2018) power-conscious framework to investigate identity, power, and antiracist praxis in the context of a participatory action research (PAR) design. The use of PAR in this study positioned the researcher alongside the research team to work together to explore our identities and our engagement in antiracism work. One goal of this study as part of PAR's action orientation was to develop a plan of action to broaden or deepen antiracist praxis. Data collected included one-on-one screening interview transcripts, research group meeting transcripts, narrative responses to reflection prompts, one-on-one closing interview transcripts, virtual whiteboard notes, team meeting agendas, researcher field notes, and researcher journal entries. Data analysis began with familiarization of the data as I transcribed data artifacts. I subsequently

coded all data using process coding (Saldaña, 2021), identified categories of codes, and then generated themes. I created an additional theme as I prepared to meet with critical scholars and perform member checks with the research team. The findings in this study reflect a white person's response to a racialized stimulus: responses are motivated by defense, persistence, or growth and are mediated by vigilance and shame. A visualization of the data, recommendations for practice, and suggestions for future research are provided.

INDEX WORDS: Antiracism, antiracist praxis, participatory action research, power-conscious framework, whiteness

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Fall 2020, my doctoral classmate, Mya Richardson-Echols, and I researched and

developed a presentation on antiracist hiring and supervision practices in student affairs. That

academic year, we delivered the presentation at four regional and national conferences, and in

each offering, we conducted a live poll and asked Participants of Color, "What do you wish

white people would do?", while asking white participants to use this as an opportunity to listen.

Across the presentations, with participants from varied geographies and different functional areas

within student affairs, the most common responses were: (a) listen; (b) educate yourself/hold

yourself and your peers accountable; (c) support, see, and value People of Color. These

presentations revealed my desire to focus my dissertation research on antiracism. This study was

an opportunity to enact the second imperative above: to engage a group of my white peers in

research on antiracism while holding one another accountable.

"Our world is steeped in racism" (Singh, 2019, p. 1) and racism has daily negative,

harmful, and sometimes deadly consequences in our lives and inside higher education. The

problem of racism in higher education is as old as our institutions. Colonialism, racism,

patriarchy, and exploitation (Stewart, 2019) were embedded into higher education's origins,

became systematized, and still operate today. The early colleges in the United States were

founded on stolen land and built by slaves, and the legacy of racism in higher education in the

forms of white supremacy and white privilege is reinforced by both institutions and individuals.

Whiteness is valued and valuable in higher education. Inequity in contemporary higher education

is not a reflection of a failure of the system, but rather, an indication that the system is working as it was designed.

Systemic forces of racism offered context for this study as did the unique historical moment of the 21st century racial justice movement that immediately preceded it. During the second decade of the 21st century, racial unrest grew, fueled by the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer. Martin was a 17-year-old Black boy who was walking home from a convenience store; he was unarmed and was pursued and shot by a man who claimed Martin looked suspicious. In response to the acquittal verdict, Black Lives Matter was founded in 2013 (Black Lives Matter, n.d.b), and grew from a small activist group to a mainstream civil rights organization. The summer of 2020 brought about Black Lives Matter protests and perhaps the largest civil rights movement in U.S. history (Buchanan et al., 2020), demanding racial justice across hundreds of cities in the U.S, and internationally in response to the murders of George Floyd, whom police suffocated during an arrest; Ahmaud Arbery, who was shot while he was out jogging; Breonna Taylor, who was killed in her apartment when police forced entry; and so many other Black people.

The ways racism manifests have shifted over time, and antiracism must move in sync with those shifts. Antiracism work by white people is fraught with challenges, yet it must be done and is worth doing. In higher education, antiracism work has taken the form of institutional change (in a few instances), diversity or multicultural courses, and diversity statements. Higher education's efforts have not yet made great strides toward racial justice, and this study explores individual antiracist praxis within that system. In this study, antiracist praxis was the conscious, willed practice of working toward racial equity, a state in which all racial groups are equal (in all ways). The literature on antiracist praxis was reviewed using the framework of Stanford

University's antiracism toolkit: start with self, get comfortable being uncomfortable, talk about racism, take action to confront and reject racism, practice allyship, and keep focused on the change.

Problem Statement

The suffering racism creates is endless. For too long, the burden of speaking out and taking action against racism—in the world and in higher education—has fallen on Communities of Color. In *White guys on campus: Racism, white immunity, and the myth of "post-racial" higher education*, Cabrera (2019) wrote, "the subject of white people challenging racism is wide open in terms of scholarship and scholarly debates" (p. 112). Cabrera also posited that "it is incredibly important for student affairs practitioners to offer opportunities for white people…to take tangible racial justice actions" (p. 157). There is a dearth of empirical guidance regarding white antiracist practice (Malott et al., 2019) and how one enacts such practice in higher education or student affairs.

Higher education needs people inside the system to actively resist its racism by implementing antiracist policies and practices. Student affairs, as a profession, has two broad, generalist professional organizations, ACPA (College Student Educators - International) and NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education). They promote social justice and inclusion as a professional competency (American College Personnel Association [ACPA] & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 2015) and the implementation of antiracist policies and practices are critical to embody that competency. Furthermore, 51% of student affairs professionals are white women (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018), and we need to study what white women in student affairs engaging in antiracist praxis looks like in order to expand that practice. As Hughes wrote in a letter to white student affairs

colleagues, "we have the ability to influence our institutions and shape our students, who are future leaders in all industries. Our actions and commitment to justice can help to build a different future for this country" (Hughes, 2021, para 6). We have a responsibility to do this work and increase justice and equity in our institutions and beyond.

Purpose of the Study

White people, and white women in particular, comprise a majority of student affairs professionals, and that means our investment and engagement in social justice has the potential to make meaningful change. The purpose of this study was to explore how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis. I used Linder's (2018) power-conscious framework to investigate identity, power, and antiracist praxis in the context of a participatory action research (PAR) design. The use of PAR in this study positioned me alongside my participants in a research team (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), and we worked together to explore how we have engaged in antiracist praxis, where we have found successes in that praxis, and where we have encountered challenges. One goal of this study as part of PAR's action orientation was to develop a plan of action to broaden or deepen antiracist praxis.

Research Questions

1. How do white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand antiracist praxis?

2. How do white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, describe their experiences enacting antiracist practices?

Significance of the Study

It is important to explore the antiracist praxis of white women in student affairs for several reasons. Higher education is mired in racism that harms our entire community, most especially People of Color students, staff, and faculty. Racially minoritized students are among our most vulnerable community members, and supporting them through antiracist praxis is our responsibility as student affairs professionals. Furthermore, while it is important to engage all people in antiracism, this study focused on white women. Too often throughout history, white women have used our proximity to white men to hoard power and oppress others, rather than using that power to advocate for others and overturn oppressive systems. It is important to understand white women's experience engaging in antiracism so we can unlearn the ways white supremacy has taught us to oppress others, and so we can develop genuine connections with People of Color and grow the community of white people doing racial justice work.

In this study, a group of white student affairs professionals considered our antiracist praxis: our thoughts and feelings, the incentives and barriers to practice, our successes, and our shortcomings. The findings and implications of this study support recommendations from activism and social justice education literature, and argue for their inclusion in student affairs practice. Utilizing these sources—particularly works by Black women and Women of Color—decenters white ways of knowing and has the potential to lead to transformed individual and institutional practice in student affairs. Additionally, this study explored antiracist praxis within the context of a participatory action research (PAR) design, and PAR's action orientation can be a significant research methodology for the field of student affairs as we seek to apply theory to practice. The knowledge generated by this study has the potential to transform student affairs preparation programs as well as professional practice.

Theoretical Framework and Research Design

Linder's (2018) power-conscious framework was created to enhance understanding of the ways in which power and identity interact in situations involving sexual violence on campus. However, the power-conscious framework's explication of issues of identity and power (and their intersection) offers insight into other arenas where identity and power meaningfully interact. Evans (2020) applied Linder's (2018) framework to a study on internally-facing racial justice advocacy, and my study continues the exploration of racial justice advocacy and antiracism supported by the power-conscious framework (Linder, 2018).

I utilized participatory action research (PAR) as the research design for this study. Action research is an "emergent inquiry process" (Coghlan, 2019, p. 87), and enlists participants as collaborators in the study. In a critical participatory action research study, another way to describe this study, the research team collaborates to work toward change and social justice at an individual and societal level (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this study, I worked with a team of white student affairs professionals to better understand antiracist praxis and develop action steps to further those efforts.

Key Terminology

- Antiracist: a person who supports antiracist policies through their actions or by expressing ideas that suggest all racial groups are equal (Kendi, 2019). An antiracist person actively seeks to increase their race and racism consciousness and disrupts racial power inequities in daily life (Singh, 2019).

- Antiracist praxis: the conscious, willed practice of working toward racial equity, a state in which all racial groups are equal. Antiracist praxis requires raised consciousness of race and racism, recognition of oppressive power systems, and active allyship with People of

Color to further racial justice (Cabrera, 2012; Kendi, 2019; Oxford University Press, 2022a; Singh, 2019).

- Minoritized: "populations of people who have experienced harm as a result of systems of oppression" (Linder, 2018, p. 12). This term may refer to People of Color, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, differently abled folks, etc. Historically, scholars may have used terms such as "marginalized" or "minority," however, these terms focus on numerical representation rather than centering the lived experiences of people whom society has subjugated (Linder, 2018).

- Racism: "individual actions (both intentional and unconscious) that engender marginalization and inflict varying degrees of harm on minoritized persons; structures that determine and cyclically remanufacture racial inequity; and institutional norms that sustain white privilege and permit the ongoing subordination of minoritized persons" (Harper, 2012, p. 10). Race is socially constructed, yet perceptions of race produce racist ideas and a "racial structure" (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) that enacts advantages for some and oppresses others.

- Whiteness: "a social and political construct of power that allows whites to assert superiority over those who are not white" (Gusa, 2010, p. 468). Whiteness is perceived as normal and nonexistent (Hikido & Murray, 2016), a background experience (Ahmed, 2007), invisible and unmarked (Ahmed, 2007), and innocent (Poon, 2018).

Assumptions of the Study

An assumption of this study was that people who have a connection to the identity of woman have some shared understanding of minoritization as a result of misogyny, sexism, and gender-related oppression. People who identify as women now and people who were socialized

as girls or women and identify in other ways now all have perspectives on womanness and womanhood that I welcomed into this study. Such people may currently describe themselves with language including cisgender, transgender, genderqueer, genderfluid, or other terms. The power-conscious framework "focuses explicitly on the relationship of people with power to systems of oppression" (Linder, 2018, p. 14). For this study, I worked toward a power-conscious understanding of the ways people with some connection to woman identity (and that experience of minoritization) who also identify as white (and know that experience of dominance) understand antiracist praxis.

Another assumption of this study was that power is ever-present, regardless of our awareness of its workings. Given this, we can choose to be informed, conscious, and intentional actors in systems and structures that reinforce power for certain individuals, and we can do our best to disrupt those systems and reduce harm and oppression. As an extension of this idea, in this dissertation, I have not capitalized the terms "white" or "whiteness" to avoid reifying the power of an already dominant and dominating group. I have capitalized the terms "People/Students/Communities of Color," etc., and "Black" in an effort to communicate solidarity with and support of the power of these groups (ACPA: College Student Educators International, 2017).

A third assumption of this study was a belief in and endorsement of critical race theory (CRT). CRT is a collection of scholarship that investigates the relationships between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT posits the permanence of racism (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015) and the ordinariness of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), and these ideas position race as the norm in society, rather than the exception. CRT also urges a revisionist history examination in ways that center the lived experiences of minoritized people and offer

counterstorytelling (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015) to the dominant group's historical narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). While this study's research team was white, the aim of antiracist praxis as explored in this study is to center the experiences of People of Color and engage and enlist more white people in antiracist actions.

On the topic of enlisting more white people in antiracist actions, I believe white accountability groups or affinity groups like the one formed in this study have the capacity to be personally transformative and high-impact practices (Obear & martinez, 2013) that can promote growth and change. They also have the capacity to cause harm. I assume that a person reading this dissertation with a plan to lead a white affinity group has done a considerable amount of work on their own social justice values and praxis, and has significant experience facilitating groups. I will offer recommendations for white accountability group facilitation in Chapter 5.

Subjectivity and Positionality

I was socialized into white womanhood, I am a student affairs practitioner, and I am interested in engaging in antiracism in my praxis, and I share these features with the research team members in this study. Like them, I hold some identities that grant me privileges and insider status and others that render me minoritized, vulnerable to others' power, or assigned outsider status. I believe that my race and gender were salient in this study, and that white women's "one up/one down" (Accapadi, 2007, p. 2010) identity gives us the capacity to be productive agents for social change because of our knowledge of oppression due to our gender, combined with the power afforded to us due to whiteness. Unfortunately, historically, white women have not used our power in ways that advance racial justice or demonstrate a belief that our liberations are bound together (Elliott & Shatara, 2018).

Knowing the ways in which white women have left behind other people who experience oppression, particularly Women of Color, I could have been tempted to pursue this study to prove that I am a "good" white person. I could have embarked on this study hoping to make myself more likeable to People of Color or to absolve myself of the guilt and shame of being white. I could have hoped this study would forgive me for the ways in which I uphold and perpetuate systems of domination. I describe these motivations to acknowledge my awareness of them; throughout this study's inception, active process, and post-study writing, I have reflected on and interrogated my motives in an effort to engage in accountability and to de-center my ego. This work is not furthered by my distancing myself from mechanisms of white supremacy or from the actions of so many white people that are born out of white rage, white fragility, and white silence. The work is furthered by my seeing myself in these white people, taking responsibility for our actions, and working toward solidarity and common humanity in pursuit of racial justice (Evans et al., 2020).

Ethnicity is another part of my identity that felt salient in this study. I am Italian-American and grew up in an area with many Italian-American families. I remember being in elementary school and feeling unsure how to complete the bubble for race/ethnicity on yearly standardized tests. I had received the message (though I do not remember where or from whom) that Italian-Americans were not white, and I did not know what to enter on the test. The complexities of race and ethnicity were not clear to me as a child, but that confusion was based on the fact that Jewish, Irish, and Italian immigrants to the United States faced discrimination from Anglo-Saxon white people in the early part of the 20th century (Singh, 2019). These lighter-skinned immigrants observed the racial dynamics in the United States, understood that others were not treating them as white (with the privileges whiteness afforded), and felt pressure to

assimilate into white culture. Racial assimilation necessitated leaving behind their cultural traditions and adopting racist ideas about People of Color (Singh, 2019). This history of simultaneously not being white enough yet also choosing to align with the white hierarchy is in my DNA and brings up complex feelings about my relationship with my white identity.

In my first job in student affairs, our office motto was to create conditions in which all students can thrive, and that has become part of my professional mission ever since. Creating conditions for all students to thrive means that I aim to see, acknowledge, and value each student and their holistic set of experiences and identities they bring to our institution. It means I view commitments to student access, equity, justice, community, and belonging as central to the work of student affairs professionals. When we use these commitments as a lens through which to view our institutions and communities, we see what many Students, Faculty, and Staff of Color have been telling us for years: higher education is not equitable and causes harm in daily and irreparable ways. As a person who receives many benefits and privileges from systems of domination, I am especially responsible for interrupting and disrupting racism and other forms of oppression. Antiracist praxis requires a lot of work, and the liberatory higher education of our future needs all of us to be engaged in that work.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided the background and purpose of this study, introduced the research questions that guided the research team, and detailed the assumptions of the study and my researcher positionality. In the next chapter, I will offer an in-depth literature review covering topics including race and racism, whiteness, antiracism in higher education, and antiracist praxis. Finally, I will unpack a model of antiracist praxis that describes six types of actions that comprise antiracist praxis as I have conceptualized it.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I describe previous research that contextualized this study exploring how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis. First, I explain the construction of race and racism, the indelible presence of racism in higher education, and the features of whiteness. I then offer an overview of the 21st century movement for racial justice and provide information about Black Lives Matter and a recounting of important events in 2020. Next, I discuss how antiracism has shown up in higher education in recent years in the forms of institutional plans, diversity courses, and diversity statements. Finally, I define antiracist praxis and present a model of six phases of action supporting antiracist praxis.

Race and Racism

Construction of Race and Racism

The early European migrants to New England in the 17th century possessed both religious fervor for their Puritan ideals, and a reverence for the style of academic training many of them received at Cambridge and Oxford Universities. These interests led them to study early Christian theology, Greek, and Latin, and in these texts, they read rationales for the existence of a human hierarchy as ordained both by God—in St. Paul's testimony—and by Aristotle (Kendi, 2016). Support for the existence of a human hierarchy had produced "ethnic, religious, and color prejudice" (Kendi, 2016, p. 18) in the ancient world, and in the colonial era, those prejudices

matured into racist ideas that differently categorized European, Indigenous, and African people (Kendi, 2016).

The European colonists' racist ideas traveled with them across the Atlantic Ocean, and the early founders of higher education institutions in what we now call America owned slaves and used those slaves to erect and maintain their colleges and universities (Wilder, 2013). Furthermore, the emerging "racial science" produced in those early American educational institutions "legitimated the dispossession of Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans" (Wilder, 2013, p. 10). The colonists propagated an essentialist view of race, and they relentlessly tried to prove the scientific inferiority of those they had enslaved through dissection and experimentation on the bodies of People of Color beginning in the 18th century (Kendi, 2016; Wilder, 2013).

Racism was necessary to justify African slavery and to fuel colonialism, oppression, the murder and displacement of Indigenous people, and the building of what we now call America (Kendi, 2016; Wilder, 2013). Despite the historical attempts at racial categorization, present-day scholarship holds that while certain people with common origins share some phenotypical traits such as skin tone or hair texture, those aspects of difference represent a fraction of the attributes all humans share (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Bonilla-Silva (2015) observed that "racism produced (and continues to produce) 'races' out of peoples who were not so before" (p. 1360). Contemporary social scientists believe that race is socially constructed (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). As Delgado and Stefancic (2017) stated, races are not "objective, inherent or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient" (p. 9).

Race is socially constructed, yet the existence of racist ideas and racism produces a "racial structure" (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) or "racial frame" (Feagin, 2020), and that structure enacts advantages and privileges for the dominant racial group and disadvantages or the withdrawal of privileges from all other racial groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Bonilla-Silva, 2015). An individual's starting circumstances, access, education, career, and all the other points on their life's trajectory are influenced by that individual's movement through this system called white supremacy. White supremacy grants privileges to the dominant, white group, and thwarts and discriminates against minoritized People of Color (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2016). Okun described it, stating, "the power elite constructed white supremacy (and construct it still) to define who is fully human and who is not" (Okun, 2022). The systemic functioning of white supremacy as a means of social domination is critical to racism as understood in this study. Racism is not merely the presence of prejudice based on a person's race, but additionally, it is the reinforcement of that prejudice by systems of power (Oluo, 2019).

Racism in Higher Education

There is no history of U.S. higher education separate from the history of racism and slavery. As Craig Steven Wilder explained in *Ebony and ivy: Race, slavery, and the troubled history of America's universities* (2013), "American colleges were not innocent or passive beneficiaries of conquest and colonial slavery…the academy never stood apart from American slavery—in fact, it stood beside church and state as the third pillar of a civilization built on bondage" (p. 11). Racism and white supremacy were built into the foundations of higher education, and that legacy continues to operate today. One of the complexities of contemporary, post-"Jim Crow era" racism is that racial inequity is produced in less overt, yet still systemic, ways (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Simultaneously, society and researchers alike often treat today's

racism with "racism-evasive rhetoric" (Melaku & Beeman, 2020). As an example of this phenomenon, in a survey of higher education literature on race, Harper (2012) found a strong tendency to deploy semantic alternatives to "racism" and "racist" (instead describing experiences as "minority stressors," and environments as "marginalizing," or "unsupportive"), even in articles written by those who consider themselves "race scholars," demonstrating the challenge of naming racism in contemporary research.

Racism pervades the literature on the experiences of Students and Faculty of Color in higher education. Duran and colleagues (2020) found that students' identities were tied to their feelings of belonging, and that colleges favor students holding majoritized identities while creating less welcoming environments for all other students. Vaccaro and Newman (2016) determined that privileged and minoritized students' experiences were so different that they even defined sense of belonging in different ways, with privileged students associating belonging with comfort, fitting in, and fun, while minoritized students tied belonging to safety, respect, and authenticity. These distinct relationships with belonging in higher education reveal the way race shapes individual experience, and such differences play out at the faculty level as well. Faculty of Color report contending with microaggressions (Doharty et al., 2020), racial battle fatigue (Chancellor, 2019), and the "third shift" (Quaye et al., 2017) of doing diversity work—committee membership, extra advising to Students of Color, colleague course consultation, etc. (Squire, 2017)—on top of their official responsibilities without receiving recognition or compensation for third shift work.

The combination of negative racialized experiences creates a hostile environment for People of Color on campus. Gusa (2010) attributed the hostile campus climate to "white institutional presence (WIP)" (p. 466), and she argued that WIP functions based on the

institutional entrenchment of four ideologies of whiteness: white ascendancy, monoculturalism, white blindness, and white estrangement. White ascendancy is the by-product of whiteness, white mainstream culture, and the historical power and domination of white people (Gusa, 2010). Monoculturalism refers to the ways that "academic" or "scholarly" viewpoints prioritize white epistemologies—individualistic, objective, rational, linear, quantitative, and written (Gusa, 2010; Helms, 2020; Okun, 2022)—above all others. White blindness "obscures and protects white identity and white privilege" (Gusa, 2010, p. 477) and is based on a racial ideology of color-blindness. White estrangement refers to the separation and distance, physically and socially, between white people and People of Color (Gusa, 2010) in our higher education institutions.

White institutional presence (Gusa, 2010) and its four ideologies of whiteness connect individual harms experienced by People of Color on campus to the systemic functioning of racism in higher education. Whiteness is "inherited...[and] also reproduced" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 154) in campus environments, and it is a force with centuries of inertia behind it. Furthermore, racism is so embedded, entrenched, and endemic in higher education that institutions not only reflect societal racism, but they continuously recreate racial inequity, and only occasionally present challenges to it (Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017). Unfortunately, racism is not just alive in our institutions of higher learning, it is thriving.

Whiteness

Since race is socially constructed, by extension, so is whiteness. Whiteness is complicated: it is perceived as normal and nonexistent (Hikido & Murray, 2016), innocent (Poon, 2018), and as a background experience (Ahmed, 2007), and yet it is also a "social and political construct of power that allows whites to assert superiority over those who are not white" (Gusa, 2010, p. 468). Collins and Jun (2017) described it as an "architecture of the mind" (p. 6)

that establishes pathways and grants accessibilities to dominant group members. In this architecture, the system itself is hidden from view. Like many systems of social domination, whiteness benefits from the dominant group's—its primary beneficiaries—inability to see the mechanisms of the system.

White people have been taught to be confused about their own color (Helms, 2020) and whiteness is "invisible and unmarked" (Ahmed, 2007, p.157) to white people. White people have not been taught to see themselves in racial terms or to think that their race matters (DiAngelo, 2018), effectively distancing them from race entirely. With this upbringing, race becomes something other people know or experience, and white people cannot be held accountable for racism (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014). White ignorance is not accidental, but is a concerted investment by white society, the mainstream media, white family and peer networks, and educational and political systems—all these parties powerfully invest in *not* knowing about social domination and racial injustice (Feagin, 2020; Foste & Irwin, 2020). This ignorance is willful, intentional, and implicates all white people as complicit in perpetuating white supremacy.

White privilege (McIntosh, 1989) is one piece of the system of whiteness in action. White privilege is "an epidemic" (Collins & Jun, 2017), and like a virus, it "evolves, mutates, and rapidly spreads; it is very difficult to prevent or defeat" (Collins & Jun, 2017, p. 33). To be white is to be given unearned advantages, insider status, and the benefits of belonging and freedom (DiAngelo, 2018). Cabrera (2019) prefers the term "white immunity" to white privilege, because he believes it more accurately reflects the default or baseline nature of whiteness. Immunity is assumed and creates protection, and that is part of the functioning of white privilege.

White people control our society's policies and practices, and have supported ideals of meritocracy and individualism as universal paths to achievement. Emphasis on these ideals ignores the different experiences of white people and People of Color on the path toward achievement. White society has legitimized a hierarchy in which white Americans control a disproportionate amount of wealth and power (Gusa, 2010), while spinning a narrative that these successes were the rewards of exceptional individual performance and hard work (DiAngelo, 2018; DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014). Within this paradigm, white culture blames People of Color for their lack of success, rather than accurately identifying People of Color's position in society as the direct result of differential starting points and treatment throughout their lives because of white supremacy, white privilege, and racism.

White fragility (DiAngelo, 2018) is another enactment of whiteness and white privilege. DiAngelo defined white fragility as "a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress...becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (p. 103). She elaborated further that it functions as a form of bullying and "may be conceptualized as the sociology of dominance: an outcome of white people's socialization into white supremacy and a means to protect, maintain, and reproduce white supremacy" (p. 113). Just as the term racism should not be separated from its systemic component for application to "sincere fictions" like "reverse racism" (Cabrera, 2019), fragility as DiAngelo used it is tied to dominance and should not be applied to difficult or complaining groups (e.g., "teenage fragility") (DiAngelo, 2018). Saad (2020) elaborated on DiAngelo's term and suggested that two factors drive white fragility: whites' lack of exposure to conversations about racism and their lack of understanding of what white supremacy actually is. The defensive (or offensive) moves that white fragility invokes can range from shutting down and disengaging, to denial and defensiveness, to aggressive behaviors

that become dangerous to People of Color (Brown, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Saad, 2020). The ability of white people to weaponize their whiteness into an active threat to People of Color is what makes white fragility so powerful.

Several studies (Accapadi, 2007; Ahmed, 2007; Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017; Diggles, 2014; Gusa, 2010; Hikido & Marray, 2016; Linder, 2015; Poon, 2018) offered meaningful insights into whiteness and what it means to be white that inform my study. One notable example is Bondi's (2012) research on the ways students and institutions protected whiteness as property. This study is significant because the student participants were future professionals in student affairs, a field that espouses values of social justice and equity. Despite those espoused values, Bondi's white participants prioritized their own learning over their impact on Classmates of Color, felt silenced or devalued when their experiences were not centered in the classroom, and safeguarded their right to exclude minoritized classmates (Bondi, 2012). These participants protected these aspects of their experience, aspects rooted in whiteness, like they would protect pieces of property. Bondi (2012) proposed that these behaviors were not learned in a vacuum, and the U.S. educational system had a role in shaping them. Bondi's exploration of whiteness as a form of property revealed individual and institutional investments in racism that are significant to my exploration of white antiracist praxis in student affairs.

In another important analysis, DiAngelo and Sensoy (2014) examined data from facilitated conversations among a racially heterogeneous group of college students. They noticed the discursive moves of white students to position these dialogues as unsafe spaces for white people, and how "the demand for safety [harnessed] violent imagery as a means by which white students [projected] racist ideologies onto racialized people, and in so doing, [reinscribed] white supremacy" (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014, p. 107). According to the authors, framing the discourse

as violent achieved the following results: positioning of white students as innocent, positioning of Students of Color as perpetrators of violence, maintenance of white solidarity, reinforcement of individualism and universalism, and reinforcement of an ideal imagined community (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014). DiAngelo and Sensoy's (2014) research exposed how a workshop facilitator's guidelines for safety can be coopted to prop up white supremacy and inflict harm on People of Color. The authors provided important framing for the conceptualization of my study and identified new challenges to consider for the process of conducting the study.

<center>21st Century Movement for Racial Justice</center>

#BlackLivesMatter

Like all scholarly inquiries, my research is situated in a particular moment in time, and in my case, that context powerfully informed the study. In 2012, a 17-year-old Black boy was walking back from a convenience store when he was seen, stalked, and then killed by the coordinator of the neighborhood watch. Over a year later, in July 2013, George Zimmerman was found not guilty of the murder of Trayvon Martin (Hajela, 2022). In response, activist Alicia Garza wrote a love letter to Black people on Facebook, "Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter" (Black Lives Matter, n.d.a, image). A friend and fellow activist, Patrisse Cullors, wrote a note of support and included the hashtag, #blacklivesmatter. Those words launched a movement, and Garza, Cullors, and another activist, Opal Tometi, decided to found Black Lives Matter. What began as a hashtag became a global network whose mission is:

> To eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives. (Black Lives Matter, n.d.b, para 1)

In the years between 2013 and 2020, Black Lives Matter adapted and grew in response to an unrelenting string of extrajudicial killings of Black people at the hands of police. Some of these

deaths led to local and national protests—Eric Garner and Michael Brown in 2014, Walter Scott

in 2015, Alton Sterling and Philando Castile in 2016, and Stephon Clark in 2018 (BBC, 2021)—

and "#Black Lives Matter" appeared on poster boards and tweets across the United States. This

litany of police executions and public protests set the stage for what would unfold in 2020.

2020

During 2020, the world saw the rise and rapid spread of the coronavirus COVID-19

pandemic that fundamentally altered global public health, the economy, work, and life as we

knew it. Simultaneous to the public health crisis, in 2020, tolerance for anti-Black brutality

reached a breaking point and new levels of national attention focused on the racial injustice

pandemic. In February 2020, Ahmaud Arbery was chased down and murdered by armed

vigilantes; in March 2020, Breonna Taylor's apartment was raided by unannounced police, and

she was shot and killed; and in May 2020, George Floyd died while he pleaded that he could not

breathe to a police officer who kneeled on his neck for over nine minutes (BBC, 2021; Fausset,

2021). Immediately following Floyd's murder, protests broke out around the United States and

across the world, continuing for months.

George Floyd's murder was yet another demonstration of institutionalized anti-Blackness

and police violence in America, in many ways not dissimilar from the countless murders of

Black people stretching back over centuries in this country's history. However, a combination of

factors may account for the unprecedented national and international response to this case. The

previous decade of police violence and demonstrations built up to the larger response to Floyd's

death. The rise in cell phone camera technology and prevalence enabled a passerby to take a

video of Floyd's murder and share it, exposing the event as a "modern-day lynching" (Dreyer et

al., 2020, para 1). These factors galvanized new activism in people who had no previous

experience with protests (Buchanan et al., 2020). Black Lives Matter also played a role in the 2020 protests, supporting activists by providing guidance, materials, and frameworks for activism (Buchanan et al., 2020), and enabling organizers across the country to plan large-scale protests. Overall, the 2020 demonstrations after George Floyd's murder involved more people (including more white people) protesting for racial justice than participated in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, and 2020's Black Lives Matter protests represent the largest social movement in U.S. history (Buchanan et al., 2020).

Antiracism

Racism has evolved over time, and accordingly, antiracism has shifted in response (Thompson, 2003; Weston, 2021). What constitutes antiracism work is fluid as it depends upon the ways racism shows up in a particular time and place, and as "we take on new lived possibilities" (Thompson, 2003, p. 20). It may seem obvious to state, but racism is, and must be, at the center of antiracism. White supremacy will attempt to take up residence in antiracism, but it must be evicted. The alleviation of white guilt (Thompson, 2003), white ally identity achievement, and other whiteness projects must not be centered in antiracist work. Disrupting racism must be centered in antiracist work. For this study, I have defined antiracist praxis as the conscious, willed practice of working toward racial equity, a state in which all racial groups are equal. Racist policies, not differences between racial groups, are the cause of racial inequity.

Antiracism and White Women

A challenge in investigating antiracist praxis by white women is that choosing this population already centers whiteness. At the same time, all people—particularly dominant identity-holders—need to engage in this work, and I have best access to the people who share my identity. White women need to see ourselves in others taking action to disrupt racism and to see

ourselves in community with and in support of People of Color. We have a responsibility to center justice and to honor the work of Communities of Color to build a more equitable society and higher education.

A further complication of white women working toward action steps to disrupt racism is the extant literature's contradictions on the role of white people in the movement toward racial justice. White people are called upon to engage in the work but should not ask "what can I do?" because of the ways that question centers whiteness and repositions white people as "somewhere other than implicated in the critique" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 165). Another problem with white people doing this work is that our motives are questionable because the desire to "do good" is suspect. Doing good as an act of benevolence depends upon an idea of charity and the knowledge of the power of the giver and the powerlessness of those receiving (Watt, 2007). In this way, benevolence reifies domination and white supremacy. Doing good can also be a manifestation of white exceptionalism and a desire for us to prove ourselves to be "good white people" and separate ourselves from "bad white people" (Accapadi, 2007; Collins & Jun, 2017; DiAngelo, 2018; Thompson, 2003; Weston, 2021). Attempting to establish ourselves as "good whites" negates the reality that as white people, all of us receive benefits, privileges, and advantages that others do not.

Another factor in white people's engagement in antiracism is "interest convergence." "Interest convergence" is a critical race theory concept first introduced by Derrick Bell, stating that "the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (Bell, 1980, p. 523). Interest convergence argues that white people will only engage in disrupting racism when those actions benefit them. For these reasons, scholars and activists object when white people who work toward racial justice benefit

financially, reputationally, or professionally (Evans, 2020). These benefits represent their interest convergence in antiracism work.

Antiracism in Higher Education

During and following the summer of 2020, in response to protests and public outcry for justice, organizations across many sectors in the United States faced a reckoning with racism. Even some of the more racism-entrenched American institutions like higher education began to take steps on the path toward racial justice. This section details some of the ways colleges and universities have approached racial justice and antiracism to date.

Institutional Change

Despite the degree to which racism and white supremacy are embedded in higher education, in recent years, a few institutions have launched large-scale institutional antiracism commitments, plans, and efforts to begin to force change on the system (Colorado College, 2021; Santa Clara University, 2021; University of South Florida, 2021). Some schools have even issued guidance as part of their human resources effort (Stanford University Human Resources, n.d.). Hopefully, institution-wide efforts like these will help dissipate the culture of fear and trepidation (Evans, 2020; Harrison, 2010) described in the literature regarding making changes in the racial climate in higher education. In interviews with Staff of Color, Harper and Hurtado (2007) found that "fear of being seen as troublemakers who were always calling attention to racism compelled many to remain silent" (p. 19), and that fear is still very real fifteen years later (Melaku & Beeman, 2020). When conducting dissertation research on internally-facing racial justice advocacy among faculty, Evans (2020) found that some faculty members had received messages of warning about their advocacy, and others were simply aware of a culture meant to promote fear and inaction regarding racial justice. Evans' participants engaged in advocacy

anyway, but the culture of trepidation they navigated necessitated slower and more careful work to sidestep harmful consequences while pursuing racial justice (Evans, 2020).

Courses

One of the strategies higher education institutions have deployed to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion is the offering or requirement of a diversity course. Unfortunately, the institutional racism in academia is a much larger problem than one course can fix. Pope et al. (2019) noted that an unintended consequence of such courses is the continued marginalization of minoritized students. Too often, these courses are one more way that institutions espouse multiculturalism without challenging white students' learned assumptions about whiteness and the power of their racial location (Hikido & Murray, 2016). Diversity courses that build cultural competence are helpful, but will not support systemic change unless white supremacy, social domination, and power and privilege are foregrounded in the curricula. Some scholars have argued a larger-scale decolonization of the curriculum is the path to inclusive pedagogy (Arday et al., 2020). Transforming pedagogy and diversifying the canon could help challenge the centrality of whiteness, power, and privilege in higher education (Arday et al., 2020), however, racism exists in many spaces of the academy, not just in courses.

Diversity Statements

In recent years, universities have utilized mission statements, diversity statements, and statements in response to racialized incidents (on campus, in their community, or nationally) to promote their commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion. How schools respond to activism and the increased awareness of institutional racism in higher education can be viewed as "acts of racial redress" (Tichavakunda, 2021), but only if statements and actions move beyond the level of publicity stunts meant to demonstrate good optics for white stakeholders and pacify

minoritized campus communities. Tichavakunda called such acts "racial symbols" and stated that investing in such a symbol "without coupling it with meaningful policy is another way to ignore the structural issues shaping Black collegians' experiences and outcomes" (Tichavakunda, 2021, p. 318). Statements are important, but Communities of Color on campus want to see policies and actions that meaningfully improve their experiences in higher education environments.

In general, institutional responses to racial injustices fall short. In a study of Faculty of Color's perceptions of institutional responses to racial incidents (Squire, 2017), faculty expressed that they believed modern universities should make efforts to rectify historical oppression and improve education access and equity, and many of their institutional missions aligned with those values. Yet, those same faculty felt that their universities did not respond appropriately to racial events, and those poor responses affected their work (Squire, 2017). In the weeks and months following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, NASPA studied institutional statements and actions. During this same period in 2020, *Inside Higher Ed* surveyed students about their school's response. Only 12% of students reported their institutions acted for racial justice, whereas NASPA's data showed a much higher rate (Whitford, 2021). This discrepancy demonstrates that even among institutions acting for racial justice, there is a disconnect between that action and students' awareness of their institution's efforts. If institutions support racial justice but their students "don't hear it," the school has not truly advanced antiracism.

Antiracist Praxis

As demonstrated above, most of the literature on antiracism in higher education focuses on institution-level practices. There is a gap in the literature regarding antiracism and individual antiracist praxis in higher education, particularly individual praxis by white people. In order to build a foundation for understanding antiracist praxis by white women in student affairs, I

expanded my literature review to include work by racial justice educators, advocates, and activists.

Defining Antiracist Praxis

To explore antiracist praxis in this study, I needed to establish the definition that guided the research team. In the realm of work toward racial justice or antiracism work, Cabrera (2012) discussed the terms "racial justice ally" and "antiracist ally" as competing terms, and expressed his preference for "racial justice ally." He outlined the relative merits of positioning oneself in alignment with what one is advocating for, rather than defining oneself in the negative and in opposition to something. Cabrera found "antiracist" problematic because it introduces racism into the mind of the audience and can create a negative reaction. However, I contend avoiding the use of "antiracism" to stave off the negative reaction it may cause constitutes the type of problematic, racism-evasive rhetoric described by Melaku and Beeman (2020) and observed in scholarship by Harper (2012). Furthermore, for this study, I chose the term "antiracist" because claiming that identity or enacting antiracism requires recognition of asserting oneself in opposition to systems of power. A person engaging in antiracism work operates with a level of intentionality that is needed when fighting deeply rooted, institutional inequity like the racism in higher education.

In *How to be an antiracist*, Kendi (2019) defined an antiracist as "one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea" (p. 13), and 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" (p. 20). I agree with Kendi's definition, and, given the white identity of the research team in this study, wanted to incorporate some of

Cabrera's ideas about racial justice allyship into my definition. Additionally, Singh (2019) wrote that "antiracist refers to people who are actively seeking not only to raise their consciousness about race and racism, but also to take action when they see racial power inequities in everyday life" (p. 87), and this definition was also significant to my conception of antiracism. Kendi's, Cabrera's, and Singh's ideas, as well as the Oxford English Dictionary's (Oxford University Press, 2022a) definition of "praxis" have contributed to the working definition of antiracist praxis for this study.

Antiracist praxis is the conscious, willed practice of working toward racial equity, a state in which all racial groups are equal. Antiracist praxis requires raised consciousness of race and racism, recognition of oppressive power systems, and active allyship with People of Color to further racial justice (Cabrera, 2012; Kendi, 2019; Oxford University Press, 2022a; Singh, 2019). The conscious, willed practice of working toward racial equity is neither simple nor easy. Antiracist praxis is an evolving, multi-faceted set of practices that looks different for each individual and their unique context. To complicate matters further, different people will find ease and challenge in different areas of antiracist praxis.

Literature on white racial identity development (Helms, 1990) and racial healing (Singh, 2019) reinforces a progression from self-awareness through education and raised awareness of racism, to growing into nonracist, ally, and antiracist identities. This progression reflects different areas of racial justice work that constitute antiracist praxis, and a clear visualization of these actions toward racial justice was created by Stanford University's human resources department (n.d.). For this study, the literature on antiracist praxis will be reviewed in the context of the six stages of Stanford's antiracism toolkit, shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Antiracism Toolkit

Note. Reproduced with permission from Stanford University human resources.

Start with Self

According to a College and University Professional Association for Human Resources Research Report from 2018, white women represent 51% of student affairs professionals (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018), making us the majority group in the profession at the intersection of race and gender. Given our majority status, white women have an opportunity to use the power of our numbers to further racial justice and antiracist efforts. However, we will only realize such opportunities if we work to develop our critical consciousness, "an awareness of the role of power in everyday actions and in systems…Developing a critical consciousness requires people to consider structural as well as individual-level practices and their roles in those

practices" (Linder, 2018, p. 25). The research questions, purpose, and design of this study aim to encourage critical consciousness growth as part of the process and outcomes of the study.

Another significant consideration in starting with self is learning about whiteness (Hughes, 2021). As described previously in the section on whiteness, because of the way in which whiteness is centered in society, the culture of whiteness can be difficult for white people to recognize (Ahmed, 2007; Collins & Jun, 2017; DiAngelo, 2018; Gusa, 2010; Helms, 2020; Hikido & Murray, 2016). White women must grapple with the racial dissonance we experience in our location at the intersection of racial privilege, gender oppression, and other identities that may render us dominant or marginalized (Robbins & Jones, 2016). Accapadi (2007) described this dynamic as a "one up/one down" identity, in which one aspect of an individual's identity experiences privilege and the other is discriminated against in society. Our identities enable us with the power to enact change by virtue of our racial identity, and position us to understand oppression by virtue of our gender identity.

Starting with self also means recognizing how I, an individual white woman, connect to white women as a group, and how we connect to a lineage of white women. That lineage is an inheritance of violence, betrayal, and trauma inflicted on People of Color, especially Women of Color. As an example of this history, in the last few years, the name "Karen" has become a symbol in popular culture for a middle-aged white woman who asks for a manager, or worse, calls the police, when her experience is disrupted or when she construes her proximity to Black people as a threat. Even before they were called "Karen," there was a long history of white women causing harm and violence to Black people when they weaponized their distress and appealed to white men for help (Bates, 2020; Doyle at al., 2022; Mishan, 2021). One of the more infamous instances of a white woman unleashing violence by appealing to white men occurred in

1955, when Carolyn Bryant complained that a young Black man had whistled at her in her family's store, and that complaint prompted Bryant's husband and brother-in-law to abduct, torture, and murder the teenage Emmett Till.

Even earlier, in the antebellum era, there was "Miss Ann," the archetypical white wife of the plantation owner. "Miss Ann"s were often as violent as their plantation owner husbands, and attempted to gain access to power in the ways they saw exemplified by white men (Doyle et al., 2022). "Miss Ann" understood her privilege and wielded it to keep Black people in their place (Bates, 2020). As Mishan (2021) powerfully wrote:

> Framing Black people as a threat has historically been a surefire way for a white woman to win the attention of white men...but by invoking fear of the other, she gains not so much an ally as an enforcer, who leaps to protect her as he would protect a piece of property, less as a specific woman than as an embodiment of white virtue. This merely reaffirms a dynamic in which power means the power to oppress, including oppressing the white women appealing to it. (para 20)

These histories of "Miss Ann" and "Karen" live inside us, and starting with self means beginning with the humility to own that past and recognize its present operation.

Get Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable

Starting with self and beginning inward (Hughes, 2021) is an important grounding for antiracist praxis. The first four chapters of Singh's (2019) *The Racial Healing Handbook* are entitled, "Know Your Racial Identity," "Explore Your Internalized Racism," "(Re)learn the History of Racism," and "Grieve and Name Racism." These titles reflect the way in which racial justice work is both deeply personal and requires a process of learning and unlearning (Hughes, 2021; Saad, 2020; DiAngelo, 2018; DiAngelo, 2021; Malott et al., 2019; Singh, 2019). The acts of examining one's own internalized racism—and for white people, internalized dominance (Singh, 2019)—and learning the true histories of colonization, slavery, and racism in the United States are emotionally fraught and deeply uncomfortable. Furthermore, DiAngelo (2018) stated

that because white Americans are insulated from racial stress, we do not possess stamina for racial discomfort. She wrote, "we consider a challenge to our racial worldviews as a challenge to our very identities as good, moral people...the mere suggestion that being white has meaning often triggers a range of defensive responses" (p. 2). The defensive responses DiAngelo described occur because they represent our ways of coping with the discomfort of being confronted with our own complicity in racism and white supremacy.

Singh (2019) framed this increasing awareness of the role of racism in our lives in terms of grief, and discussed common responses to racism—shame, guilt, fear, rage, surprise, sadness, withdrawal (DiAngelo, 2018; Singh, 2019)—in terms of Kübler-Ross' (1969) five stages of grief. Naming an experience of racism as such and working through our emotions about that experience with tools like Kübler-Ross' stages of grief can build a more productive pathway to deal with the discomfort white people feel. At the same time, we must recognize (and we experience an additional wave of discomfort when we do) that this work is never done (Hughes, 2021). In addition, the more we actively engage in conversations and activism related to racism, the more we may make mistakes or become aware of our own assumptions and bias; we must recognize the corresponding discomfort as inherent to the process. As Oluo (2019) matter-of-factly wrote, "You're going to screw this up royally. More than once" (p. 45). Part of getting comfortable with being uncomfortable is relinquishing the idea that we will be right or "do" antiracism right, and, continuing to engage in the work anyway.

Talk about Racism

One way we push on the boundaries of our comfort is to educate ourselves, and then to speak more openly about race, racial power structures, and racism. The alternative is to continue to participate in white supremacy (Hughes, 2021). Yet, talking about racism is difficult for many

Americans. In a study on conceptions of diversity conducted in four major metropolitan areas, Bell and Hartmann (2007) found that while most respondents recognized difference and could recite American ideals associated with "the melting pot" and cultural assimilation, few articulated an awareness of white normativity and systemic inequality. This study is now over fifteen years old, yet many white people still have not reckoned with the ways whiteness is centered in society, placing all racial others as deviations from that center (Ahmed, 2007). Without a recognition of the inequality People of Color experience and the benefits white people receive because of white normativity and privileges, an honest conversation about racism remains impossible.

Another challenge to talking about racism is "racism-evasive rhetoric" (Melaku & Beeman, 2020) and "color-blind" ideologies. Color-blindness "positions equality in an ideology wherein the race of a person is and ought to be immaterial to any decision-making process" (Gusa, 2010, p. 477). While this outlook may intend to treat everyone "the same" (as though that is a good outcome), it ignores the realities of the ways laws, policies, privileges, and discrimination differentially impact white people and People of Color (Diggles, 2014). Furthermore, this ideology recasts discussions of race and the ways race affects reality as racist. This semantic move represents what Bonilla-Silva (2015) called "color-blind racism" because of the ways it minimizes race and offers "raceless" explanations for enactments of white supremacy and racism.

If a white person does not espouse color-blindness ideology and wants to openly discuss race and racism, there are still more challenges to navigate. White epistemologies of ignorance, white normativity, and owning our complicity in racist power systems are all places our whiteness can obstruct an honest discussion of racism (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014; Foste &

Irwin, 2020). Additionally, conversational tactics or habits such as personifying one's office, rationalization (justifying ourselves or the status quo), and benevolence (using the desire to do good as a defense) can all be tools to deflect personal responsibility for racism or racial critique (Accapadi, 2007). The challenges abound and are likely to continue to present themselves in new ways and forms. Despite the myriad challenges of being a white person talking about racism, there are strategies that will help raise our awareness and honor the experiences of People of Color. Ijeoma Oluo (2019) offered tips for conversations in *So you want to talk about race*:

1. State your intentions.

2. Remember your conversational top priority (and do not let emotions override that).

3. Do your research.

4. Do not allow your antiracism argument to oppress other groups.

5. Pause and reflect when you start to feel defensive.

6. Do not tone police.

7. Be mindful of making the conversation about yourself (if you identify as white).

8. Ask yourself if you are trying to be right or if you are trying to do better.

9. Do not force People of Color into discussions of race.

A final important consideration for talking about race is the issue of silence. White silence occurs "when people with white privilege stay complicitly silent when it comes to issues of race and white supremacy" (Saad, 2020, p. 52). Examples of white silence are when we hear a family member make a racist joke, when we witness discriminatory professional practices, or when we observe other white people speaking from a place of white fragility and we say nothing (DiAngelo, 2018; Saad, 2020). This silence is a way of maintaining white solidarity (DiAngelo, 2018; DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014) as there is a tacit agreement in our white supremacist society

to not cause other white people racial stress (DiAngelo, 2018). Maintaining white solidarity and staying silent is rewarded in a white supremacist system and can help a white person make friends and advance professionally. The converse is also true, and breaking from white solidarity and silence to name racism and racist dynamics can produce negative social and professional consequences for the white person who disrupts the rules of whiteness. Because of these dynamics, white silence can feel like violence to Communities of Color (Saad, 2020; Time's Up Foundation, 2020) because it upholds white supremacy and ignores their experiences. While there are many challenges to being a white person talking about racism, we cannot allow those challenges or our fear of saying the wrong thing to inhibit us from speaking (Hughes, 2021).

Take Action to Confront and Reject Racism

An important first step in confronting and rejecting racism is working to decenter whiteness. Because of the unseen, normative, and powerful nature of whiteness, collectively, we need to "critically examine and modify our words, our influences, what we tolerate, and where we use our power...This work must take up important space in our lives" (Hughes, 2021, para 9). Building on this idea, Singh (2019) described being an antiracist as not an "identity you ever finally and fully achieve, but a commitment" (p. 88). Antiracist praxis represents an intentional awareness and corresponding actions: a path we will continue to travel. Singh (2019) offered six responsibilities from Okun (2006) related to raising race consciousness and becoming an antiracist. These responsibilities are:

1. Read and educate yourself regarding racism.

2. Reflect on that education and your own identity.

3. Remember your participation and complicity in the system of racism.

4. Take risks to challenge racism when you see it or participate in it.

5. Accept that you may make mistakes or be rejected at times as you pursue antiracism.

6. Build relationships with others on their journey toward antiracism.

This set of commitments can serve as reminders to us, wherever we are on our antiracism journey. Furthermore, when taking action against racism feels too big or overwhelming, rooting ourselves in one of these actions is a powerful way to reengage in the work.

Practice Allyship

A racial ally is "someone who actively supports others who are experiencing racial injustice, prejudice, and discrimination" (Singh, 2019, p. 167). Typically, allies are people with dominant group identities who work toward equity and who are willing to give up privileges afforded to them through their dominant identity status (Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Racial allyship moves beyond increased race consciousness and into the realm of action: allies actively promote social justice and support nondominant group members (Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Brown and Ostrove (2013) investigated allies in three studies focused on how People of Color perceived white allies and People of Color allies. They found the same two qualities as critical to allyship among both ally groups. "Informed action" was the first quality and reflected the ally's high level of racial identity awareness, knowledge of racial justice and racism, and active engagement in community and social justice movements (Brown & Ostrove, 2013). "Affirmation" was the second quality and corresponded to an ally's investment in, connection to, and respect for their relationship with the participant (Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Participants experienced the most allyship when both factors ranked highly. True allyship requires knowledge of self and our larger racial context, and connection with People of Color.

Obear and martinez (2013) discussed race caucuses as a high-impact strategy to develop skills needed for allyship. Their experiences leading same-race and inter-race caucuses on

college campuses and at the Social Justice Training Institute led them to conclude that race-alike caucuses can provide participants (both People of Color and white) the opportunity to explore racism dynamics, internalized dominance or oppression, strategies for increasing equity in their organizations, and building self-confidence and courage to become a change agent (Obear & martinez, 2013). These same-race groups provided participants with a safe environment among a group of peers to stretch and grow their awareness and skills before re-engaging in inter-race groups. I believe this study's research group offered similar opportunities for growth.

Keep Focused on the Change

The power of institutional racism can feel daunting, even insurmountable at times; nevertheless, we persist. Bonilla-Silva (2015) wrote that not all people comply with the rules of engagement of "racial etiquette" (p. 1361), and because of that "the system is ultimately unstable and subject to change" (p. 1361). This assertion provides an intellectual reason to continue to engage in racial justice work and stay focused on the change. Singh (2019) offered a more affective explanation, citing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and stated, "for as much as racism feels permanent and never ending, there is hope, peace, and a calling for collective healing from racism that can also be permanent and never ending" (p. 187). This quote begins her chapter, "Engage in Collective Racial Healing," and the chapter centers on building community and the way in which that practice can support racial healing while also sustaining long-term engagement in advocacy.

Saad (2020) explained that to do this work, we need to bring our truth, our love, and our commitment to the work. She described that the level or depth of truth one invests in dismantling white supremacy will reflect the depth of truths one will uncover. Like Singh (2019), Saad (2020) articulated that this engagement has the capacity to lead to personal healing. Saad (2020)

also proposed that love is needed to engage in this work because shame and pain will not motivate people to sustain their efforts long-term. We are more likely to stay focused on change if we approach antiracist praxis from a belief that it is a way for us to enact our love of humanity and belief that all people deserve freedom and equality. Saad (2020) contended that when the truths of this work feel hard, "love is what will keep you going" (p. 19). Finally, Saad (2020) advised that we articulate what keeps us committed to the work because it will be hard and there will be temptation to abandon the work. Having a well-articulated "why" behind our engagement in antiracist praxis can help us keep focused on the change.

Conclusion

Racism is omnipresent in all our systems, including higher education, and that is why antiracist praxis is so important. The purpose of this study was to explore how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis. In this chapter, I reviewed the construction of race and racism, the ways racism shows up in the academy, and I unpacked some aspects of whiteness. I gave an overview of racial justice as it surfaced in the Black Lives Matter movement and the events of 2020. Next, I described forms of antiracism that have become more prominent in higher education in recent years: institutional plans, diversity courses, and diversity statements. Finally, I created a definition of antiracist praxis for this study and explicated a model of actions for antiracist praxis. In the next chapter, I will discuss the research paradigm, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approach to this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Racism has been part of higher education since its inception. White women comprise a majority of student affairs professionals, and we need to study what white women in student affairs engaging in antiracist praxis looks like in order to expand that practice. The purpose of this study was to explore how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis. I used Linder's (2018) power-conscious framework to investigate identity, power, and antiracist praxis in the context of a participatory action research design. The following research questions guided the research team:

1. How do white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand antiracist praxis?

2. How do white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, describe their experiences enacting antiracist practices?

Paradigm

This study was situated at the borderlands of constructivist and critical, or transformative, frameworks. Constructivism posits that knowledge is socially constructed in the research process and that researchers' values cannot be separated from the research (Mertens, 2021). In this study, constructivism framed the exploration of the research team's socialization as white women student affairs professionals and how they understood that identity in relationship to antiracist praxis. This process of understanding is a way of constructing and assigning meaning to reality. The critical or transformative framework also shaped this study because the researcher

positioned herself alongside oppressed people (Mertens, 2021) and saw this study as an effort toward racial justice. The exploration of the research team's understanding of power structures and the ways in which team members disrupt the inequities they encounter within those structures was reflective of the critical paradigm. Historically, the critical paradigm has been used to give voice to the experiences of oppressed people. However, some scholars have used the critical paradigm to explore the relationship between dominant group members and power, and as a means to dismantle systems of oppression (Linder, 2015).

Ontology

Ontology is the attempt to describe the nature of reality, and this study was built on the ontological understanding that "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2021, p. 17), and that historical systems of power and privilege affect what is understood to be real. As an example of the ontological crossroads of constructivist and critical frameworks in this study, whiteness is both a socially constructed state (constructivist paradigm) and an oppressive force in the lived experiences of People of Color (critical paradigm). The social construction of whiteness teaches white people to see themselves in raceless terms (DiAngelo, 2018), contributing to the confusion many white people experience about their own race (Helms, 2020). From a constructivist view, that racelessness or confusion could be benign, however, the critical paradigm rejects the idea that white people are ignorant of the power of whiteness. This study's research team engaged in antiracist praxis, aligning them with an understanding that their whiteness is both a social construction and a facet of their reality that implicates them in oppressive forces.

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge: what constitutes knowledge and how we acquire it (Jones et al., 2022). Part of that knowledge acquisition refers to the research process

and the relationship between researcher and participants. The constructivist framework positions the researcher and participants as engaged in an interactive, mutually influencing knowledge-acquisition process (Mertens, 2021). Such a process depends upon the researcher's ability to build relationships with her participants. The critical or transformative framework approaches epistemology with a social justice agenda. It "seeks to uncover and change oppressive systems" (Jones et al., 2022, p.75), to use knowledge to interrogate and transform those systems, and to liberate people from them. The critical paradigm positions the researcher as a fellow passionate participant. This study sought to build the literature base for white antiracist praxis in student affairs since there is a lack of empirical guidance (Malott et al., 2019) on white antiracist action steps. As such, the research team worked together to examine their experiences with antiracist praxis and the ways they felt those efforts have or have not succeeded in disrupting inequity and oppression. In this process, team members were engaged in a mutually influencing process of working to interrogate power structures and charting a path to transformative practices. This epistemology lives at the intersection of constructivist and transformative paradigms.

Axiology

Axiology reflects the role of values in research. In both the constructivist and transformative paradigms, research is seen as possessing values and researchers are not value-neutral. Given the value-laden nature of research in these paradigms, reflexivity practices are vitally important to the research process. Constructivists have more recently moved closer to critical researchers in an emphasis on justice as part of their axiology (Mertens, 2021). For the critical paradigm, social justice and human rights are central to research. I brought values with me into this research, and I am not value-neutral about the work I believe white women student affairs practitioners should do in antiracist praxis. The axiology of this study was situated more

toward the critical paradigm because this study hoped to further a racial justice agenda as part of the process and product of this study.

Methodology

Qualitative research holds that "individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 24). This study centered on white women student affairs professionals whose praxis positioned them in opposition to aspects of their social world and reality. I was interested in hearing their stories of antiracist praxis in action: how they enacted this practice, what their experiences were like during engagement, and what consequences they perceived from their actions (either consequences to the world around them or consequences they faced as a result). The constructivist paradigm suggests the purpose of research is understanding for improved praxis (Jones et al., 2022), and that purpose aligned with my hopes for this study. The transformative paradigm's purpose is liberation, and at a high level, I am working toward a more liberatory, emancipatory higher education.

Theoretical Framework

This study grappled with the way those raised with a specific identity encounter systems of power. Linder's (2018) power-conscious framework focuses on the relationship between identity and power and "requires scholars, activists, and policy makers to consider the role of power in individual, institutional, and cultural levels of interactions, policies and practices" (p. 14). The power-conscious framework is consistent with critical epistemology because it prompts the researcher to uncover the "symptoms and the roots of oppression, not one or the other" (p. 21). While Linder's framework was built to better understand identity and power as they show up in sexual violence on campuses, scholars have used the framework for other areas where identity and power intersect. Notably, in Evans' (2020) dissertation, they utilized Linder's (2018)

power-conscious framework to explore experiences of faculty confronting racism within higher education. That study offers a precedent for successful application of the power-conscious framework to issues of identity and power related to antiracist praxis.

Research Design

Overview

Action research emerged as a research design with a formalized, theoretical basis in the 1940s, as a result of Kurt Lewin's work in social psychology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Since that time, the contexts for the use of action research have expanded beyond the social sciences to include health services, education, community development, and organizational development (Somekh, 2008; Coghlan, 2019). The appeal of action research to this variety of fields may be due to the fact that it is exploratory and flexible, and "uniquely suited to researching and supporting change" (Somekh, 2008, p. 5). Action research involves a researcher and co-researchers attempting to understand and make meaning of a phenomenon and working together to solve an identified problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Contemporary participatory action research also owes a debt to Paulo Freire, whose *Pedagogy of the oppressed* incited a tradition of action research being used as a path to liberation (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

The research process in action research is an "emergent inquiry process" (Coghlan, 2019, p. 87), meaning that this design is dynamic, evolving, and fluid. The direction of the study, the knowledge uncovered, and even the methods used emerge over the course of the study. This research design cannot be planned out from start to finish prior to the study's beginning because action research is fueled by the research team's exploration of a problematic situation, and subsequent identification of where the study should move next (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Somekh (2008) described the phases of action research as: "cycles of investigation, action

planning, piloting of new practices, and evaluation of outcomes, incorporating at all stages the collection and analysis of data and the generation of knowledge" (p. 2). These cycles demonstrate that the researcher must make new meaning of the research problem throughout the action research design, and she must continue to develop and innovate the procedures of the study as it unfolds.

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) Research Team

Literature on participatory action research (PAR) does not agree on a term for the people who take part in the research study. These people are described as "participants," "participant-researchers," "co-researchers," the "PAR team," "research team," and "collaborators." When I submitted my materials to the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board, I used the terms "participants," "co-researchers," and "participant-researchers" that appear throughout the appendices. After executing the study, my sense of how I wanted to refer to these collaborators changed. As such, in the body of this dissertation, I use the term "participant" when describing research in general, or when describing my collaborators before they were invited to join the study. I use "research team" or "team members" to describe them after their invitation to participate in the study. I refer to myself as "the researcher" because I was the original instigator of this study.

Benefits of PAR: **Participation and Action**

In action research, the researcher is a member of the research team in the study, and all team members work together to investigate the research questions and try to solve the research problem. The study is not done *to* or *on* participants, but rather, the study is done *with* them (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The positioning of the researcher as an integrated co-investigator in the study can take advantage of a researcher's "insider" status in meaningful

ways. Action research can thus bridge the gap between research knowledge and practitioner knowledge (Somekh, 2008), generating new theoretical bases and associated practices.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) stated that "critical PAR studies can affect and transform people from both an individual and a societal perspective" (p. 58), and Kemmis et al. (2019) argued critical participatory action research (CPAR) is "a practice whose aim is to change other practices…not only practitioners' practices, but also their understandings of their practices, and the situations in which they practice" (p. 189). As such, CPAR works toward change at the individual and collective level, and actively incorporates an examination of systemic forces into its design.

This study was situated at the crossroads of the constructivist and transformative research paradigms, and the tradition of action research with a focus on CPAR exists in that same space. The action research approach to meaning-making and knowledge generation speaks to a constructivist view of the production of knowledge. Simultaneously, critical participatory action research's emancipatory goals (Kemmis et al., 2019) and critique of systems (Fine et al., 2021) reflect the transformative research paradigm. This research design thus operationalizes the borderlands paradigm that framed this study.

Jordan (2008) contended that participatory action research is "committed to a politics of equity and social transformation that many other research traditions would dismiss as ideological" (p. 603). A research design that emphasizes equity and social transformation fits the purpose of this study and the problem I hoped to address—that white women make up the majority of student affairs practitioners and we have not sufficiently engaged in antiracism work. CPAR was an appropriate design for this study because the idea of emergent inquiry mirrors the continual process of working to learn and unlearn that is essential to racial justice work (Hughes,

2021; Saad, 2020; DiAngelo, 2018; DiAngelo, 2021; Malott et al., 2019; Singh, 2019). The casting of researcher as co-investigator was fitting because being in community can break down some of the internal resistance and defensiveness white people experience when engaging in antiracist work (Obear & martinez, 2013; Arnold, 2020; DiAngelo, 2021; Singh, 2019). Finally, I firmly believe that more white women in student affairs need to be actively involved in antiracist work (Arnold, 2020; Cabrera, 2019; Malott et al., 2019), and CPAR's potential to be a "practice-changing practice" (Kemmis, 2009) supports the movement toward social change.

Considerations and Challenges of PAR

PAR projects represent a broad diversity of research areas, yet share some common features: active engagement of all members of the research team in co-constructing knowledge and making meaning, a critical awareness and aim toward social change, and the collaborative approach between researcher and research team in the progress and process of the research project (McIntyre, 2008). PAR studies have taken place all over the world, often in contexts that provide historically minoritized people with power to disrupt oppression they experience and participate in emancipatory research (Herr & Anderson, 2015; McIntyre, 2008). More recently, PAR has also been used by white researchers working to disrupt the white supremacy of higher education. Dissertations from Cullen (2009), Ashlee (2019), and Weston (2021) explored white identity, critical whiteness studies, and antiracist actions among white students, respectively. As Ashlee (2019) stated, "CPAR creates an opportunity for white people to critically self-reflect on how their individual actions may be implicated in whiteness, and ultimately challenge white supremacy through an honest assessment of their attitudes and behaviors" (p. 55). Cullen's, Ashlee's, and Weston's dissertations demonstrated Kemmis and McTaggert's (2005) seven PAR characteristics, notably the four transformative ones of being emancipatory (addressing unjust

social structures), critical (encouraging team members to consider power and their own positionality), reflexive (aiming to make the world better), and working to change both theory and practice.

In some ways, a PAR design and a dissertation process are incompatible by their very natures. A true PAR study would engage in power sharing (Danley & Ellison, 1999) at all stages of the process, including research conception, development, and design. A dissertation, however, requires the researcher identify a problem, establish a purpose for the research study, and create research questions. None of my team members was involved in that conception and foundational phase. Furthermore, the timeline of a dissertation is at odds with the often long-term involvement of PAR projects (Herr & Anderson, 2015; McIntyre, 2008; Weston, 2021). PAR dissertation studies are accordingly "more pragmatic" and may require shortcuts or compromises as compared to a traditional PAR study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Despite these challenges of PAR as a dissertation research design, the documentation of the change effort has the capacity to change the academy (Herr & Anderson, 2015), and to prove that change is possible.

Sampling, Recruitment, and Selection

Process

In PAR designs, participants serve as the research team investigating the interests of the study, and I utilized purposeful sampling to pursue participants. It was important to find participants who brought "information-rich cases" (Jones et al., 2022, p. 133) to the study, as their depth of awareness of antiracism enhanced the dynamic nature of the PAR design. I used criterion sampling to find individuals who met the criteria of interest to the study (Jones et al., 2022), and also used snowball sampling. I contacted individuals (e.g., colleagues in student

affairs, previously identified participants, etc.) who could help me identify other possible participants who met the study criteria (Jones et al., 2022).

To recruit participants for the study, I created a flyer (Appendix A) providing information about the study and emphasizing the collaborative nature of this investigation (to begin to orient participants to PAR). I posted the flyer to the Facebook group for Student Affairs and Higher Education Professionals, a group moderated by administrators who serve a gatekeeping function. I also emailed (Appendix B) that flyer to the listserv of participants from a workshop series on Unpacking White Womanhood that I attended. The members of that listserv were key informants (Jones et al., 2022) as they are white people who engaged in a four-part workshop series dealing with white woman identity, white dominance, and antiracism. Finally, I sent a recruitment email (Appendix C) to colleagues and key informants to identify possible participants for the study.

Participants in this study first contacted me in response to the flyer posting or by replying to one of my outreach emails. After receiving an email expressing interest from a potential participant, I sent a reply email (Appendix D) providing more detail about the study, inviting them to participate in a screening interview, and attaching information about participatory action research (Appendix E). If they proceeded, during the screening interview, I reviewed informed consent (Appendix F) and followed an interview protocol (Appendix G) to ensure consistency across all participants. After all screening interviews were completed, I sent invitations to join the research team (Appendix H) reiterating the purpose of the study, the inclusion criteria, the engagement details and time commitment, and providing a link to a demographic questionnaire (Appendix I) to be completed via Qualtrics before the first research group meeting.

Criteria

I used the following criteria for this study: (a) identifies as white; (b) has been socialized or identifies as a woman; (c) currently works full-time in student affairs in a higher education institution in the United States; (d) engages in antiracist praxis. After receiving outreach from an interested potential participant, I replied reiterating the inclusion criteria, sharing the information sheet about PAR and the study, and scheduling a screening interview via Zoom. This screening allowed me to get to know participants a little better and to gauge if they would help maximize data and achieve saturation (Jones et al., 2022). There is no guideline for the size of a PAR study (Danley & Ellison, 1999; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Weston, 2021), and since I planned to use research group sessions as one of my data collection methods, I adopted the size recommendation associated with focus groups of six to 10 participants (Jones et al., 2022) as the target number of team members in my study.

Ten potential participants reached out to me over email to express interest in the study. In my reply email, I provided more information about the study and described the time commitment of the study. Three people replied that they would be unable to meet the entire time commitment and opted not to proceed. The remaining seven people scheduled and participated in screening interviews with me. One person revealed that they would be unable to make the total time commitment during their screening interview, and I thanked them for their interest and told them I could not include them in the study. I invited six people to join the research team and believed I had met my team member number goal; however, one person did not reply to my invitation and did not show up to our first research group meeting. I consulted with my dissertation advisor after the first meeting about how to proceed with the team. I felt that group dynamics and norms had begun to form in the first meeting, and at this point, I did not want to alter the composition of

the group. Furthermore, I had used the norms for a focus group as my target number of participants, however, in a focus group, the facilitator is not an active contributor to the content of the meetings. In this study, I occupied a role of equal team member with some additional duties facilitating our process. My advisor and I agreed that I would be the sixth team member and my study could continue.

Another important criteria consideration in this study was my second criterion: "has been socialized or identifies as a woman." I included this language in my criteria and recruitment materials because my view of woman identity for this study had to do with a social or cultural experience, not with female biological sex characteristics. I wanted language to signal to a potential participant that my interests were more expansive than the population of cisgender women, and I hoped to invite people into the study who are transgender, as well as people who feel (or felt) a connection to woman identity and may currently identify in other ways.

I modified the language that Obear and Farris (2022) used in the welcome email for their Unpacking White Womanhood workshop series. I had observed the richness of dialogue in Obear and Farris' sessions when gender-expansive individuals offered their perspectives in the workshops, and I hoped to create the possibility for that type of conversation in my study. I wanted a person who felt some connection to white woman identity to see the criteria and believe they could join. I tried to balance clarity and inclusiveness with a need for concision and keeping the focus of study recruitment on engagement in antiracism (the main interest of the study). This was a difficult balance to achieve, and currently, we do not have a succinct way to express the cultural or socialized experience of this study's interest in English.

A colleague questioned the criteria language I used and expressed that they believed it was problematic and biased. That reaction concerned me, but after consulting with my advisor, I

kept the language unchanged in my recruitment efforts. After the study's launch, I found out that

one of the individuals who chose to join the research team identifies as gender queer. They did

not disclose their gender identity in the screening interview, however they included it in their

demographic survey response, so I progressed through the rest of the study aware of their gender

identity. In the closing interview, I asked this team member if they would be comfortable sharing

a little bit of what the study was like for them, focusing on their gender. They said:

> Like I said, [I] very much knew [the study's interest in white woman identity] walking in, and appreciated the language that you used to try to include, like, get others involved, who don't necessarily identify as cisgender women, which was why I was so eager and excited and comfortable, um, joining and putting my pronouns, and identifying the way that I did…It's hard because I'm like, I have to acknowledge the privilege that comes with [white woman identity], and the things that I've gained from that, and the ways that I do present, and the things that it offers me, for better or for worse. And also, like, not just be like: oh, well, I'm not a woman, so like, this doesn't apply to me, and this isn't my issue, because it very much is. Because I do very much benefit from the things that white women benefit from, and because I very much pass in that way, and just like with so many other things, try to like, lay under the radar, and not cause problems. And so, I can be my valid, authentic self with the people that I trust, and in the spaces that I trust. Um. And then out in public I can just be a white woman.

The reflections offered in the closing interview illustrated the way this team member operates

inside and outside of white woman identity. Their considerations of the messages they received

in their upbringing and how those relate to their current gender identity added depth to the study,

and I am grateful they chose to participate in this research.

Data Collection

For this study, I utilized the following types of data collection: screening interview,

demographic questionnaire, electronic whiteboards from research group sessions, researcher

field notes, team member written narrative prompt responses, closing interview, and a researcher

reflection journal (see Table 1) (Ashlee, 2019; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Jones et al., 2022;

Weston, 2021).

Table 1

Data Collection Methods

Data Type	Collection Timing	Description
Screening interview	Following recruitment and outreach to interested parties; screening preceded invitation to join the study	Individual narrative interview following a protocol with each potential team member
Demographic questionnaire	Sent out via Qualtrics survey with invitation to join research team, due before first group meeting	Individual questionnaire collecting data about each team member
Research group whiteboards	During each research group session	Notes taken by research team during research group sessions on an electronic whiteboard
Researcher field notes	During each research group session	Notes taken by the researcher to capture key moments and personal reactions during research group meetings
Written narrative prompt responses	Prompts (Appendix J) sent via Qualtrics survey and collected between research group sessions	Individual written responses to prompts between research group sessions (max 250 words)
Closing interview	After three research group meetings and two narrative prompt responses, the individual closing interview was the last real-time engagement in the study (member checks via email followed)	Individual narrative interview following a protocol with each team member; helped to "close" process with each of them
Researcher reflection journal	Initiated during formation of research questions/reading of literature and maintained to completion of full draft	Ongoing journal kept by the researcher throughout dissertation process

The screening interview served a dual purpose of assisting with participant selection and

beginning to establish trust with them. Given the collective nature of this research process,

coupled with the discomfort most white people feel when discussing whiteness, racism, and

antiracism, taking time to build trust individually and in the group was important (Danley &

Ellison, 1999; DiAngelo, 2018; Jones et al., 2022; Obear & martinez, 2013). Furthermore, all

spheres of this study depended on that trust: Linder's (2018) power-conscious framework

(theoretical framework), PAR (research design), and the constructivist-critical research paradigm

cannot achieve their transformative goals without trust.

At all points in the study, I attempted to share power and work collaboratively and democratically with the research team. Research team members, including the researcher, wrote responses to narrative prompts, giving them an opportunity to provide individual reflections on engaging in antiracist praxis. I collected these reflections between research group sessions to gather data that might not emerge in an oral, real-time, group setting. By incorporating this data type into the study, I allowed an opportunity for team members to lower their reputation management impulses and take time to reflect on the purpose of the study more deeply. Because self-awareness is essential to antiracism work (Saad, 2020; Singh, 2019), I hoped to create space for that awareness to emerge individually so it could spur collective change and action.

The research team also took part in a set of research group meetings. These sessions served as our collaborative opportunity to deepen our understanding of antiracist praxis and chart the path for future actions we wanted to take. The dynamic nature of PAR and the constructivist-critical paradigm of this study are well served by this data type because it works in the moment to shift feelings of shame, defensiveness, and embarrassment into passion and commitment to create meaningful change in communities (Boss et al., 2018; Obear & martinez, 2013). Finally, I conducted closing interviews following a protocol (Appendix K), as an opportunity to hear from team members about their experience in the research study and their current reflections on antiracist praxis.

Compensation

Like Weston (2021), I wrestled with the idea of participant compensation. I felt that it was important to compensate the research team for their time and energy in this process; at the same time, I recognized that this meant I would be paying white people to do antiracism work, and that choice felt problematic. To try to combat the challenges of interest convergence while

still acknowledging the investment of the research team, I created a compensation structure modeled after Weston's (2021). I sent team members a $25 gift card at the conclusion of the study, and I matched that incentive with a collective donation ($150) to a social justice organization the research team decided upon together. After I made the contribution, I forwarded the confirmation email to the research team to acknowledge our shared donation.

Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) contended that data analysis is a "process of meaning making" (p. 202), and the best qualitative studies engage in data analysis simultaneously with data collection. Such an approach creates the opportunity for real-time pivots to pursue leads based on learnings from previous data collection, and in action research specifically, this approach is "imperative for the process" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 90) due to the dynamic and democratic nature of the research design. Herr and Anderson (2015) likened data analysis in action research to attempting to document a moving train in which the researcher is both passenger and a member of the train crew.

This train metaphor captures the significance of the data analysis decisions that happen during the data collection process because they change the future direction of the study. Additionally, the idea of the researcher as both passenger and crew member recognizes the multiple roles of the researcher within the study and shows why ongoing researcher journaling is critically important in action research. In this study, I held simultaneous positions as researcher, insider, and group session facilitator (Herr & Anderson, 105). These multiple roles created complexity, and I engaged in ongoing reflection journaling to capture "ongoing thinking, decisions, and actions" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 91) that influenced the progression of the study and how I navigated the process.

I approached data analysis of the transcripts of interviews, research group sessions, narrative prompt responses, and other data types using phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). Braun and Clark (2006) described six phases of thematic analysis that guided my analysis and interpretation. I describe the first phase in detail here and will describe the other phases of data analysis in more detail in Chapter 4. The first phase, familiarizing yourself with the data, occurred as I transcribed the interviews and group meetings, reread the written prompt responses, and typed up the virtual white board, my field notes, and my reflection journal. After I uploaded all data artifacts into Dedoose, a software platform for data coding and analysis, I consulted *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (Saldaña, 2021) to decide which coding method I wanted to use.

I felt drawn to use either emotion coding, process coding, or "in vivo" coding (Saldaña, 2021). While emotion coding (assigning the name of an emotional state to an excerpt) was tempting because there were a lot of moments when emotion or emotional impact was important, I suspected there were other significant moments when emotion was not the most salient aspect. I liked the idea of using process coding because that involves assigning a gerund form of a verb to each code, helping the researcher see the action in each moment (Saldaña, 2021). That felt appropriate for a participatory action research design, given its action orientation. I also saw tremendous value in "in vivo" coding, a method of using participants' own words as the name of the code. I was very tempted by "in vivo" coding, but I knew there were some moments in meetings or interviews when I felt team members struggled to name exactly what they were feeling or what was going on (for any number of reasons—guilt, avoidance, judgment, overwhelm, etc.), so I worried that "in vivo" coding might be limiting. Considering all these

factors, I decided to utilize process coding, and began Braun and Clark's (2006) second phase, generating initial codes.

Searching for themes is Braun and Clark's (2006) third phase of thematic analysis, and at this stage of the process, I decided that I wanted to be able to physically manipulate the codes. I wrote each code on a single post-it note and began to move the post-it notes into thematic groups. After studying each group, I returned to excerpts from the codes in each group. Jones et al. (2022) described "submerging into the hermeneutic circle" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 167) as a process of listening more deeply to the data and disregarding previous assumptions or analyses. At this stage in the process, I tried to set aside preconceived notions of what I expected to see in the data and "dove in" to the hermeneutic circle to hear what the research team truly expressed in the data. After making sure I understood the driving ideas behind each group of codes, I created a category label naming each group and wrote that category label on a new post-it note. I continued to consider the six category names and determined there were three larger themes into which those categories fit.

In the fourth phase of analysis, I reviewed the themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). This involved sketching and continuing to iterate on a visualization of the categories and the themes. In this phase, I also met with two sets of scholar-practitioners for peer review, and preparing for these meetings helped me identify a fourth theme in the data. Additionally, in this phase I conducted member checks with the research team to give them an opportunity to review and provide feedback on my initial themes and findings. During the fifth phase of thematic analysis, a phase Braun and Clark (2006) called defining and naming themes, I worked with the major themes I had identified and considered their connections to: specific excerpts in the data I collected, the power-conscious framework (Linder, 2018), participatory action research, and

previous literature. The sixth phase of Braun and Clark's guide to thematic analysis is producing the report, and I began writing some of the process findings in Chapter 4 while those decisions and thoughts were still fresh, and I continued writing after I concluded data analysis.

Trustworthiness

In Herr and Anderson's (2015) discussion of rigor in action research, the authors proposed that traditional notions of validity and reliability do not apply to this research design. Instead, they offered five validity criteria—outcome, process, democratic, catalytic, and dialogic—that align with action research's goals. My strategies to increase trustworthiness in my study brought together Herr and Anderson's (2015) validity criteria with some of the strategies to promote validity and reliability offered by Merriam and Tisdell (2015).

Triangulation refers to the utilization of multiple types of data collection as a means of confirming findings within the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). There were multiple research team data types (interviews, group sessions, written responses, and group whiteboards) as well as several researcher data types (reflection journal, written responses, and field notes) that were used for triangulation to contribute to process validity (Herr & Anderson, 2015) in this study.

I also engaged the research team in member checks or respondent validation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) during the study to co-create the path forward, and after the study to solicit feedback. The respondent validation process supports Herr and Anderson's (2015) concepts of catalytic and democratic validity. Catalytic validity refers to the transformative nature of the research team's understanding of the research problem, and the way that transformation can energize and reorient the learning of all involved. Democratic validity (Herr & Anderson, 2015) describes the collaborative nature of the research process, a necessary component to an action research study.

Finally, I utilized peer review, the process of discussing the initial analysis of the study with colleagues (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) as another way to increase trustworthiness. Writing about action research, Herr and Anderson (2015) suggested engaging a "critical friend who is familiar with the setting and can serve as devil's advocate for alternative explanations of the research data" (p. 70), and this type of peer review supports what they call dialogic validity (Herr & Anderson, 2015). For peer review, I met with two race-specific caucuses of scholar-practitioners experienced in antiracist praxis: one meeting with two white women and one meeting with three Black Women. In keeping with the values of this study, I compensated each of the Black Women scholars for their time, energy, and efforts that they invested in me and this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand antiracist praxis?

2. How do white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, describe their experiences enacting antiracist practices?

In this chapter, I review the findings of this participatory action research study. This research was framed by the power-conscious framework (Linder, 2018) which is focused on the intersection of identity and power. I begin this chapter with an introduction of each member of the research team to share some salient parts of their identities and offer some context and insight into the group. Next, I present process findings—some of the valuable data and key moments that occurred over the course of the different phases of the study. Finally, I provide the resultant findings of the study, detailing the four major themes that emerged.

Research Team Profile

Five people confirmed the invitation to join the study and completed all phases of the research process. The following research team profiles offer background information about each member of the research team. As an active participant in group meetings and a respondent to written prompts, I was a member of the team and appear below using my name. All other

individuals are introduced using a pseudonym of their choosing, and demographic details they provided, using their own language. In accordance with the study's criteria, all team members identify as white.

Alex

Alex identifies as gender queer and gender nonbinary, and uses they/them pronouns. Alex is Italian-American, middle class, and identifies as queer in sexual orientation. Alex has a disability. Alex works at a large, public, rural, historically white university in the Southeast. They work in residence life and have been in student affairs for seven years. Alex chose to pursue graduate school at a predominantly white institution in the Deep South because they are passionate about race and racism and wanted to explore diversity and inclusion work in that setting. Alex's comments often reflected their awareness of the communities in which they exist (family, community of queer friends, work department, institution, etc.), and how to negotiate their privilege and vulnerability in those systems.

Allie

Allie identifies as female and uses she/her pronouns. She is of Polish, Italian, and Irish ethnicity, and identifies as middle class, heterosexual, and fully able. She works at a large, private university on the West Coast in academic advising and co-curricular programming, and has been in student affairs for 23 years. Allie has the longest career in student affairs on the team, and joined the study "hoping for inspiration" and to hear "how we sustain ourselves for the long road." Allie has extensive experience as a group facilitator, and periodically spoke up in research group meetings with comments that affirmed team members and created opportunities for the team to further reflect on powerful moments in meetings.

Amy

Amy identifies as a cis woman and uses she/her pronouns. Amy's ethnicity is Hispanic and European, and she was raised working class and is currently middle class. Amy identifies as straight and temporarily able-bodied. Amy works at a large, private, religiously-affiliated university in the Midwest. She works in community engagement and has worked in student affairs for less than one year. Amy is the youngest member of the team and completed her master's degree in higher education/student affairs about four months before the start of the study. As an undergraduate student, Amy double-majored in English and Justice & Peace Studies, and in our group meetings, she asked big questions that revealed her activist experience.

Claire

Claire identifies as a cis woman and uses she/her pronouns. Claire is of Italian-American and European ancestry, and identifies as middle class, bisexual, and able-bodied. Claire works at a large, private university in the Southeast. She works in student affairs within an academic unit, and has been in the field for eight years. Claire served roles as instigator of this study, team member, and facilitator of research group meetings, often initiating topic transitions in group sessions.

Josuelynn

Josuelynn identifies as female and uses she/her pronouns. Josuelynn identifies as lower middle class, bisexual, and fat. Josuelynn is a mother, breadwinner, first-generation college student, and was rurally raised. She works at a small, private, religiously-affiliated, Asian-American Pacific Islander serving, historically white institution in the Midwest. She works in residence life and has worked in student affairs for 10 years. Just prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Josuelynn began her current job as a director, and her comments often

demonstrated a desire to develop a leadership style that disrupts oppression and advocates for both students and staff in meaningful ways.

Kallista

Kallista identifies as cis-female and uses she/her pronouns. Kallista is of Norwegian ethnicity, and identifies as pansexual, lower middle class, and able-bodied. Kallista is agnostic and in a straight-passing relationship. She works in admissions at a small, public community college in the Midwest. She has worked in student affairs for three and a half years. Kallista identifies as an introvert and is active in LGBTQIA+ activism. In group meetings and in her closing interview, she explored how to take her confidence in her queer advocacy and activism and translate that to antiracist praxis.

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Process Findings

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Kemmis (2009) described action research as "critical and *self*-critical" (p. 463), emphasizing that action research transforms our practices, the way we understand our practices, and the conditions in which we practice. Kemmis' framing of action research as a practice-changing practice elevates the process of the research study into its own fertile ground for findings. Given the significance of process in participatory action research, the section below presents the process findings, described in chronological order of the research team's progression through the study. These findings lay the foundation for the major themes and resultant findings of this research.

Screening Interviews

I conducted individual screening interviews over Zoom prior to inviting participants to join the research team to accomplish several goals: (a) I wanted to confirm that an individual met all the criteria of the study; (b) I aimed to establish rapport and begin to build trust one-on-one

with future members of the research team; and (c) I hoped to set expectations by modeling the

breadth and depth of inquiry I anticipated would occur both during research group meetings and

in written prompts. I wanted participants who chose to join the research team to do so with fully

informed consent, and I believed that process included more than telling them the basic facts of

the study. I wanted to engage participants in the affective realm of the thoughts and feelings the

study might elicit and see how they responded.

In the screening interview, I asked participants to tell me the story of their antiracist

praxis and their reasons for wanting to join the research team for this study. Three of the five

team members named that they hoped to learn from others as a motivation behind joining the

study. Josuelynn explained, "I'm excited to learn from other peers and folks in the field to get to

see what other folks are reading, where folks' different experiences have been, and hopefully,

just learn a little bit more." Kallista echoed those thoughts, stating an interest in learning from

people with different perspectives and experience than her own.

The desire to find community was another common theme across a majority of the

interviews. Amy expressed that she had felt a part of the "built-in community" in her

undergraduate experience, and due to a move for graduate school, the pandemic shutdown, and

then moving again and being new in her first full-time job, she was still looking for community

in her new environment. She said, "I feel like that sense of community that was really good for

me as an activist has kind of eroded," and she hoped participating in the study could provide

community and reconnect her to antiracist praxis. Josuelynn discussed her interest in community

and offered:

> Women are inherently communal, and there's this pull, like this deep-seeded pull within
> us to be part of a larger community, and to not break into individualism, but yet
> whiteness and nature have taught us to break up and pull ourselves away, right, and be in
> our own households and in our own buckets. And so, part of this is selfish and wanting to

find a community. I'm wanting to break away from what I've been taught, and try to unlearn that and do so in a community with others.

Josuelynn and others expressed awareness of the connection between the self and larger communities—the community of white women, and more broadly, of all women. Allie voiced the desire for community and stated, "I feel like we need each other more than ever" and discussed how this study might offer a unique opportunity for white women to talk about thoughts or feelings often left unsaid because "we're not supposed to be centering ourselves."

In the screening interviews, I asked participants about the development of their race consciousness and about a time when they struggled to show up as a racial ally. I also asked why antiracist praxis by white women in student affairs is important to study. Alex gave a poignant answer:

> We, as white women, are the most dangerous population for the survival of antiracist praxis. I think historically and in the present day, we have…put [antiracism] work, and more importantly, the safety of People of Color and particularly Black people and Black women and non-binary folks, at risk.

The screening interviews showed me that the individuals I interviewed were very willing to be vulnerable, even when their stories or statements revealed mistakes, struggles, or uncomfortable feelings. I also saw that each participant had experience reckoning with racism and antiracism. At the conclusion of interviews, I was excited to convene the first research group meeting.

Meeting One

When I sent the participants their invitation to join the team, I asked them to complete a demographic questionnaire prior to our first team meeting. After reviewing the responses, I saw that the group was diverse in geographic location, employer's institutional type, student affairs work area, years of experience in the field, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and ability/disability status. The wide range of their experiences brought a richness to the research

group meetings and to the study that made me grateful that I had constructed the study to enable national recruitment and virtual participation.

Before the first meeting, I asked team members to reflect on one to three unwritten rules they had learned early about whiteness or white womanness, and we spent a portion of the first meeting discussing those unwritten rules. Team members talked about being taught to compete, being taught not to take up too much space or to silence their needs, and learning that they would be given the benefit of the doubt. Allie identified that as a child and teenager, she understood her presence to mean neutrality, goodness, and safety. Kallista spoke about learning that "the best way to be is colorblind," and Amy talked about the coded way she observed others talking about the suburbs and the city—"basically…the suburbs are safe because you're around a bunch of white people, and the city is dangerous because you're around People of Color." When team members spoke about the rules they had learned early, their current discomfort was clear and often stated.

At this point in the first meeting, I reintroduced the research questions and the purpose of the study, shared some unattributed themes (desire to learn and find community) from the screening interviews, and opened up the conversation to the group to ask how we would like to proceed in our work together. Josuelynn proposed we use a conceptualization of the facets of white supremacy culture originally presented in an article by Okun (as a result of work in collaboration with Kenneth Jones), which Okun subsequently updated and made available online (Okun, 2022). The white supremacy culture characteristics are all "interconnected and mutually reinforcing" (Okun, 2022, first para), and according to Okun (2022): "our institutions not only value these characteristics, they to some extent require them and constantly reproduce them in order to benefit from them" (first para). Okun's (2022) current list of characteristics of white

supremacy culture are: fear, one right way, perfectionism, paternalism, objectivity, qualified, either/or thinking, denial and defensiveness, right to comfort, fear of open conflict, individualism, progress is more, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, and sense of urgency.

After Josuelynn proposed the idea of working with this framework, she shared an example of how she has seen these traits surface at work. I provided a link to Okun's website in the Zoom chat to give access to the concepts for the whole team, and team members took turns sharing some ways they have seen white supremacy culture characteristics present in higher education and student affairs. We decided that before our next meeting, each of us would choose a characteristic to reflect on more deeply, thinking about how we have seen it show up in our work and what actions we might take to disrupt that manifestation of white supremacy.

Prompt One

In addition to the "homework" we gave ourselves to reflect on a white supremacy culture characteristic, between meetings I sent out and received back responses to the first narrative reflection prompt. The first prompt asked each person to consider how they saw themselves in white women who show up in white privilege, white fragility, white silence, and/or white exceptionalism. In the text of the prompt, I provided definitions of each term from the literature, and asked for responses to be fewer than 250 words (Appendix J).

The responses focused most on white exceptionalism, white silence, and white fragility; team members recognized that they move through the world with white privilege, but they chose to write about different aspects of whiteness. The reflections on exceptionalism articulated versions of: "at least I'm doing something" and a sense that we care about equity and oppression, and not all white people do. The reflections on silence explored messaging that reinforces silence

and possible reasons for staying silent: not knowing if Colleagues of Color want us to speak up in response to a racial incident or if that will draw out a situation when they would rather move on, and not speaking up due to feeling unsafe because of other minoritized identities we hold. Finally, the responses on fragility discussed defensiveness or other reactions we try to manage internally while remaining calm externally. Another team member wrote that despite having done a lot of work on herself and on programming for others, she "still" recognizes white fragility in herself and feels moments of shame, inadequacy, and fear, and recognizes that those moments separate us from genuine connection with People of Color. She then wrote about white tears and that despite her knowledge of their impact, "there have been times that tears emerged during difficult conversations about racism" and she felt shame that she had not better regulated her response in those situations.

Meeting Two

We began our second research group meeting with a discussion of the written prompt responses. I shared themes and key quotes without attribution, and we transitioned into a discussion of the relationship between silence and perfectionism in antiracism work. During this conversation, Allie reflected to the group, "sometimes it's like I'm overthinking it so much to a point where it's no longer helpful. And then that pushes me into like silence…Sometimes I feel like I don't give myself permission to be human." Several team members echoed these sentiments, and Amy discussed the way fear and perfectionism operate simultaneously. She explained that part of the fear is ego—a need to be perfect, not make mistakes, and the fear that "I'll be revealed as a person who actually doesn't know anything [about racial justice] or actually can't act on the things I say I care about." She went on to describe a simultaneous fear of causing

harm to her Friends of Color and making a mistake that would cause the deterioration of her relationships.

The team then shifted the conversation to the possibility of using a trauma-informed approach, or trauma healing, to navigate dealing with white supremacy. Their comments led me to write in my reflection journal, "are these separate categories: things you work on with your therapist & white supremacy culture?", as they discussed how challenges like fear of abandonment, people-pleasing, inferiority/superiority complex, etc., interact with some of the characteristics of white supremacy culture (Okun, 2022). As the conversation subsided, I used this opportunity to ask the group about their individual reflections since our last meeting on a white supremacy culture characteristic (Okun, 2022), and the team took turns speaking about the characteristic they have seen show up in student affairs and how they might interrupt that situation in the future.

When I built the agenda for the second team meeting, I included time for us to discuss successes and challenges we have faced in antiracist praxis, and time for us to return to the purpose of the study and discuss what actions we might choose to pursue as the outcome of the study. As the team discussed praxis successes and challenges—a discussion I thought might begin to shift us toward action—it became clear to me that the group was not inclined toward digging deeper into action at that moment. It felt like they were grateful, even relieved, to have this chance to process emotions with peers who shared their experiences, and I made an in-the-moment facilitation choice. I decided that rather than try to discuss outcome actions in this meeting, I would introduce the idea as something to consider in preparation for next time, stating that a proposal for action would be one focus of the final meeting. We ended the second meeting

generating a list of possible organizations to receive the donation I would make on behalf of the research team.

Prompt Two

After the second group meeting, I wanted to use the second reflection prompt to begin to move our conversation into the realm of action. I asked the team to share opportunities in their work environment where they could divest from policies, processes, or practices that privilege white people and how they might enact this divestment in community and in collaboration with People of Color (Appendix J). As I had done in the first prompt, I requested that responses be shorter than 250 words.

The responses shared valuable ideas: self-placement instead of standardized testing as a way to support all students more effectively, including students who do not perform well on placement tests; policy overhaul and reworking to examine the degree to which policies are rooted in equity or privilege; handbook review starting with the most impacted students, then understanding policies that negatively impact their experience, and subsequently considering what shifts are needed in the handbook; suggestions for improved hiring, critical incident responses, process reviews, and community norms; and changing the way we show up by choosing to take up space and share power.

As I read their responses, I was appreciative of all of the great ideas the team shared, and at the same time, I wished I could go back in time and send a prompt that was more personally reflective in nature. Everyone wrote smart, thoughtful responses, and yet, I felt like I had not captured the same energy in these responses that I had seen in the responses to the first prompt. In an effort to align with the action orientation of participatory action research, I had steered us toward making a list of actions and tactics. The more I sat with that decision, the more I

recognized whiteness in that choice. White supremacy culture characteristics (Okun, 2022) like progress is more and one right way support the creation of lists and identification of tasks as a way to stay oriented to achievement (in other words, capitalism) rather than anchoring on feeling and collective values (relationships). I had felt anxiety about our "lack of progress" toward action as dictated by the research design, so I chose to prioritize what I believed the research design needed rather than what I felt the team members needed. This period of the study—from the end of the second meeting through the prompt and to the beginning of the third meeting— created tension between what I believed I should do in service of the group versus what I believed I should do in a participatory action research study.

Meeting Three

At the beginning of the third meeting, we discussed the group donation that I would make to match the incentive I would give team members at the conclusion of the study. The group decided that the donation would go to the Urban Justice Center (www.urbanjustice.org), an organization that supports social change and the mentorship of future social justice leaders. Our team had generated many different ideas when we first discussed the donation, and I had offered to make five separate matching donations when I thought agreeing on one cause for a collective donation might not feel satisfying to the group. In the third meeting, however, the group quickly came together to determine the collective donation recipient, and I was heartened to see the individuals show up as a collective in that conversation; they wanted the donation to come from "us."

After we determined the donation organization, I reintroduced an idea that had been posed in the first meeting that we had not yet explored: somatic experience. I asked the group, "What happens in your body when you experience racial stress, when you have been called out,

or when you feel like you made a race- or racism-related mistake?" Some of the team described

physical experiences similar to the physical sensations associated with shame: feelings of heat

rising into the face or cheeks, a fight or flight need for safety, wanting to shrink, feeling frozen or

constricted. For other participants, these racial stress experiences, callouts, or mistakes did not

become embodied in the same way. Kallista described her response, "I tend to get more like

caught up in my anxiety and my thoughts when I feel shame about it; like I overanalyze the

situation, or I overthink about what I could have said…or could have done." We stayed with this

conversation and also discussed rage in the face of racial injustice and how we do or do not

experience rage somatically. The conversation on our somatic experience was very powerful, and

there was a lot of richness in discussing how our nervous systems do or do not become activated

in these moments, and how we manage those reactions.

Next, I reintroduced a question one of the team members had written on our virtual

whiteboard toward the end of the second meeting as a topic we had not yet discussed that they

would like us to explore: "what level of discomfort or risk am I willing to undertake to interrupt

white supremacy?" After I asked this of the group, Alex said:

> I think we all want to be like, 'oh, I'd do anything,' like, 'nope, I have no hesitations, I'm
> going to do and say whatever needs to be done and said'…and like, I am a good ally, and
> I'm always going to do the right thing. And I think…there is a point where…whether
> perceived or real, your safety and security…is potentially at risk, and so I feel like often
> for me, the line has come down to…am I going to get fired for this?…I work in housing,
> so before this position that I started this year, it wasn't just losing a job. It was literally
> losing my home and losing my meal plan and losing everything. And so, I feel like most
> often…working in student affairs, um, that's the line for me is like protecting my own
> safety and wellbeing to be able to survive. But I want to be able to be like, 'No, I'm
> gonna do and say whatever needs to be done and said,' and I think some of that has come
> as I've like moved up in positions and have more privilege and safety and security.

Alex's comments showed how difficult resistance can feel at times. Professionals in certain areas

of student affairs might have access to the financial benefits of free or reduced-cost housing, but

such benefits might make challenging the system feel unsafe. This conversation took the team into an exploration of what circumstances provide us with safety or power to disrupt (e.g., duration of employment at an institution, level of seniority, relationships with key decision-makers), and a recognition that trying to leverage that safety or power afforded to us by the system is, in fact, still operating within the system. Amy voiced a fear of "becoming deradicalized" and started a group conversation about "burning it all down."

Next, we discussed the responses to the narrative prompt and the actions we would like to take as the outcome of the study. I sensed that it might be helpful for me to offer some possibilities, so I tried to do so while encouraging the team to edit or reject any or all of the options. One of my suggestions was for the group to continue to meet, because I felt people were enjoying the chance to be in community with others committed to this work and who were outside of their immediate contexts, in different parts of the country, in different types of roles, and with different levels of experience, who brought different personalities and experiences to the conversation. Most of the team quickly voiced the desire to continue meeting. The team suggested that we could continue talking through problems with one another and processing experiences in a place where, because of neutral power dynamics, it felt less risky to reveal struggles. After we had agreed to continue to meet, I closed the meeting asking each person to share a reflection on something they were still sitting with as we concluded.

Closing Interviews

I was happy to have one-on-one time with each team member in the closing interviews to hear more from them individually. I asked each person to tell me the story of their experience in the study, and all five people expressed appreciation and shared new insights that they gained because of the study. Josuelynn shared, "I found it really…empowering and refreshing to be able

to talk with other white women about…I think, things that we're all struggling with, recognizing that both there's a system in play, but also, that we're contributors to that system" and how those systems affect our professional and personal lives. She described the study process as "a really grounding experience to help root me back" to do the work and role model it in "intentional and thoughtful ways." She went on to describe how she hoped to incorporate some of the ways this group operated into the dynamics of her own work team.

Kallista also shared thoughts about application to her work setting and said, "I think more than anything, what I've learned is that these conversations need to be happening, and that sometimes I am the person that needs to bring it up. Like I can take up the space to do this." Kallista also talked about some feelings of imposter syndrome in the group and her continual evaluation of the relative value of her contributions to the group. In this part of the conversation with Kallista, I recognized how difficult it is for all of us to let go of judgment. In multiple closing interviews, team members talked about their judgments of themselves or of each other throughout the research process.

Another important insight arose during Alex's closing interview. Alex said:

> I think the experience of whiteness looks different for everyone, which seems very obvious, but I think just hearing the unique stories that I heard really solidified that for me…We can all have these unique experiences but come back to the shared concepts and ideas and passions, and reasoning for doing the work.

Alex described how it is easy to look at whiteness as a monolithic experience, and it is helpful to remember that whiteness, and antiracist praxis, are unique to each person. At the same time, our motivations and investment in racial justice unite us.

Post-Study Analysis

When closing interviews concluded, I reflected on all the insights that had surfaced in the conversations, interviews, and prompts, and I also thought about the analysis and writing work

still to come. As I reflected on my closing interview with Alex and our conversation about their gender identity and experience in the study, I recognized new needs for the dissertation draft and my writing. I decided to email Alex to check in about how my ideas were coalescing around the ways I would discuss woman identity and the research team in the dissertation.

In the email, I proposed that in my dissertation, when I described the purpose, problem, research questions, and guiding interests of the study, I would use the term "white women" because that is concise and represents the socialized experience I wanted to explore. I also suggested that I would include a section explaining my desire to include gender-expansive, non-cisgender collaborators, and that experience with socialization as a woman (not a prescriptive gender identity) was how I conceptualized my participants. Furthermore, I stated my intention to use language that includes Alex when describing the members of the research team and to not misgender Alex or force them to pass. I closed the email acknowledging the complexities and nuances of the writing task, and my desire to honor Alex's whole self. I also included a list of language Alex had used to describe themselves and asked them to add, edit, or modify the list. I did not hear back from Alex over email, and I followed up with them alone at the end of our first post-study research team meeting. They had been in the midst of a personally challenging time, so had not replied to my email. They also expressed their appreciation and were touched by the intention and care I had shown in my email. That conversation and the reflections that preceded it have informed the way I discuss white woman identity in this dissertation.

The reflective and reflexive nature of participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggert, 2005) means that by the time the active phase of the study had concluded, I had already engaged in incremental periods of data analysis in the interstices between each of the study's phases. I found coding the data to be both interesting and creative, and Saldaña's

description that coding is more art than science (2021) resonated with me. At times when there

was not an explicit action, participants often reflected on their thoughts or feelings, or described

what was going on within them, so I used verbs like noticing, reflecting, considering, and feeling

as the beginning of codes where the action was more related to internal processing. Trying to

find the right language to describe a moment was its own thought-provoking process that forced

me to further reflect on the action of a specific moment and the meaning of the data. I was struck

by how the language of a code could enhance the significance of a moment.

The study produced 28 data artifacts, and when I finished coding, I had created 73 codes.

Figure 2 illustrates a word cloud of the codes, with phrases that appear in larger font representing

a greater frequency of application of that code to data excerpts.

Figure 2

Code Word Cloud
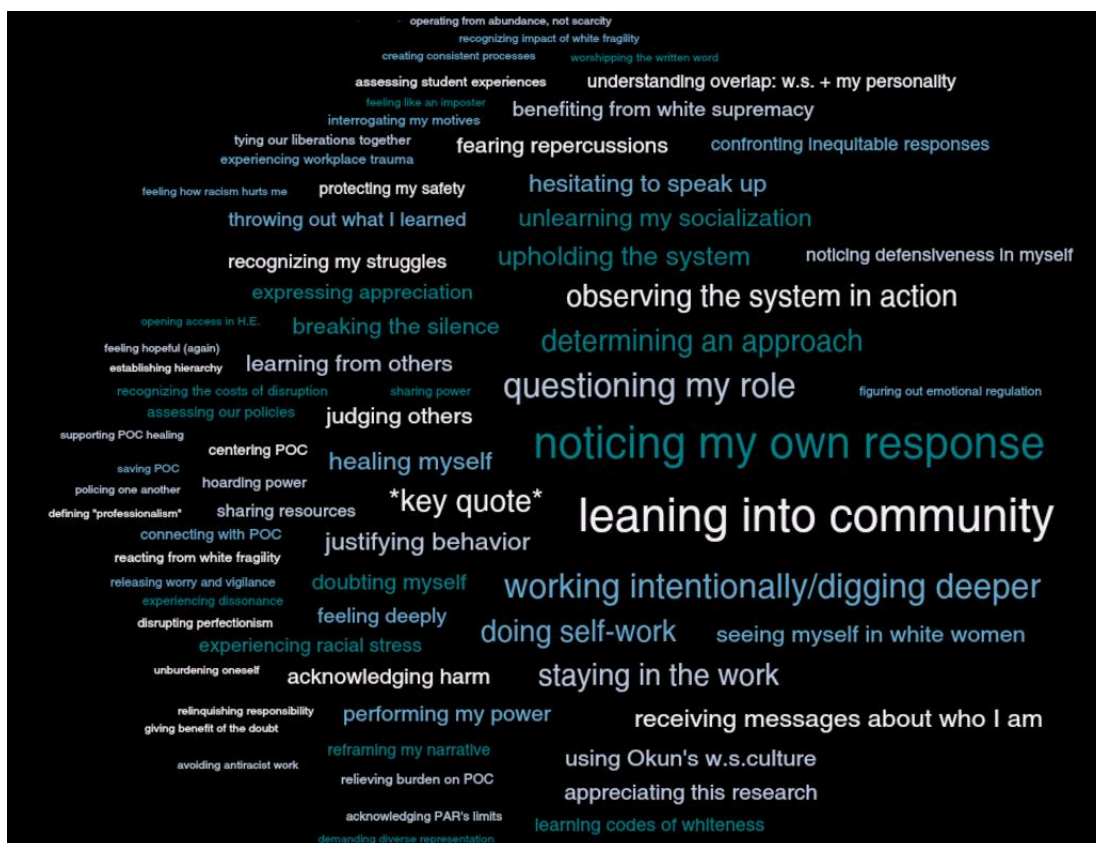
After applying and working with the codes in Dedoose, I also wanted to experience them in a more tactile way. I wrote each code on its own post-it note to be able to look at all of them and physically move them in space. I separated two codes from the others because they referred to research or dissertation process rather than content data. The first of these two was a code called "*key quote*," a way for me to highlight excerpts that I thought were particularly insightful and to make them easier to find later in the writing process. The other code I separated from the rest was "acknowledging PAR's limits," a code only applied to my own reflection journal entries regarding my thoughts about challenges I encountered with the research design. I began to work with the other 71 post-it notes, arranging them on my kitchen counter. When the codes seemed to address similar actions, say the same thing in different words, or speak to related phenomena, I moved those codes into physical proximity to one another.

When the process of grouping codes was complete, I had six groups and one outlier post-it note. That outlier code, "performing my power," worked across multiple categories because sometimes the excerpts associated with it reflected times power was used for harm or recusal, and sometimes the excerpts revealed times power was used for advocacy or connection. I had used this code in different ways, depending on context. I placed this code in the middle of the groups since it worked for several categories. I stopped and considered each category and reflected on the coding method I would use to name each category. I considered if the naming of categories would be a good opportunity to use emotion coding or "in vivo" coding methods, given my earlier interest in these approaches. After spending some time rereading the codes in each category and the excerpts they represented, I felt clear that I wanted to continue using process coding as the title for each category.

I went category by category, reading the codes, sometimes returning to excerpts to make sure I understood the types of comments the codes represented. I spent time with each group and wrote a post-it note with the category title for each group. At the end of this process, there were six category labels, and I recognized that the six categories broke into pairs of two, producing three major themes. I recorded an initial idea of each major theme name, then I returned to the data artifacts and reread all of them. After immersing myself in the data again, I added another major theme. At this point, I had to prepare for member checks and my peer review meetings with my "critical friends," so I created a presentation deck of initial findings to use for both purposes.

To perform member checks, I emailed the research team and attached the slide deck, asking the team to review it and provide any feedback within one week. I received one affirming response and no other replies to the message. In the same week, I conducted my meetings with my "critical friends." The peer review meetings provided valuable conversations, new insights, and an opportunity for me to hear new questions and thoughts about my initial findings. The first meeting with white women scholar-practitioners raised questions about a visual of the data I had created, and we all agreed that the graphic was not yet supporting data understanding and meaning-making in the way that I would like. We also discussed category names and major themes, and they felt the themes were right, but wanted one of the category names to change. I updated the category names and the visualization of the data prior to my meeting the following day with three Black women scholar-practitioners. The meeting with the Black women caucus gave me more ideas about the visualization of the data and they asked new questions about category names. They also offered affirmation of the study and indicated that, overall, my findings felt true to their experiences working with white women in student affairs. Finally, they

raised some questions for me to consider regarding implications and recommendations from the study.

One week after the peer review meetings, we had the first post-study meeting of the research team. They seemed interested in hearing how my thinking had evolved since I had sent them the presentation deck, so we ended up performing an impromptu, real-time member check. I talked with them about my analysis at the time I sent the presentation deck, and how that thinking had adjusted and evolved through the peer review meetings over the previous week. They offered a few new thoughts, and a lot of support and recognition of the work I had done to date. My data analysis process and these valuable peer review and member check conversations created ample opportunity for reflection, questioning, and periods of both self-doubt and encouragement.

In this research study, I tried to share power, invite other voices into the conversation at all stages of the process, and lean into the value of perspectives different from my own. To put it another way, I tried to disrupt the white supremacy of the researcher as all-powerful study ruler, colonizer of participant experiences, and owner of knowledge. I tried to position myself not as an expert, but as another traveler on the road toward justice. This orientation to welcoming in multiple voices meant that transitioning to being the single presenter of the findings and implications of the study felt uncomfortable. I am the sole chronicler of a collective journey.

Resultant Findings

Initial data analysis produced six categories of data: harming, fearing, persevering, unlearning, connecting, and healing. Those six categories paired off and yielded three major themes: defense, persistence, and growth. I added a fourth major theme, vigilance and shame, after rereading all the data to check the fit of the categories and major themes as I prepared for

peer review and member checks. Often in dissertations, the theme appears first with its subordinate categories explicated thereafter. In my findings, the categories build to the major themes, so I will explain the categories in detail first to offer grounding and support, then I will provide a description of the related theme.

Category: Harming

The data represented by this category reflected moments when our actions harm others or ourselves. Team members described avoiding antiracist work and allyship, upholding the system and benefiting from white supremacy, and hoarding power over others. In Allie's response to the first written prompt, she wrote about white exceptionalism and said:

> Because I do DEI work, there are times in my private life (especially when I am tired) that I let myself off the hook from feeling responsible for my impact as a white person in the collective of white people world because "at least I'm doing something." This looks like avoiding social media posts of antiracist influencers for a few days. This looks like judgmental thinking about everyone else, but not me.

Allie's comments mirrored other moments in the study when team members discussed making choices that resulted in avoidance of antiracism or activism. As examples, in two screening interviews, team members talked about witnessing a Black woman colleague get fired without apparent cause and believing racism was the major factor in the dismissal. Kallista watched this happen during her graduate school experience and reflected, "I didn't say anything when I should have…[there] wasn't a structure that was in place for me to be able to talk about racism, and so I felt like I couldn't." Kallista acknowledged that while she had supported her friend interpersonally, she had not advocated for the friend to those in power and challenged the racism of the situation. Kallista's comment about the lack of structure for a conversation about racism suggests that to break from white silence (DiAngelo, 2018; Saad, 2020) and white solidarity

(DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014), she would need to be given permission to challenge the racism she witnessed. White supremacy will never grant permission to threaten its interests.

Power hoarding and establishing hierarchy came up with respect to how we position ourselves with People of Color and with other white people. In her closing interview, Josuelynn spoke about how often she observed herself competing since starting her current job. She talked about her behavior "around experting, trying to be the smartest in the room…or at least, show that I know what I'm talking about…I don't need to be the smartest, but gosh, I want you to know that I know something!" Josuelynn's comment revealed the white exceptionalism of a white activist who wants to prove that unlike other bad white people, they are a good ally. White folks involved in social justice work try to prove our worth in activist spaces by citing who we perceive to be the right thought leader or signaling in other ways that we belong in the space. These moves to jockey ourselves into "better" relative positions do nothing to support people experiencing oppression, and often damage our relationships instead of strengthening them. At least once in the course of the study, each member of the research team shared an example of a time when they recognized that their action or inaction caused harm.

Category: Fearing

This category reflected moments when the research team discussed doubting ourselves, fearing repercussions, judging ourselves or others, justifying our behavior, and observing the system in action (but not doing anything). As discussed above in the process findings, during the second research group meeting, we discussed the white supremacy culture characteristics of fear and perfectionism and how both characteristics function to maintain our silence and inhibit our disruption. Alex captured it, saying, "there's so much fear behind doing or saying something that would cause harm, mostly, but also that could result in [Friends or Colleagues of Color] seeing

me as a person who is not supportive or who is not safe." Alex and Amy discussed their dual

fears of acting in a way that proves they are unsafe (which impacts the relationship) and what

that action means about who they are (which impacts ego). The fear of making a race-related

mistake and the desire to be perfect in our efforts proved to be powerful silencing and inhibiting

forces.

There were many moments in interviews, group meetings, and written responses when I

felt the power of our judgment of ourselves and others. Amy recognized the uselessness of this

judgment and stated, "I think I'm just like hyper-observant in a way that I don't think actually

necessarily serves me." Allie furthered this idea in our third meeting's discussion of somatic

experience. She said:

> [I have] this deep sense of responsibility I feel to the people I work with, and the people
> that work for me. And so, on occasions where I have made a mistake…I definitely like
> freeze up and it's like very constricted, and the thing that I notice is like it will stay with
> me for a very long time. It's like I don't let myself off the hook. I almost feel like it's
> punishment that I need to feel. I'm working through that, I will say, because I know it
> doesn't serve me. But it is like the subconscious thing that I do. Or like, I will hold onto it
> for a very, very long time. It's like I will hold myself accountable and responsible way
> longer than the people around me…and what I notice…is, it limits me just being my best
> version of myself, and it limits me from being a creative thinker and being open and
> flexible…What I notice is like, my physical experience can then really impact my
> cognitive experience and my ability to like connect with other people and do really good,
> creative work.

When Allie said, "it's punishment that I need to feel," I felt the whole team catch their breath in

deep recognition of Allie's experience—Allie had voiced something we all felt. The idea that we

believe we deserve to be punished adds another dimension to our fear. We have internalized

white supremacy's expectation of perfectionism so much that we have replicated its standards in

our work in antiracism.

Major Theme: Defense

The categories of harming and fearing tie to a larger theme of defense. When we operate in ways that perpetuate harm or fear, those actions are motivated by a desire to defend. We feel a need to defend ourselves, our safety, our comfort, and furthermore, the *status quo* and the system that supports us. Harming and fearing actions defend white supremacy and therefore they cannot further antiracist praxis.

Category: Persevering

The category of persevering included data on questioning our roles, noticing our reactions and defensiveness, interrogating our motives, and still staying in the work. The group meeting moments and narrative prompt sections that were coded to this category showed times when the research team was grappling with their responses—fighting off unhelpful responses, holding themselves accountable, and continuing despite discomfort. Two team members discussed how these reactions manifested for them even in their approach to the study. In the first group meeting, Kallista shared that she had felt like she needed to go back and reread texts from her graduate program to prepare, saying she felt, "I needed to educate myself more, so that I would come across as the competent white woman…even though…the whole point of this is to get the real, how we're actually feeling…I still felt like I needed to bolster myself." Josuelynn quickly agreed, stating that the previous day, she had shared with a colleague that she would be participating in this study, and the colleague asked if she would be getting paid. Josuelynn said she told her colleague yes, a little, but assured her she would donate that to an organization. As though speaking to her colleague, Josuelynn said, "So no, don't worry, I'm going to use the money for like, good." Kallista and Josuelynn's comments demonstrate an example of

credentialing, and how these team members caught themselves in the act and felt frustrated by their impulses to perform the "good" white woman role.

Data in the persevering category often revealed an increased awareness of self and of white supremacy's operations. This increased awareness enabled deeper questioning and a thoughtfulness mid-stream about whether we want to continue or stop our behavior in-the-moment if it does not align with our antiracist values. Allie raised a question shortly after Kallista and Josuelynn's exchange that reflects a lot of the data in the persevering category. Allie offered:

> It's just interesting to be here with all of you, and to be able to like peel back the layers and complexity of like, what does it mean to be a white woman who wants to show up in…in a different way…It requires thinking and feeling, and questioning your own work; and like, how do I do this? And like a constant questioning that I think can lead to doubts of, who am I really, and how do I want to be in this space, and am I always going to have to think so much about every step that I take?

Allie's questions and reflections captured the ways increased self-awareness can also lead to increased self-consciousness and self-doubt. Team members discussed moments when self-doubt stymied them from showing up in the way they would like, as Alex and Amy did in the discussion of white silence and perfectionism. These comments about self-doubt were couched in a broader context of team members choosing to continue to stay engaged in the work and persevere.

At other times, team members used their increased awareness to break through some of the barriers imposed by white supremacy and fear. Amy offered a strategy for a response to a racial incident and said:

> I feel like…just encouraging ourselves to at least just be like, "hey, can we stop for a second? This doesn't feel right to me. I'm not exactly sure why…is anyone else feeling uncomfortable about this conversation?" You know, whatever it is, releasing the need to have the perfect thing to say and just saying something; and if we can't do it in the moment, coming back to it the week later when we have another meeting, or one-on-one,

whatever, and bringing it up again, which I think I struggle with. I'm like, oh, it's already happened, maybe nobody else is thinking about it, and it's already in the past. But going through the extra effort to return to whatever it was if we've clocked already [that] I should have said something; making a point to bring it back up again.

Amy's suggestion breaks the silence and reopens a conversation to speak about a moment of racial bias or some other racialized incident. The framing of her questions lets go of the need to be right or perfect in the mode of disruption. She recognized that speaking up to stop white supremacy can still happen when we do not have all the right words or arguments assembled. The act of disruption is more important than our perfection in that disruption.

Category: Unlearning

In the previous category of persevering, excerpts revealed team members questioning white supremacy within themselves and beginning to break out of silence, thoughts, or behaviors that reinforce that system. The unlearning category revealed more active disruption from team members, who explored confronting inequitable policies and practices, creating new opportunities for access and justice, and unlearning aspects of our socialization. In the second narrative prompt, I asked our team to reflect on how we might divest from policies, processes, and practices that privilege white folks in our work environments. Josuelynn responded:

> I think about the radical act of throwing out everything I've learned, to be loud, take up space, care about others and their emotions but also not limiting myself in the process…I believe in my heart of hearts that the only way to truly divest is for me to continue to lean into community. Allow shared leadership to happen...My biggest stand against whiteness at this time will be to truly hand over as much power as I can, without risking my position, to those I have power over. This would involve putting BIPOC folx in the conversation and ensuring thinking outside my white frame is in place.

Josuelynn addressed how she, as a leader in her department, could change the environment and the level of influence of whiteness in that environment. She saw an opportunity for how her individual actions could make change and interrupt oppression.

Another collection of data excerpts within the unlearning category focused on confronting inequity when we encounter it. As Kallista noted, "sometimes your privilege is the reason that you're welcomed into the door, and so it's your job to do something with that." Most team members discussed wanting to use the power they have to help others and further justice. Alex discussed pushing back on inequitable practices in their response to the second prompt. They wrote about what constitute "emergencies" in their work environment, and the panic and trauma behind some of these situations. Alex connected those moments to white supremacy culture and observed, "I believe some of that is a result of 'sense of urgency' related to who is bringing the concern forward or who is being impacted by the situation." Alex's implication was that complaints or issues brought forward by white residents or problems that impact white residents are treated with greater urgency than those that impact minoritized residents. Alex saw the systemic difference in treatment and discussed working to change policies and training of staff to eliminate inequitable responses.

Major Theme: Persistence

The persevering and unlearning categories relate to persistence. When we are uprooting and overturning white supremacy and racism in ourselves, we must persist through the doubts and challenges we encounter, and work to bring our socialization into our conscious awareness. Because of our intersectional identities, that work involves exploring both the white supremacy and the sexism that we have internalized and accepted into our ways of being and acting. When we truly persist, we can interrupt and defy these forces in ourselves and in our world.

Category: Connecting

The codes and data categorized under the label of connecting focused on supporting and centering People of Color, sharing power and resources, leaning into community, and learning

from others. Our discussions of supporting or centering People of Color mostly involved those actions in the context of our work in higher education and student affairs. Josuelynn and Alex both discussed supervising Colleagues of Color, and how they navigate those relationships. In both cases, the team members considered the power dynamics in their supervisory relationship with their staff member, and they also talked about how to support that staff member in their broader department. As Josuelynn shared in her second prompt response quoted above, her aims with her Colleagues of Color were to find ways to give them and their voices more space and share power and decision-making as much as possible.

Another aspect of this thread of centering the experiences of Colleagues of Color came up when we discussed the cost anyone in higher education pays for speaking out or not upholding the system. Allie said, "[I recognize] that as a white woman, like the price I'm going to pay is not going to be as big of a price, as someone who was a Woman of Color or just a Person of Color," and Kallista had shared a similar thought in her screening interview when she discussed "actively trying to use my own privilege to be able to support People of Color." In individual and group meetings, the team acknowledged that resistance costs us less than our peer Colleagues of Color, and we felt a responsibility and drive to speak out because of our connection to these colleagues.

The code "leaning into community" was the most applied code in the entire data set, and the importance of community emerged in screening interviews, in all three group meetings, and in closing interviews. This code referred to times when team members were in community with People of Color, and also, when we were in community with other white people dedicated to racial justice. Additionally, the action outcome of the study—to continue to meet as a group to support one another's antiracist praxis and hold one another accountable—directly ties to this

area of the data. Many team members spoke about the value of our research group community toward the end of our final group meeting and in closing interviews. When I began to close the third group meeting and asked the team to share a learning, thought, or feeling that was sitting with them, Alex shared:

> I think for me it is gratitude. I think everybody has shared and been very vulnerable in the experiences that they have brought to this group. And that took a lot of bravery, and I'm just really grateful that we were all able to show up in this space the way that we were, [and] to be able to do the work that we hope to do, moving forward. And so, I appreciate and am grateful to each of you for that.

Alex's comment does not directly mention the word community, but they spoke about an environment where vulnerability and bravery felt safe, and Alex expressed gratitude to continue being in the group. This excerpt shows that the group created a space that served as a counterpoint to the silence, perfectionism, and performance of "goodness" team members had described in their experiences of navigating racism and antiracism elsewhere.

In Amy's closing interview, she reflected on the significance of the third group meeting's discussion of somatic experience. She shared, "there are so few spaces to have conversations where we are pushed to specifically, like, name those feelings on an individual level. So, I definitely appreciated that, and that feels like a learning to me." Amy's comments revealed that for various reasons (not wanting to center white feelings, struggling to name feelings associated with racism and antiracism, discomfort, etc.), white people do not have many opportunities to explore our emotional or somatic experiences of racism and antiracism. That silencing keeps us disconnected from one another, and the chance to talk about those experiences with others who share our identities creates the possibility for understanding, recognition, and connection.

Category: Healing

"Healing" was the initial name I wrote for this category because the codes clustered in this group dealt with feeling deeply, feeling how racism hurts me, healing myself, and working intentionally/digging deeper. When I met with the critical friends group of Black women, they questioned this category name, asking me, "what do you all need to heal from?" I took in that feedback and thought for a few days, wondering if "healing" was the right category name and returning to the data while considering other options. I was still wrestling with the category name when the first post-study meeting with the research group occurred, and I shared with them my current state of uncertainty about this category and an alternative to "healing" that I was considering. Josuelynn pushed back on the alternative and argued that while she understood the impulse to defer to Women of Color in this work, and agreed that that is often how we should proceed, she believed "healing" was right. I saw other nods of agreement on the Zoom when Josuelynn was talking and thanked the room for their feedback. I returned to my data and reread some sections of Singh's (2019) *The Racial Healing Handbook*. After reflection, I decided to stick with my original decision to call this category "healing."

Several of the closing interviews explored different aspects of the ways this study's process created opportunities for healing for the team. Allie had an in-the-moment recognition of the power of the study for her and observed, "for a change, I wasn't super worried about my impact and instead, it was like I could just show up with curiosity and for the experience of others, and care for the experience of others and be really messy." Her comment sheds light on the strength of her typical vigilance over her words and actions in antiracist spaces, and the possibilities that are created by releasing worry. Letting go of self-consciousness and self-doubt

afforded Allie (and the research team) the opportunity to talk about racism and antiracism in new

ways. This was part of the healing.

In Josuelynn's closing interview, I asked her what she learned about white racial

consciousness or antiracism in the study process. She said:

> I think the learning was endless…I learned a lot about reflection and the power of
> community, right? To be revisiting that, which is I feel like not a super white thing to do
> to be in good community…I think there was, we also talked a little bit about like some
> generational healing and some healing that began, I think, in our community too, at least
> for me, and some re-examining of: whether that be past healing of myself, or healing
> from generations, right, that then impacts who I am today. That was something that I
> have been thinking about; it's not always that other people need to heal. It's I also need to
> heal, along with Communities of Color, but as a white person, also need to heal, right? I
> don't believe that, you know, my ancestors or myself, could inflict violence without also
> being traumatized in the practice and the process.

Joseulynn acknowledged the way in which she carries generational trauma from the historical

and present-day perpetration of violence and what Singh (2019) calls an "internalized…sense of

dominance" (p. 4) related to being white. Alex also discussed healing in their closing interview

when I asked about what they learned in the study. Alex stated:

> Being in community, being with others who care about doing this work… [I've been]
> recognizing the things that People of Color have already recognized for so many
> generations and so many centuries and have been trying to share with us. But we don't
> listen. And so, I think just, yeah, sitting in that space of where community healing plays a
> role and how important it is. And how I contribute to that.

All three of these closing interview excerpts show the strong connection between the feeling of

community in the group and the ways that community prompted individual and collective

healing.

Major Theme: Growth

The data behind the connecting and healing categories describe growth. When we work

to connect and to promote healing within ourselves and others, we are working to further our

development and growth. Connecting with People of Color and with like-minded white folks

allows us to join communities and deepen our antiracist praxis. Furthermore, delving into thoughts and feelings about racism that often stay unspoken has the capacity to kickstart our healing. Connecting and healing actions support our efficacy in our antiracist praxis.

Major Theme: Vigilance and Shame

I generated the major theme of vigilance and shame in a different way than I created the other three major themes. After my initial data analysis period that produced the six categories and three major themes above, I reread the data prior to drafting the presentation slide deck I created for member checks and my meetings with my critical friends caucuses. When I reread the data and created the presentation, I realized that I saw a broad theme of vigilance and shame in the data that often went unnamed and would only emerge over the course of several paragraphs in the transcripts. I could hear vigilance and shame in the recordings over the course of a segment that might last one minute or longer, so this theme had been harder to capture in my initial coding, when the codes were attached to shorter quotes or "snapshots" of ideas. Additionally, I realized that by using process coding as my coding method, all my codes reflected actions associated with team members' comments. The fact that vigilance and shame were rarely mentioned by name and are not associated with explicit actions meant that I had not seen this theme in my initial categorization and theme ideation.

To be vigilant means to be "wakeful and watchful; keeping steadily on the alert; attentively or closely observant" (Oxford University Press, 2022c), and by extension, vigilance is "the quality or character of being vigilant" (Oxford University Press, 2022b). Over the course of the study, the members of the research team revealed their continual watchfulness or scanning for moments when we might enact microaggressions, express inequitable viewpoints or biases, or do outright harm to People of Color. In discussing our vigilance, team members expressed the

costs of this state of heightened alertness. Amy phrased it saying, "I think I'm just like hyper-observant in a way that I don't think actually necessarily serves me," and Allie discussed "a constant questioning that I think can lead to doubts of, who am I really, and how do I want to be in this space, and am I always going to have to think so much about every step that I take?" Kallista spoke about her reaction after a race-related mistake and how she overanalyzes, overthinks, and overprocesses. These small comments were made over the duration of the study and demonstrated the ways in which the research team closely monitors ourselves all the time, to the point of exhaustion and futility. As Allie stated in the second meeting, "sometimes it's like I'm overthinking it so much to a point where it's no longer helpful…Sometimes I feel like I don't give myself permission to be human." Hypothetically, we took up this vigilance out of a desire to reduce harm and be mindful actors in our racial existence, but our vigilance has the power to cut off our ability to be in the present moment in an unselfconscious way.

Shame was another experience that arose throughout the study. Researcher Brené Brown wrote that "shame is about who we are, and guilt is about our behaviors" (Brown, 2010, p.41). In other words, guilt is "I did something bad," whereas shame is "I am bad" (Brown, 2010). Despite Brown's definition, for the members of this research team, a race- or racism-related mistake became larger than that action—these mistakes were quickly internalized and became comments on personhood. If we messed up in our antiracism efforts, we expressed shame, not guilt, over that incident. Josuelynn captured this point in our first meeting, when we discussed the cost of mistakes in the public sphere and "cancel culture." She said, "the cancel culture, I think, is much stronger than maybe it was, at least when I was growing up…that in some ways there's this idea of like, you should then live in shame if you do this wrong." Josuelynn's comment demonstrated

that there is a societal expectation that we will accept shame for race-related mistakes, as if taking on that shame will be penance for our error.

The experiences of vigilance and shame can exist independently, but in this study, they often co-occurred. When we operate from a state ruled by vigilance and shame, we are separated from being the best versions of ourselves, and inhibited from authentic connection with others. Vigilance and shame make it nearly impossible for us to act with our full humanity, and they counteract our goals in antiracist praxis.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the process findings and resultant findings of this study. I detailed significant moments at each stage of the study's progression, and shared my thoughts and decisions along the way, given my multiple roles in this PAR study. Finally, I shared the major themes and the categories of data that supported those themes and described how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis. This study's research team explored the ways we act from defense, persistence, and growth, and how all these actions are connected to vigilance and shame.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from this study, offer implications for practice, and provide suggestions for future research in participatory action research (PAR) dissertations and studies on antiracist praxis. The discussion, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research are supported by literature, the power-conscious framework, and the guiding principles of PAR.

Linder's (2018) power-conscious framework assumes three ideas that were important to this study: power is always present both in interactions among individuals and between individuals and systems, power and social identities are inextricably linked, and history informs the way meaning is assigned and codified to identities over time. Furthermore, the power-conscious framework was constructed on six pillars that support the framework and "provide an organized way for scholars and activists to interrogate or analyze an idea, phenomenon, policy, or practice to improve them for future use" (Linder, 2018, p. 24). These tenets require the researcher to: (a) engage in critical consciousness and self-awareness; (b) consider history and context when examining oppression; (c) change behaviors based on reflection and awareness; (d) name and call attention to dominant group members' investment in and benefit from systems of domination; (e) interrogate the role of power in interactions, policies, and implementations of practice; (f) work in solidarity to address oppression (Linder, 2018).

In qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument acting on the data. My dissertation advisor, Merrily S. Dunn, is known for saying, "we are our meaning-making structures." Given

this framing, it is important to note that I was first trained as a theatre director and later as a counselor. My educational histories mean that I tend to think about situations in terms of actions, motivations, the internal world of a person, and how that person's internal world interacts with their external environment. Such considerations affected how I conducted and interpreted this study, whose purpose was to explore how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis.

I undertook this research to explore disruption of a system when we are a part of it, to pull together a collective of white folks who have done racial justice work and hear their perspectives on their practice, and to see what we had learned in common across our different experiences, institutions, and competency areas in the field. I hope that the analysis and recommendations for practice and future research provided in this chapter offer support to others on their antiracist journey. In the next section, I will discuss the findings of the study and implications for practice in terms of the literature, the power-conscious framework, and the PAR research design. After that, I describe recommendations for practitioners and for other researchers exploring similar topics or using PAR in the context of a dissertation. I then conclude the dissertation with final thoughts and reflections.

Discussion of Findings and Implications for Practice

In Chapter 4, I presented the six categories (harming, fearing, persevering, unlearning, connecting, and healing) and four themes (defense, persistence, growth, vigilance and shame) of data from this research study. As I worked to create and name the themes, I recognized that each theme (and its supporting categories) represented a response to a stimulus. A racialized stimulus occurs—that stimulus might be a comment, an action, or an event, etc.—and the white person

who encounters that stimulus may respond in any of the six ways represented by the categories, motivated by one or more of the four themes.

As I worked to name the themes and categories, I also began to sketch a visualization of the data. That visual went through a series of drafts based on my continued analysis and meaning-making, feedback from the critical friends caucuses, and consultation with a graphic designer friend. Figure 3 provides the final visualization of the data.

Figure 3

Visualization of the Data
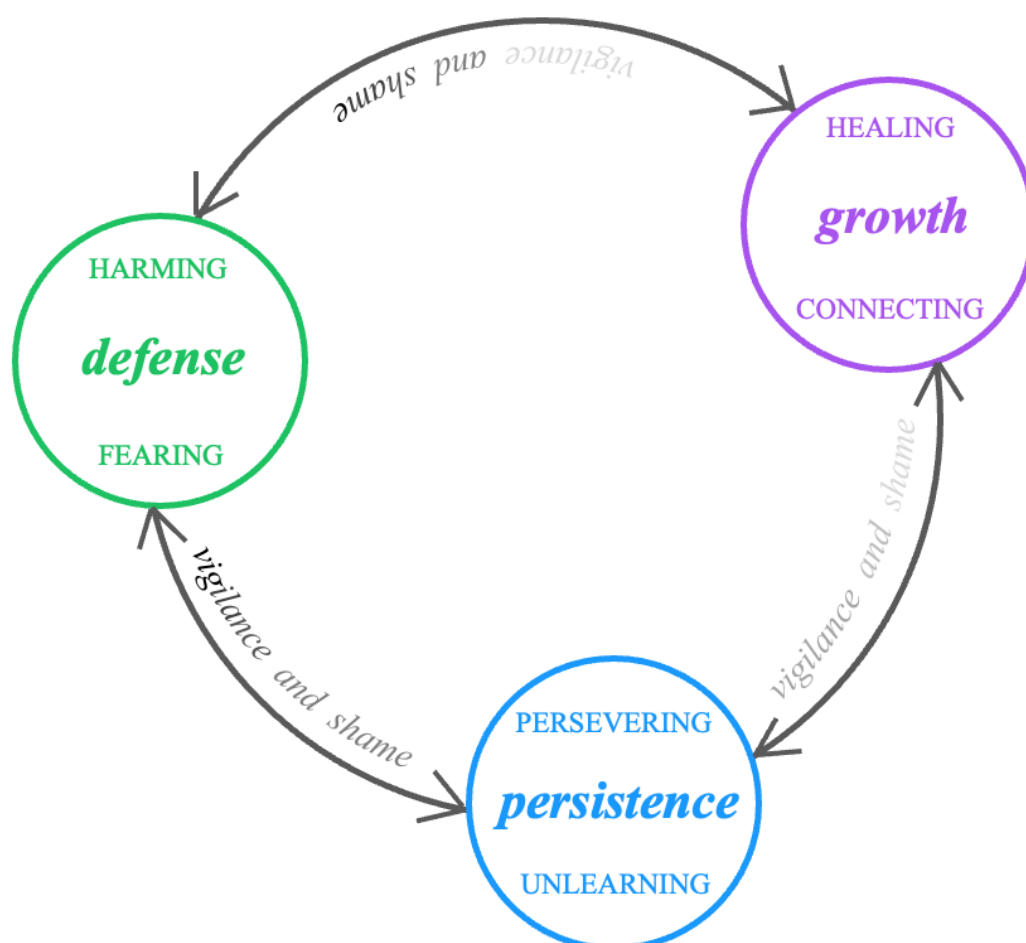
In this infographic, the three primary themes of motivation—defense, persistence, and growth— are represented with their associated action categories in their circles. The double-sided arrows

between the themes represent that these are not fixed states, but rather, a response to a stimulus might occur in any of these areas, and the white person navigating racialized stimuli will travel from one to another. The fourth theme of vigilance and shame is present alongside the other themes, but the strength or salience of its presence changes across the motivating themes. Vigilance and shame are strongest when we are motivated by defense and weakest when we are motivated by growth.

In the following section, I discuss the themes and categories and their connections to prior literature, the power-conscious framework, and participatory action research. I also discuss implications for student affairs practice within the context of each theme.

Defense

The first major theme in this study was defense, reflecting instances when we, white people, act with a motivation to defend ourselves or the system, and that motivation of defense results in harming or fearing actions. When we defend the system, we are complicit agents in upholding and sustaining white supremacy, and by extension, other forms of oppression. When we defend ourselves, we are often acting in ways that reify one or more characteristics of white supremacy culture (Okun, 2022)—for example, our right to comfort, fear of open conflict, defensiveness, individualism, etc. Defending our systems and ourselves protects the position and power of white people in society.

Actions to defend are not consistent with antiracism, so their presence in this study demonstrates that reckoning with actions that reinscribe racism was part of how this research team conceptualized antiracist praxis. The study team shared stories of fear and harm from our past and present that we recognized as antithetical to our espoused antiracist values. These stories involved team members avoiding antiracist work and the call to social justice, staying

silent when confronted with racism, and asserting our power over others—in sum, acting in ways that reinforce domination, oppression, and white supremacy.

For research team members to discuss those times when our actions fell short of our ideals, we must have critically examined our behavior and identified inconsistencies. Linder's (2018) power-conscious framework's first pillar focuses on engaging in critical consciousness and self-awareness, as does this study's definition of antiracist praxis. The emergence of these stories in the data demonstrated that the research team had invested effort in raising our critical consciousness. Additionally, in most environments, embarrassment, regret, or guilt might keep stories of our shortcomings cloaked in silence, however, the research team in this study chose to be vulnerable and connect with others over our shared challenges and a desire to do better next time. The participatory action research design's neutral power dynamics and orientation toward collaboration and transformation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) supported opening up to consider our place (past and present) within systemic racism (Weston, 2021).

Literature on white racial identity development also offers some interesting perspectives on the theme of defense. In Helms' (1990) white racial identity development model, there are six schemas that represent unique developmental steps toward a positive, non-racist white identity. The depth of questions and reflections that arose during this study's research group conversations, individual interviews, and written responses suggests that team members probably exist in one of Helms' (1990) schemas associated with phase two, defining a non-racist white identity. While Helms described the schemas as non-linear and able to be revisited (Singh, 2019), Helms presented them as distinct.

In this study, the team's responses to racial stimuli were distributed across actions motivated by defense, persistence, and growth, indicating a variety of reactions to a racial

stimulus. Despite the assumed location of team members in Helms' model, our responses did not necessarily correlate to a single identity development schema. Perhaps the responses motivated by defense represent deviations from a team member's typical developmental schema. Perhaps the strength of our indoctrination into whiteness and white supremacy makes it difficult to definitively achieve Helms' autonomy schema—what we might call a positive, secure, antiracist white identity. Our histories, experiences, and socialization can disarm us and trigger a response motivated by defense in spite of long-term investments in disrupting racism in ourselves and in our world.

Implications

There are implications for practice at an individual and collective level based on this finding. For white people who have done a lot of self-work to uproot our own bias, racism, and internalized domination, it can be tempting to feel like we have arrived at some equity-minded destination where we are no longer likely to cause racialized harm. Such a destination does not exist. I believe the research team in this study represents a group of student affairs practitioners who have done more self-reflection and interrogation than the average white person in America (arguably, more than the average white student affairs professional), yet we shared stories of times when we recognized that our actions defended ourselves and dominant systems' operations. Equity-minded being and doing is not a fixed state; it is a practice one enacts every day in every decision. Continuing to do self-work using new and existing resources strengthens our antiracist praxis. As one example, a person wanting to further their racial justice practice could engage with Singh's (2019) *The racial healing handbook,* which offers workbook-style prompts and opportunities for reflecting and working toward racial healing. The recently published white racial engagement model (Whitehead et al., 2022), discussed further below, is

another tool an individual might use for self-examination on topics of whiteness and racial justice.

Continually evaluating our actions in terms of our motivation to defend systems or ourselves and the impulse to act from places of harm or fear is a helpful practice for our institutions as well. Student affairs leaders could assess policies and practices for places where those policies and practices defend oppressive structures. This study used Okun's (2022) white supremacy culture characteristics as a means of identifying defensive motives, and institutional units could apply this technique to review their processes. Similarly, teams or divisions could dedicate professional development time to collective work with antiracist resources such as those mentioned above. If leaders truly value social justice work, they will create dedicated time for student affairs professionals to invest in reflection, dialogue, community-building, and action-planning.

Persistence

The second major theme in this study was persistence, and this theme revealed the research team persevering through challenges in antiracist praxis and working to unlearn internalized oppressive and dominating ideologies. When white people persist, we stay engaged in racial justice work, even when that work is hard, uncomfortable, and unsettling to our sense of self. Persistence also involves confronting inequity where we encounter it, throwing out processes or breaking them open for access to all, and using the unearned power given to us to support and advocate for others.

This study's research team discussions about actions motivated by a desire to persist in our antiracist praxis reflect most of the topics outlined in Layla F. Saad's *Me and white supremacy* (2020). In part two of this book, entitled "The Work," Saad explored white privilege,

white fragility, tone policing, white silence, white exceptionalism, color blindness, anti-Blackness, racist stereotypes, cultural appropriation, allyship, white saviorism, and being called out/called in, among others (Saad, 2020). All of the content areas named above surfaced in research group meetings, written responses, or individual interviews in this study, and these topics frequently appear in other antiracist and whiteness literature (e.g., Ahmed, 2007; Bonilla-Silva, 2014 & 2015; Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Cabrera, 2012 & 2019; Collins & Jun, 2017; DiAngelo, 2018 & 2021; Foste & Irwin, 2020; Gusa, 2010; Kendi, 2019; Oluo, 2019; Singh, 2019; Thompson, 2003).

The theme of persistence in antiracist praxis, with its dual categories of actions related to persevering and to unlearning, is also supported by Whitehead, Weston, and Evans' (2022) white racial engagement model (WREM). The WREM conceptualized white people's racialized actions and provided a visual for the nonlinear and continuous movement of all white people between "fluid statuses" (Whitehead et al., 2022, p. 231), acknowledging that one's status can shift due to experience, environment, and "dissonance-provoking stimuli" (Whitehead et al., 2022, p. 231). The statuses of awareness, unconscious beliefs of white superiority, denial, white liberalism, and deconstructing whiteness all relate to this study's findings regarding the research team's recognition of our own defensiveness, questioning of ourselves, breaking from silence, and unlearning our socialization into white supremacy and patriarchy.

The work of white women to persist in interrogating and casting off aspects of our programming also maps to several of Linder's (2018) pillars in the power-conscious framework. Her tenets that we must consider history and context when examining oppression, change behaviors based on reflection and awareness, name and call attention to dominant group members' investment in and benefit from systems of domination, and continually interrogate the

role of power all relate to the ways this research team conceptualized antiracist praxis. Similarly, the cycles of investigation of PAR (Somekh, 2008) that require the research team to return to consideration of the research problem support the continual examination of our individual and collective investments in oppression and what divestment from its forces requires.

Implications

It is difficult to overstate the importance of persistence in antiracist praxis, and the implications for practice of that persistence. Saad (2020) wrote the following regarding the work of her reader in tackling white supremacy, and her words offer truths to any of us engaged in antiracist praxis:

> *This is commitment work*. This work is hard. There is no way to sugarcoat it…You have to decide now before you begin, and then again throughout the work, that you are going to stay committed regardless. You have to decide what is going to be the anchor that keeps you committed to this work, whether it is a commitment to antioppression and the dignity of BIPOC, your commitment to your own healing, your commitment to being a better friend or family member to BIPOC, or your commitment to your own personal or spiritual values. Decide now, before you begin, what is going to help you stay committed to this work when the going gets tough. (pp. 19-20)

Saad acknowledged the difficulty of racial justice work and the impulse to stop fighting upstream against the current of oppressive systems. Articulating our "why" and understanding what keeps us committed is critically important. Knowing why we persist is an essential component of our resistance to white supremacy.

As student affairs practitioners, we are outside-the-classroom educators of our students, and our willingness to persevere in racial justice when we feel challenged, and our willingness to unlearn our internalized white supremacy may be the most important lessons we can offer our students. Racial justice work requires resilience (Evans, 2020) even as we, white practitioners, navigate discomfort, racial anxiety, guilt, and shame. Our capacities to tolerate difficult emotions, regulate ourselves, and ignore the impulse to emotionally "run" are important skills we

can model for our students, particularly our dominant identity-holding students. These skills will support students' development in myriad ways, and can become the basis for building equity-minded practices on our campuses and beyond.

Growth

The third major theme was growth, and the categories of action for this theme were connecting and healing. When we act from a motivation to grow, we create opportunities for integration and connection within ourselves as well as building community with others. Our growth is also supported by the work we do to heal old wounds and make ourselves more whole as we move into the future. This finding reflects literature on white accountability groups, racial healing, participatory action research, and the power-conscious framework.

Toward the end of this study's final group meeting, we discussed what we wanted our outcome action from the study to be, including the idea of continuing to meet as a group. In that conversation, Allie shared:

> I want there to be something really actionable. You know what I mean, like what's the recommendation or something for people to think about, and I guess…what I'm centering now on is like: well, there's something about being in community and having really raw conversations and building up that muscle. Because if we can do that with each other, then where will we be able to do it with others in our lives? So, I feel like there is actually something quite actionable about being conscious and creating this little community that I really like.

Allie's reflections framed doing this work in terms of building up a muscle, positioning racial justice work like an exercise regime. One improves with sustained energy, effort, and repetitions over time; consistency yields improved antiracist "fitness." At the same time, racial justice fitness is not a finalized state, and will decrease without regular practice and investments of time and energy.

Allie acknowledged how important community was to this study, and this study's creation of a white race caucus created space for team members to share times they "messed up" and reveal feelings of defensiveness and shame without worrying about their impact on People of Color (Obear & martinez, 2013). Obear and martinez (2013) discussed the goal of a white caucus as helping white people develop competency and courage to engage in issues of race and racism. They also mentioned several benefits of white caucuses such as participants' realization of the ways racism had harmed them, and the building of intimacy and community with white allies (Obear & martinez, 2013). All of these observations from the literature held true for this study and reaffirmed that white race caucuses, or white accountability groups, truly have the capacity to be "high impact" practices.

The concept of racial healing is central to *The Four Pivots*, and in that book, urban development scholar Shawn Ginwright (2022) wrote, "healing is the only pathway to real justice because it requires that we take an honest look at what harmed us and pushes us to restore our humanity and finally to move us confidently into a possible future" (p. 3) and one page later, "the most important aspect of social change is not problem analysis, power building, narrative change, or coalition building—it's healing" (p. 4). Looking at what harmed us and trying to heal from that is obviously a different process for People of Color and for white people when addressing racism. For white people, healing involves acknowledging the ways racism and dominance have warped our perspective and justified our beliefs about power and power-hoarding, whiteness, and People of Color. These systems of oppression have detached us from our inner knowing that understands that we are connected to all people. We must reclaim the bond to our common humanity.

The research team in this study explored aspects of our socialization into white supremacy and patriarchy/sexism/misogyny, and such discussions align with participatory action research's interest in socialization, and its characteristics as a social process (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). PAR is positioned to explore how people come to be who they are individually and collectively (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005), and our study team shared stories from our growing up and how we have reinforced or resisted the messages that have shaped us. The social interests of PAR and the collective nature of a PAR study dovetailed with this study's interest in community as a component of antiracist praxis. Furthermore, the PAR recommendation to utilize "critical friends" in data analysis (Herr & Anderson, 2015) was another instance when the study process and content were aligned.

Another important area for connecting actions in antiracist praxis is the imperative for white people to build authentic relationships with People of Color and follow their lead in movements for racial justice. Linder's (2018) final pillar of the power-conscious framework called this, "working in solidarity to eradicate oppression." The nature of this study created isolation between the research team and Communities of Color. Part of this isolation happened by virtue of designing the study to work with a racially homogenous, white group of participants. Additionally, by creating a structure for the study that involved national sampling, I broadened the definition of "community" to mean the wider community of white women in student affairs. This more conceptual definition of community meant that each team member had our own campus context and relationships instead of sharing one local community. As a result, PAR's orientation toward in-community problem-solving and working alongside those people in our communities who are most impacted by the problem were difficult to actualize in this study. Although the research team could not collectively offer partnership or support to a common

Community of Color, we did discuss how to support People of Color colleagues, ways to center these colleagues and amplify their voices on our teams, and how we might be better allies in the future.

Implications

Enacting allyship in our lives and institutions is one central implication of the findings of this study related to growth, connecting, and healing. Personally committing to allyship as an active practice should be an aspect of our ongoing antiracism efforts. Singh (2019) suggested that allies: stay humble, apologize when you get it "wrong" (and do not overapologize), be a good listener, believe the experiences of People of Color, continue to educate yourself about racism, and connect with other racial allies. These suggestions could be personal commitments we set for ourselves, or they could be incorporated into professional goals or performance cycle expectations as a way to embed active work toward allyship into student affairs teams.

Actions motivated by growth, connecting, and healing put us in the best position to have our antiracist praxis embody our values for racial justice. We cannot respond in this way if we have not done a lot of reflection, questioning, and unlearning on our own. At the same time, a community to support and challenge our continued growth is vitally important. More institutions and student affairs divisions should implement white accountability groups, and such groups will help keep white practitioners engaged in disrupting white supremacy and racial inequity on our campuses. I agree with Weston (2021) that oversight or administration of these groups should not fall to identity-based offices, whose focus should remain on support for minoritized students. Connection to an institutional equity office or Chief Diversity Officer could help embed accountability to the campus community into any white caucuses on campus. There may also be value in creating inter-campus accountability groups through regional consortiums or national

organizations like ACPA or NASPA. This study's research team said that they appreciated connecting with people outside of their institution and that the neutral power dynamics of our separate employments enhanced their capacity to be vulnerable with one another. Future groups like the community built in this study could be helpful.

Vigilance and Shame

I discovered the fourth theme of this study when I returned to the data as I prepared to engage trustworthiness measures associated with critical friends meetings and member checks. Vigilance and shame emerged as a companion to the first three themes, and each theme had a different relationship to vigilance and shame. When the research team described actions motivated by defense, vigilance and shame were strong. In actions motivated by persistence, vigilance and shame were still present and detectible, but did not seem as salient as in defense. Finally, when the research team described their enactments of connection and healing (actions motivated by growth), vigilance and shame were reduced. Vigilance and shame are like audio static that is loud enough to create disruptive noise when we are operating from defense, and has been dialed down to barely audible when we are operating from growth. When vigilance and shame are "turned down," white people are more capable of acting and reacting in ways that are non-defensive, rooted in the present moment and in our bodies, and connected to our intentions for equity.

When I consulted the literature, I found DiAngelo's (2021) chapter on shame and guilt in *Nice racism* particularly insightful for this finding. DiAngelo (2021) noted from her experience as an educator and facilitator that "white progressives will readily express feeling shame about racism but hesitate to express guilt" (p. 121). In Chapter 4 when I discussed this theme in the data, I noted that the research team's framing of these feelings used language about shame and

who we are but not language describing guilt and feelings about what we did. DiAngelo (2021) wrote that shame "both excuses and legitimizes our racism" (p. 121) because of the ways it elicits sympathy and shuts us down, paralyzing us from moving forward. She concluded her discussion on shame and guilt by arguing that shame keeps our focus on ourselves and we see it as impossible to change, so we are relieved of responsibility; guilt puts our focus on those whom we have harmed, our role in that harm, and our responsibility for repair (DiAngelo, 2021). Perhaps white people's immediate construction of shame, not guilt, in response to a racial mistake is yet another manifestation of our white fragility, to borrow another of DiAngelo's concepts. We produce shame so we will not have to face the people whom we hurt, and learn from them how we might make amends.

The findings related to vigilance and shame, their mediating influence on the first three themes, and the relationship between shame and guilt all validate the power-conscious framework's (Linder, 2018) three assumptions: power is omnipresent, power and identity are inextricably linked, and identity is socially constructed. Furthermore, vigilance and shame offer insight into the internal work required of a white person enacting antiracism. Vigilance exists in a space of measurement, comparison, and policing, and feeds off white supremacy culture characteristics like fear, perfectionism, individualism, progress is more, and one right way (Okun, 2022) that we have assumed as normative. Vigilance is a direct result of white supremacy. Shame relies on our views of ourselves and others, our proximity or distance from an idealized state (in which we are "perfect" in our antiracism), and what achievement of that state will do for us (e.g., absolve us of our racial sins, imbue us with power). The internalization of vigilance and shame illustrates the ways we have absorbed whiteness and our conviction of our dominance into our ways of thinking, feeling, and being.

Implications

The findings associated with the first three themes of this study offered implications for practice both for individuals and for our collective campus communities. The practical implications of my finding on vigilance and shame remain focused on individuals because this finding reflects the interior experience of a person. As I wrote in Chapter 4, I believe most white people involved in racial justice work who experience vigilance and shame took up our vigilance as an extension of increased self-awareness and race consciousness. We did not realize that this vigilance would become a new way for whiteness to operate within us, that it would breed guilt, and then transform that guilt into shame. These feelings have the capacity to render us ineffectual in our antiracist praxis, and my best recommendation for healing ourselves is to uproot, weed out, and expel vigilance and shame.

When I planned this study, I was worried that research team members might feel hesitant to share stories of times when their racial justice efforts fell short. I intentionally incorporated opportunities to build trust with team members in an effort to reduce reputation management impulses and encourage team members' true experiences to be shared in the study. In reality, during the process of conducting the study, I felt like team members dropped reputation management very quickly—faster than I had even anticipated. It seemed like they were very tired of carrying the worry, the racial stress, and the vigilance and shame. The team decided during the first research group meeting that this space was safe, or safe enough, and this was a chance for them to release all that weight and speak freely. They could let go of that worry and it would be alright if they offended someone. After all, they were not with People of Color, and they had no ties to other group members in the future; if they offended someone, "oh well." These observations make an even stronger case for the creation of white accountability groups or

communities of practice as an opportunity to give student affairs professionals the chance to experience conversations on race with reduced vigilance and shame. Offering an experience of that freer state of engagement on race might support white practitioners in working to cast out and release vigilance and shame from their internal operations and move forward while leaning into community.

Recommendations

I believe antiracist praxis is essential to creating a liberatory higher education, one that empowers community members of all identities to experience belonging and to flourish. Many of the findings of this study and the related implications for practice reinforce existing academic literature as well as writing from predominantly People of Color activists, advocates, and social justice educators. I hope to echo and amplify the voices of Scholars and Activists of Color, especially Women of Color and Black Women, who have led the way in offering guidance for racial justice actions, allyship, and healing. For years, they have issued many of the recommendations that my study supports, and I hope the list below is one more corroboration of their work. Additionally, I believe my study's unique findings, implications, and recommendations are the result of its research team conducting this inquiry in a shared white woman identity space and the trust built in that space.

The findings and implications of this study support the following recommendations on antiracist praxis for student affairs practitioners:

- Continue to do your own work. There is always more to do and new resources with which to engage. Equity-minded being and doing is an ongoing practice.
  - Articulate your "why" so you feel connected to your reason to persist in this work when it becomes hard.

- o If you are a white practitioner, build authentic connection with Communities of Color and support their racial justice priorities on your campus.
- Incorporate actions associated with allyship into professional and/or performance year expectations to enact allyship in work teams.
- Evaluate policies, processes, and practices in your workplace: are they working to defend systems of oppression? Utilize Okun's (2022) white supremacy culture characteristics or another tool to interrogate operations for complicity in domination.
- If you lead teams, create dedicated time for staff to invest in reflection, dialogue, community-building, and action-planning for social justice work.
- Create a community of practice or white accountability group for white staff at your institution to support and challenge continued growth in antiracist praxis. Connect such a group to an institutional equity office or Chief Diversity Officer to embed accountability to the campus community.

New Recommendations

- As a white student affairs practitioner, recognize yourself as a role model for students, and your willingness to "stay in it" when antiracism work makes you uncomfortable helps them learn how to navigate discomfort, racial anxiety, guilt, and shame.
- Work to uproot and eliminate vigilance and shame within yourself. This endeavor may never be complete but is critically important to our efficacy in antiracist praxis.

Facilitating White Accountability Groups

To choose to participate in a white accountability group requires self-reflection, a willingness to sit in discomfort, a desire to grow and change, and a belief that being in community offers pathways for racial justice learning that one cannot accomplish alone. To

choose to facilitate a group like this, I recommend the following additional commitments to support successful, skilled facilitation:

- Do your own work. As the group's facilitator, your first duty is to support other people's experience. You will have responses to the group's process, of course, and should share your responses if the model of your group incorporates you as a participant and not just a facilitator. Even so, you will be more able to effectively serve the group conversation if you have deeply reflected on your own identities, racial justice values, and beliefs about activism and allyship in advance of the group's formation.

- Prepare yourself emotionally. Oppression, privilege, domination, subordination, minoritization, and vulnerability are emotionally weighty. If the group you facilitate goes deep into any of these topics, you will find yourself supporting a lot of emotions in the room. Managing your own emotions while supporting others' emotions is important and requires self-regulation skills. Planning for preparatory and post-group time and activities to support your efficacy in facilitation and your own emotional experience is critical.

- Establish outlets for yourself. As the facilitator and holder of the emotional container of the group, you may need some other space to process your own experience. You may find journaling to be helpful in this regard. You might want to discuss your feelings with a therapist, confidante, or friend (in ways that protect the privacy of your group members, consistent with your group agreements). Put a plan into place to give yourself a release-valve on holding everything you will absorb as the facilitator of the group.

- Build trust. I believe this study's depth of exploration of antiracist praxis, white people's experience in response to a racial stimulus, and our findings related to vigilance and shame depended upon the trust built in the group. This work requires authenticity, a

willingness to be vulnerable, and courage to explore aspects of ourselves with others that many white people have not explored on their own. The work can feel scary, and the only way your group will venture into deep and meaningful territory is if you build trust.

Suggestions for Future Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) and the Dissertation

The participatory action research design posed some challenges in this study. As discussed in Chapter 3, PAR studies and dissertations have goals that run contrary to one another. PAR wants organic, democratized involvement of all participants from inception through execution of the study. Contrastingly, dissertations need to be planned, instigated by the student researcher, and are bound to institutional and temporal constraints. I believed I understood this conflict prior to embarking, yet unanticipated aspects of the differing needs of PAR and the dissertation process arose during the study.

One example of conflict occurred as I was planning the study. PAR argues for engaging with a research team over an extended period of time and I tried to balance that mandate with what would constitute a reasonable ask of full-time professionals in a voluntary research study. I did not compensate my research team very much in proportion to the time they gave to this study, so the issue of time expectation felt like an area of challenge to me. I anticipate that had I conducted the study on my own campus, I would have felt more comfortable expecting the same (or a greater) time commitment from colleagues.

Another reason to recommend future researchers ground their study on one campus is the limitation I discussed earlier in this chapter and Chapter 4—the more abstract conception of the community of this study led to some challenges in the strength of the push toward action and in our ability to work alongside those most impacted by racism in higher education. While the

research team members all enact antiracist praxis in their institutions, that practice depends on the local contexts each person is working with in their teams, divisions, institution, etc. Doing a PAR study like this one while situated on a single campus would make it possible for connection with campus Communities of Color to be built into the structure of the study.

Although the national sampling and broader concept of the "site" of this study posed some challenges, the broader definition of site also offered some advantages. Our research team members brought to the study impressive in-group diversity in geography, institutional type, work area within student affairs, years in the field, age, and other personal demographic characteristics. I believe our conversations were enriched by the varied perspectives represented in our group, and it would be difficult to capture that breadth of diversity in recruiting for a study at one institution.

Future Research Studies

I set out to explore how white women understand and enact antiracist praxis, and that led to my gaining an understanding of how we respond to racialized stimuli. We will be our best in our antiracist praxis when we possess self-awareness of these responses and can quiet our vigilance and shame. Vigilance and shame have the capacity to flood the nervous system and cut off the possibility of a response rooted in growth or persistence. I believe there would be value in further scholarship on vigilance and shame in the context of antiracism research, to understand how to lower the level of influence these forces play in white people's racialized interactions.

Running a similar study situated on one (large) campus would also be meaningful. I would encourage the researcher try to recruit widely across student-facing units and to be mindful of power (e.g., keeping any supervisor-supervisee pairs separated into different research teams or only accepting one member of the pair in a single team study). These considerations

would maximize the diversity benefits I saw in my study while retaining neutral power dynamics among the research team. Such a study would address the time commitment concerns I mentioned above; the study could even be framed as committee service or professional development if time allocation were needed by a supervisor. The proposed study could also incorporate partnering with Communities of Color into the study, and more directly address the need for action in support of those experiencing oppression.

I encourage future researchers to consider the following questions I am asking as I leave this study: how can white women resist the power-hoarding that whiteness has taught us our whole lives? How can we reduce our responses motivated by defense and increase our responses motivated by growth? I believe white women can contribute to antiracist praxis when we have done our own work, held one another accountable (ideally without shaming each other), and devoted our efforts to supporting People of Color.

Final Reflections

In the introduction of this dissertation, I mentioned the student affairs conference presentations Dr. Richardson-Echols and I gave in which we asked People of Color to tell the group what they wished their white colleagues would do. I have reflected on one of the responses over and over throughout this research process: "stop being afraid and start being courageous!" My aim in this study was to do just that: to break from the fear, avoidance, and silence that white women have learned as a way of operating with regard to race. I hoped to pull together a group of white practitioners, venture forward with courage and vulnerability, and see where our exploration would take us. We discussed aspects of our racial experience that I have never heard spoken aloud, and being in community with others who shared my experience was more healing than I could have predicted. What began as scholarly curiosity—what does this praxis look like,

where are our struggles, where are we making strides—became a heart recognition of our shared

inhabitance in this precarious place as aggressor and target of systems of domination.

The findings and implications of this study show many opportunities for white people to

take individual and institutional action toward antiracism: doing one's own work, working with

leadership to assess practices and policies, building an accountability group, and connecting with

and supporting Communities of Color. The visualization of the data from this study offers a tool

for conceptualizing a variety of responses a white person might experience following exposure to

a racialized stimulus. As I considered the visual, I remembered a famous quote attributed to

Viktor Frankl: "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to

choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." We have the capacity to

choose our response, and in so doing, move ourselves toward growth and freedom. I believe

white women's responses to racialized stimuli will move in the direction of justice if we

remember that there is space (and *time*) between stimulus and response, and that we have choice

within that space. We can choose to cast off internalized whiteness and domination and to

respond in ways that honor our capacity to connect and heal. We can choose to exhale our

vigilance and shame and move our responses toward growth.

A friend recently asked me how this study and dissertation changed me, and the answer

is, immeasurably. There have been times in this process when I have felt disheartened and

powerless in the face of racism—like an ant in this gigantic world of oppression, too small to

possibly make a difference. But there have been other times when I have felt more hopeful, and I

can see how far we have come. Two lifetimes ago, slavery was legal in the United States. In my

lifetime so far, the largest civil rights movement in U.S. history has happened, clamoring for

racial justice for Black people and People of Color. We are not yet at equity, far from it, but we

are so much closer than we were. Every May around graduation time, I see posts on social media from Friends, Colleagues, and Students of Color that say some version of, "I am my ancestors' wildest dreams." My wondering is, if all of us, now, are the ancestors of future generations—what are our wildest dreams? I hope our future is more wildly, radically, wondrously equitable than I can even imagine.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Call for Participants

Are you a white woman in student affairs engaged in antiracist work?

Do you want to join a collaborative research project with others like you?

Study Procedures:
15-30 min. screening interview
Demographic questionnaire
Three 2-hour virtual group meetings
Two written prompts
30-60 min. closing interview

Incentive:
$25 gift card at conclusion for those who complete study
Matching $25 donation to social justice organization determined by research team

To learn more, please contact Claire DePalma at claire.beaudro@uga.edu

This dissertation study is supervised by Dr. Merrily S. Dunn, merrily@uga.edu

This project has been approved by the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of Human Subjects. (Questions: irb@uga.edu or 706-542-3199)

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO UNPACKING WHITE WOMANHOOD WORKSHOP SERIES

KEY INFORMANTS

Dear Unpacking, White Womanhood workshop participants,

In Spring 2022, we were part of an Unpacking White Womanhood workshop series facilitated by Drs. Kathy Obear and Victoria Farris. Like some of the participants in the series, I work in higher education and am passionate about racial justice, antiracism, and equity in student affairs. I am also a doctoral candidate under the direction of Merrily S. Dunn, Ph.D., in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia, and I am reaching out today to ask for your assistance in my dissertation study currently titled Antiracist Praxis by White Women in Student Affairs. The purpose of this study is to understand how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis.

I am looking for co-researchers interested in exploring antiracist praxis by white women in student affairs and developing action steps to broaden or deepen antiracist praxis. This study will utilize a participatory action research design, which means that participants will serve as co-researchers in the study. Participant-researchers must meet the following criteria: (1) identifies as white, (2) has been socialized or identifies as a woman, (3) currently works full-time in student affairs in a higher education institution in the United States, and (4) engages in antiracist praxis in their work.

If you fit these criteria and are willing to participate in the study, please reach out to me using the contact information in this email. Additionally, I am looking for more participants who engage in antiracist praxis and meet the criteria above. If you would be willing to forward my information and the attached recruitment flyer to colleagues, I would greatly appreciate your assistance.

The procedures for this study include: one 15 to 30-minute individual screening interview via Zoom, a demographic questionnaire, three 2-hour research group meetings via Zoom, two individual written responses to a narrative prompt (no more than 250 words each), one 30 to 60-minute individual closing interview via Zoom, and a few emails with the researcher to coordinate the study and communicate about findings. This study presents limited risks to participants; you may experience discomfort or emotional reactions in response to the content. It is this researcher's hope that benefits of the study will include the expansion of the knowledge base on antiracist praxis by white women in student affairs. Participants will receive a $25 gift card at the conclusion of the study. A matching $25 donation will be made to an organization dedicated to social justice chosen by the study's participant-researchers.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please contact me at claire.beaudro@uga.edu or 847-404-1512. Please also feel encouraged to contact me if you have questions or would like additional information about the study. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Merrily S. Dunn, at merrily@uga.edu. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Claire DePalma

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO KEY INFORMANT COLLEAGUES

Dear [Colleague],

Hello! I am reaching out to you today in my capacity as a doctoral candidate under the direction of Merrily S. Dunn, Ph.D., in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia. I am writing you because I am aware of your passion and commitment to racial justice, antiracism, and equity in student affairs. I would like to ask for your assistance as I recruit participant-researchers for my dissertation study currently titled Antiracist Praxis by White Women in Student Affairs. The purpose of this study is to understand how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis.

I am looking for co-researchers interested in exploring antiracist praxis by white women in student affairs and developing action steps to broaden or deepen antiracist praxis. This study will utilize a participatory action research design, which means that participants will serve as co-researchers in the study. Participant-researchers must meet the following criteria: (1) identifies as white, (2) has been socialized or identifies as a woman, (3) currently works full-time in student affairs in a higher education institution in the United States, and (4) engages in antiracist praxis in their work.

The procedures for this study include: one 15 to 30-minute individual screening interview via Zoom, a demographic questionnaire, three 2-hour research group meetings via Zoom, two individual written responses to a narrative prompt (no more than 250 words each), one 30 to 60-minute individual closing interview via Zoom, and a few emails with the researcher to coordinate the study and communicate about findings. This study presents limited risks to participants; you may experience discomfort or emotional reactions in response to the content. It is this researcher's hope that benefits of the study will include the expansion of the knowledge base on antiracist praxis by white women in student affairs. Participants will receive a $25 gift card at the conclusion of the study. A matching $25 donation will be made to an organization dedicated to social justice chosen by the study's participant-researchers.

If you would be willing to forward my information and the attached flyer to any colleagues who fit the criteria above, I would be very grateful for your assistance. Please invite anyone interested in participating in the study to contact me at claire.beaudro@uga.edu or 847-404-1512. They can also reach out with questions or for additional information about the study. They may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Merrily S. Dunn, at merrily@uga.edu. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Claire DePalma

APPENDIX D

EMAIL TO PEOPLE WHO INDICATED INTEREST IN THE STUDY

Dear [Name],

Thank you for contacting me to indicate your interest in becoming a participant-researcher in a research study currently titled Antiracist Praxis by White Women in Student Affairs. I am a doctoral candidate under the direction of Merrily S. Dunn, Ph.D., in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia. The purpose of this study is to understand how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis.

To participate in the study, you must meet the following criteria: (1) identifies as white, (2) has been socialized or identifies as a woman, (3) currently works full-time in student affairs in a higher education institution in the United States, and (4) engages in antiracist praxis in their work.

If you meet the criteria and are interested in joining the research team, please:
  - o **Review** the attached information sheet about the research project and the time commitment of this study—participants must commit to the full project timeline
  - o **Provide** 3 days/times in the week of [WEEK 1] or [WEEK 2] when you are available for a 15- to 30-minute screening interview (via Zoom)

I will utilize the screening interview to better understand your interest in the study. This research study has limited potential risks associated with participation. You may experience emotional reactions in response to reflecting on your participation in racism and antiracism. A potential benefit from participation is the advancement of research and contribution to the knowledge base for white women's engagement in antiracism.

I am grateful for your consideration of joining the research team. If you are selected as a participant-researcher, I will be able to offer a small token of appreciation in the form of a $25 gift card at the conclusion of the study. I will also make a matching $25 donation to a non-profit group determined by the research team in acknowledgement of your participation and to actively invest in change-making organizations.

This study has Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval from the University of Georgia. All information collected during this research project will be treated as confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete the action items in the third paragraph. If you have questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact me at claire.beaudro@uga.edu or 847-404-1512. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Merrily S. Dunn, at merrily@uga.edu. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Claire DePalma

APPENDIX E

INFORMATION SHEET ON THE ANTIRACIST PRAXIS RESEARCH PROJECT

Information Sheet on the Antiracist Praxis Research Project

What is the antiracist praxis research project?
The antiracist praxis research project is a collaborative, dynamic inquiry into how white women in student affairs understand and describe antiracist praxis in their work.

What are the goals of the antiracist praxis research project?
The goals of the project are to better understand the barriers and successes of white women enacting antiracism in student affairs with the hope of determining action steps to broaden or deepen that practice. Another goal is to conduct this study using a participatory action research (PAR) design and to uphold the values of PAR.

What is the participatory action research (PAR) process?
PAR is a dynamic, fluid method (Coghlan, 2019) that positions the researcher alongside participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2019), who become fellow researchers in the study. The research process is exploratory and aims to create a democratic, collaborative group of participant-researchers invested in working together to solve a problem and determine action steps (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2019).

Why is PAR being used for this study?
Being in community with other white women can break down resistance and defensiveness to engaging in antiracist work (Obear & Martinez, 2013; DiAngelo, 2021; Singh, 2019), and increased awareness and knowledge of other white women in student affairs doing racial justice work may encourage deeper commitment. PAR allows the researchers to invest themselves in a "practice-changing practice" (Kemmis, 2009), and support movement toward social change.

Who should participate in the study?
To participate, you must identify as white, have been socialized or identify as a woman, currently work full-time in student affairs in a U.S. higher education institution, and engage in antiracist praxis in your work. As a team member, you will play an active role in guiding the direction of the study, determining areas for further investigation, and establishing the actions that will be the outcome of the study.

What special competencies will I need?
You need no special skills. You need to be knowledgeable of your own experience, willing to share that story, and meet the study criteria outlined above. Some of the stories you share may involve times when you were successful in your antiracist praxis, and other stories may reveal times you fell short of your intended goal. The nature of the story is not as important as your willingness to be an engaged member of the group and collaborate with others.

How will I benefit from this experience?
Some possible benefits include:

- A $25 gift card at the conclusion of the study
- The knowledge that your participation has secured a matching $25 gift for a change-minded organization, determined by the research team
- A chance to gain research experience, and specifically, experience with a PAR design
- The possibility to share your personal experience as a knowledge base and foundation for other white women who want to engage in antiracist work

How much time will my participation require?
This study will consist of the following engagements:
- One 15 to 30-minute individual screening interview via Zoom
- A demographic questionnaire
- Three 2-hour research group meetings via Zoom
- Two individual written responses to a narrative prompt (no more than 250 words each)
- One 30 to 60-minute individual closing interview via Zoom
- A few emails with the researcher for scheduling and to communicate about data analysis and research findings

For more information about the study:
Please contact Claire DePalma at claire.beaudro@uga.edu or 847-404-1512. This dissertation study is supervised by Dr. Merrily S. Dunn, merrily@uga.edu. This project has been approved by the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of Human Subjects. If you have questions for IRB, contact 706-542-3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Adapted from Danley, K., & Ellison, M. L. (1999).

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
ANTIRACIST PRAXIS BY WHITE WOMEN IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

Researcher's Statement
You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. This process is called "informed consent", and a copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator:	*Merrily S. Dunn, Ph.D.*
	Associate Professor
	Department of Counseling and Human Development
	merrily@uga.edu
Co-Investigator:	*Claire DePalma, M.A., M. F. A.*
	Doctoral Candidate
	Department of Counseling and Human Development
	University of Georgia
	claire.beaudro@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study and Key Information
The purpose of this study is to understand how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis. To be eligible to participate in the study, a participant must meet the following criteria: (1) identifies as white, (2) has been socialized or identifies as a woman, (3) currently works full-time in student affairs in a higher education institution in the United States, and (4) engages in antiracist praxis in their work.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The research team will be formed with 6-10 participant-researchers who will work in collaboration with the co-investigator to explore antiracist praxis by white women in student affairs. All team meetings and interviews will be held via Zoom.

Procedures of the Study and Time Commitment
Everyone interested in joining the research team will participate in a screening interview via Zoom. In that interview, the time commitment for the study that was provided over email will be reiterated during the interview. People selected for the research team will be actively engaged in the study from September through early November 2022, and will take part in a screening interview (via Zoom), a demographic questionnaire, three research group meetings (via Zoom), two individual written responses, and a closing interview (via Zoom). Participant-researchers

will receive outreach for member checks related to data analysis in November 2022. The time commitment will be roughly 10 hours total (between September to November 2022) for each participant.

Risks and Discomforts
This research study has limited potential risks associated with participation. You may experience discomfort or emotional reactions in response to reflecting on antiracism, racial justice, and your role in racism and systemic structures that uphold inequity. There are questions that may make you uncomfortable, and you can skip those questions if you do not wish to answer them. If you need additional support as a result of new realizations or awareness that arises during the course of the study, I recommend seeking the support of a trained mental health professional.

Benefits
It is this researcher's hope that this research project will provide opportunities to expand the knowledge base on antiracist praxis by white women in student affairs. The design of this study also provides participant-researchers with research experience and the opportunity to develop actions to broaden or deepen antiracist praxis. Personal growth is another possible benefit.

Confidentiality of Records
All information collected during this research study will be treated as confidential. Pseudonyms will be used rather than participants' real names. The researcher will have access to the identifiable information, and only the pseudonym will be associated with descriptions of participants or statements attributed to them. Participant information will only be shared after identifiable information has been removed. The results of the study may be published without additional consent.
Due to the nature of group meetings, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. I will do my best to protect each participant's privacy and ask other participants to do so, but I cannot control what others may share outside the group setting.

Recording
I will Zoom record the screening and closing interviews and the three research group sessions and transcribe them for data analysis. I will also use an external audio recorder as a backup to Zoom's recording capabilities. After I transcribe each session, I will retain recordings and transcripts in a secure location for one year, then destroy all recordings and transcripts to maintain participant confidentiality.

Internet Data Collection
This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Participants will complete a demographic questionnaire and responses to narrative prompts using a Qualtrics survey each time. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of technology; however, confidentiality in online communication cannot be guaranteed.

Participant Rights
Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Merrily S. Dunn at merrily@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions

about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 706-542-3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Incentives/Compensation for Participation
Participants will receive a $25 gift card at the conclusion of the study if they complete study. A matching $25 donation will be made to an organization dedicated to social justice chosen by the study's participant-researchers.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research
By proceeding with the interview, you indicate your consent to participate in this research study. Proceeding with the interview indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form and have had all your questions answered.

APPENDIX G

SCREENING INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Black Text: Information regarding the interview
Blue Text: My script, to be read verbatim
Green Text: Researcher notes

Setting: All screening interviews will take place over Zoom in a private room with a neutral background. I will arrive early and have a field notebook available for making brief, real-time notations of significant moments in the interview or body language cues that will not be captured in the transcription and might be hard to discern from the recording. I will also have a copy of the interview protocol available prior to the participant's entrance into the Zoom room.

Preparation: When the participant joins the Zoom room, I will greet them, introduce myself and share my pronouns and ask for their name and pronouns. I will engage them in small talk for a couple minutes while they settle into the environment, and then inform them that I will read an introduction to the interview that will be consistent across all participants. If they are ready to begin, I will start reading the initiation script.

Initiation: Hello and welcome. My name is Claire DePalma and I use she/her/hers pronouns. I am a doctoral candidate in the Student Affairs Leadership program at the University of Georgia. I look forward to speaking with you today and hearing more about your interest in this study. The purpose of this study is to understand how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis. I want to understand the experiences of white women doing this work, where they encounter challenges, where they find success, and work together to develop a set of actions to continue to move the work forward. This study is part of my dissertation, and I may use this research for publication.

I expect that today's interview will take 15-30 minutes. I am very grateful for your willingness to take the time and energy to speak with me. If you feel uncomfortable at any time and wish to stop the interview, please let me know. We can stop at any time and will only resume if you wish to do so. Do you have any questions at this point? (Answer any questions the participant asks.)

I will ask for your permission to record this conversation for the purpose of transcription and data analysis. Only myself, a transcriber, and my advisor, Dr. Dunn, will have access to the recording and transcription. The recording and the transcription will be stored in a secure location. Do I have your consent to record the interview? (Secure verbal consent.)

I will keep your identity confidential in reporting the findings of this study. If selected to join the research team, I will ask you to complete a demographic questionnaire which includes the selection of a pseudonym. Any direct quotes or descriptions of your experience used in the study will be attributed to that pseudonym. If you use the names of any colleagues, friends, or family, I will alter those names to maintain anonymity. Do you have any questions about your anonymity or the screening interview today? (Answer the participant's questions.)

Before we begin the interview, I will allow time for you to read the consent form and learn about your rights as a research participant. I will attach the consent form in the chat right now. (Attach consent form.) Please download it and take a few minutes to read it. I will begin recording the interview now while you read. After you have reviewed the consent form, if you agree to its terms, please give a verbal "I consent". (Begin recording session through Zoom recording and backup recording app on my phone.)

The Main Narration and Questioning phases of the interview follow Jovchelovitch & Bauer's (2000) elicitation technique.

Main Narration: No interruptions. Only non-verbal signs of active listening and minimal encouragers to support the participant's narration.
Let's begin. Today's interview will consist of three parts: the first part will be an open question about your story, next I may ask some follow up questions, and finally, I will give you time to ask any questions you have for me or about the study. We will close with a few housekeeping items regarding next steps.
- Tell me the story of your antiracist praxis and why you are interested in joining a participatory research team investigating that praxis by white women in student affairs? (Singh, 2019; Weston, 2021)
- Why do you think antiracist praxis by white women is important to study?
- Is there anything else you want to say? (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000)

Questioning: Once main narration comes to an end, the questioning phase can be used to elicit new material. Use the participant's own language, following up on information in their story. I may use one of these questions, if appropriate:
- Given what you shared about your involvement in antiracism, think about the development of your race consciousness. What do you see now that you cannot unsee? (Saad, 2020)
- Given what you shared about your involvement in antiracism, tell me about a time when it was difficult to show up as a racial ally. (Singh, 2019)
- What do you hope to learn by joining the research team for this study?

I have no further questions for today's interview. What questions would you like to ask me? (Answer all questions.)
If there are no further questions, I will stop the recording now. (Stop both recording devices.)

Conclusion: Thank you again for spending time chatting with me today and for the gift of your honesty and sharing your story. The last thing I want to go over is a bit of housekeeping. I know how busy everyone's schedules can get, so I would like to ask you to hold the three dates of our group sessions on your calendar. Those will take place on: [DAYS, TIMES]. If you receive an invitation to join the research team, please consider those dates confirmed, and we will schedule the individual closing interviews for the end of the study during our first group meeting.
Thank you so much and have a great remainder of your day!

Adapted from Clandinin & Caine (2008), Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000), and Weston (2021).

APPENDIX H

EMAIL INVITATION TO RESEARCH TEAM

Dear [Name],

Thank you for participating in a screening interview for the research study currently titled Antiracist Praxis by White Women in Student Affairs. With this email, I would like to formally invite you to join the research team for this study!

As a reminder, these are the criteria to participate in this study: (1) identifies as white, (2) has been socialized or identifies as a woman, (3) currently works full-time in student affairs in a higher education institution in the United States, and (4) engages in antiracist praxis in their work. The purpose of this study is to understand how white women in student affairs, who engage in antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis. Participation in this study is voluntary.

Our team meetings will be held via Zoom on [DATES/TIMES]. You may access the meetings using this [LINK]. I will not send a calendar invitation to team meetings in an effort to preserve your confidentiality, so please hold the time on your calendar. During meetings, please plan to have your video turned on and your audio connected in a way that honors the privacy of other participants (i.e., please be in a private space or plan to use headphones). In addition to our group meetings, you will participate in two individual narrative prompt responses between meetings, and a closing interview with Claire. We will review the timeline of the study and schedule closing interviews in our first group session.

- **Please come to the first team meeting having reflected on the following question:** What are 1-3 unwritten rules you learned early about whiteness or white womanness?

This study has Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval from the University of Georgia. All information collected during this research project will be treated as confidential. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me or call me at 847-404-1512. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Merrily S. Dunn, at merrily@uga.edu.

- If you are willing to join the research team, **please reply to this message to accept the invitation to the team and complete this demographic questionnaire** by our first team meeting on [DATE]: [LINK TO DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE].

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,
Claire DePalma

APPENDIX I

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Pseudonym & Pronouns:

Institutional Type:
- o Large public (more than 10,000 total students)
- o Medium public (3,000-9,999 total students)
- o Small public (1,000-2,999 total students)
- o Very small public (fewer than 1,000 total students)
- o Large private ((more than 10,000 total students)
- o Medium private (3,000-9,999 total students)
- o Small private (1,000-2,999 total students)
- o Very small private (fewer than 1,000 total students)

Anything else to note about your institutional type (e.g., religiously affiliated, for-profit, etc.):

How would you describe your functional area within student affairs:

How many years have you worked full-time in student affairs:

How would you describe your:
- Ethnicity:

- Gender:

- Sexual Orientation:

- Ability Status:

- Socioeconomic Status:

- Nationality:

- Other Additional Salient Identities:

APPENDIX J

MEETING AGENDAS AND NARRATIVE PROMPTS (IN SEQUENCE)

Meeting 1

- Welcome & Introductions (10 mins)
    - o Name, role/functional area/institution, a win from this week (work or non-work)
- Informed Consent & Voluntary Participation (10 mins)
    - o Review purpose, criteria, and voluntary participation
    - o Time commitment: 3 meetings including today's, 2 narrative prompt responses, a closing interview, and I will follow up via email during data analysis to check my understanding and get your feedback on my initial themes
    - o Risks and benefits; incentive
    - o Confidentiality and privacy
    - o Participant rights
- Participatory Action Research (PAR) (5 mins.)
    - o Exploratory, flexible, suited to supporting change
    - o Rooted in both participation and action
        - ▪ Participation: I am not conducting research *on* you, I'm conducting it *with you*. I am a co-investigator, another traveler on this antiracism journey we're all on.
        - ▪ Action: this type of research is a practice-changing practice, aimed at identifying and planning for an action that works to solve the problem identified.
- Activity (25 mins.)
    - o Share your name again and share your response to the prompt: what are 1-3 unwritten rules you learned early about whiteness or white womanness?
- Purpose of the Study & Research Questions (10 mins.)
    - o The purpose of this study is to explore how white women in student affairs, who engage antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis.
    - o The two research questions are: how do white women in student affairs, who engage antiracist praxis in their work, understand antiracist praxis? ...describe their experiences enacting antiracist practices?
- Activity (10 mins.)
    - o Share themes from screening interview
    - o Does anyone have more they'd like to share or talk about based on those themes?
- Our work together (30 mins.)
    - o How do we want to start this project?
        - ▪ Topics we could explore
        - ▪ Actions we could pursue
- Process Items & Closing (5 mins.)
    - o Review upcoming timeline of meetings and narrative prompts
    - o Schedule closing interviews
- Thank You

Narrative Prompt 1

How do you see yourself in white women who show up in white privilege, white fragility, white silence, and/or white exceptionalism?

How are you just like them?

- White privilege: the collection of unearned advantages, insider status, and benefits afforded to white people due to whiteness (McIntosh, 1989).
- White fragility: a state that causes a small amount of racial stress to overwhelm a person and trigger a range of responses. White fragility causes white people to shut down and disengage, to speak or act from denial or defensiveness, or to threaten and harm People of Color (DiAngelo, 2018).
- White silence: the silence of white people facing racism and white supremacy. White silence may take the form of saying or doing nothing when witnessing a racist policy or practice in action, or not breaking from white solidarity to speak up when someone tells a racist joke or speaks from a place of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018; Saad, 2020).
- White exceptionalism: statements or beliefs that position oneself as a "good" white person, and/or distance oneself from other, "bad", (racist) white people (Thompson, 2003; Weston, 2021).

Meeting 2

- Welcome Back (5 mins)
    - Something you're grateful for this week
- Narrative Prompt Discussion (15 mins)
    - Asked us to reflect on white women who show up in white privilege, white fragility, white silence, and white exceptionalism.
    - I'd love to share themes but I also recognize more may have come up for you since your response…where would you like to start?
    - Themes
    - New thoughts or reactions?
- White Supremacy Culture Characteristic Discussion (20 mins.)
    - We agreed to choose a characteristic from Okun (2022) and identify ways that characteristic surfaces in student affairs and actions we might take to disrupt that characteristic.
    - Characteristics & Actions
- Break (5 mins.)
- Success & Challenge (30 mins.)
    - Where have you found success in antiracist work?
        - What felt smoothest or easiest?
    - Where have you found challenge in antiracist work?
        - What felt hardest or riskiest?
- Purpose & Action (30 mins.)
    - The purpose of this study is to explore how white women in student affairs, who engage antiracist praxis in their work, understand and enact antiracist praxis.
- Matching Donation (10 mins.)
    - I will be giving each of you a $25 gift card as a small token of appreciation for your participation. I will be making a matching donation to a social justice

organization or equity-minded non-profit. Where would we like that matching donation to go?
- Process Items & Closing (5 mins.)
    - Prompt going out on Monday
    - Thanks for scheduling closing interviews: quick review of schedule to confirm
- Thank You

Narrative Prompt 2

In our last meeting, we touched on the origins of higher education (white supremacy, colonialism, slavery) and how they relate to our institutions' present-day embodiment of many of Okun's white supremacy culture characteristics (power hoarding, right to comfort, fear of open conflict, objectivity, progress is bigger, etc.).
What are opportunities in your unit/department/division where your group could divest from policies, processes, or practices that privilege white people? (Linder, 2018)
How might you enact this divestment in community and in collaboration with People of Color? (Linder, 2018; Weston, 2021)

Meeting 3

- Welcome Back (5 mins)
    - Something you're looking forward to this weekend or sometime soon
- Donation (5 mins)
    - Do we want Claire's matching donation to be pooled together or separate?
        - If separate, think about what racial justice org you'd like to pick, and give me that info in our closing interview next week
- Somatic Experience (20 mins.)
    - What happens in your body when we get into these topics?
        - Do you try to stop it from getting into your body?
        - Does the somatic experience align with somatic experiences around shame? Other emotions?
- Discussion (20 mins.)
    - What topics have we not yet talked about that you want to explore?
- Break (10 mins.)
- Narrative Prompt Discussion (15 mins.)
    - This week's narrative prompt asked you to reflect on individual action you could take in your team/unit/division
    - Discussion of ideas you generated
    - Any new thoughts about opportunities to divest from processes, policies, or practices that privilege white folx?
- Action (20 mins.)
    - What actions do we want to be the outcome of this study?
        - Examples
        - I want us to determine action that we feel good about as a collective, and, I invite us to keep in mind how our plans rely on white ways of knowing, white supremacy culture, etc.

- Closing (15 mins.)
    - Return to themes of hopes for study articulated in screening interviews
    - Wondering if we could close by reflecting out any learnings, thoughts, or things that are sitting with you
- Thank You (5 mins.)
    - See you next week for our closing interviews
    - Deep gratitude

APPENDIX K

CLOSING INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Black Text: Information regarding the interview
Blue Text: My script, to be read verbatim
Green Text: Researcher notes

Setting: All closing interviews will take place over Zoom in a private room with a neutral background. I will arrive early and have a field notebook available for making brief, real-time notations of significant moments in the interview or body language cues that will not be captured in the transcription and might be hard to discern from the recording. I will also have a copy of the interview protocol available prior to the participant's entrance into the Zoom room.

Preparation: When the participant joins the Zoom room, I will greet them, and engage them in small talk for a couple minutes while they settle into the environment. Then I will inform them that I will read an introduction to the interview that will be consistent across all participants. If they are ready to begin, I will start reading the initiation script.

Initiation: Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for speaking with me today. I expect that today's interview will take 30-60 minutes. I am very grateful for the investment of your time and energy at all phases of this study. If you feel uncomfortable at any point today and wish to stop the interview, or need to take a break, please let me know. We can stop at any time and will only resume if you wish to do so. Do you have any questions? (Answer any questions the participant asks.)

I will ask for your permission to record this conversation for the purpose of transcription and data analysis. Only myself, and my advisor, Dr. Dunn, will have access to the recording and transcription. The recording and the transcription will be stored in a secure location. Do I have your consent to record the interview? (Secure verbal consent.)

I will keep your identity confidential in reporting the findings of this study. Any direct quotes or descriptions of your experience used in the study will be attributed to your pseudonym. If you use the names of any colleagues, friends, or family, I will alter those names to maintain anonymity. Do you have any questions about your anonymity or today's interview? (Answer the participant's questions.)

Over the next few weeks, I will reach out to perform member checks, an opportunity for me to get your feedback on preliminary findings of the study, and to confirm my understanding of moments, interpretations, or actions. You may then correct, clarify, or add information to help me better understand the data. Are there any other questions you have at this time? (Answer the participant's questions.)

I will begin the recording and then we can get started. (Begin recording session through Zoom recording and backup recording app on my phone.)

The Main Narration and Questioning phases of the interview follow Jovchelovitch & Bauer's (2000) elicitation technique.

Main Narration: No interruptions. Only non-verbal signs of active listening and minimal encouragers to support the participant's narration.
Let's begin. Like the screening interview, today's interview will consist of three parts: the first part will be an open question about your story, next I may ask some follow up questions, and finally, I will give you time to ask any remaining questions.
- Tell me the story of your experience in this research study exploring antiracist praxis by white women in student affairs. (Weston, 2021)
- Is there anything else you want to say? (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000)

Questioning: Once main narration comes to an end, the questioning phase can be used to elicit new material. Use the participant's own language, following up on information in their story. I may use one of these questions, if appropriate:
- What did you learn about whiteness, racial consciousness, or antiracism in the process of this study? (DiAngelo, 2018; Helms, 2020; Saad, 2020; Singh, 2019)
- What surprised you during this research process? (Weston, 2021)
- What did you learn about yourself?

I have no further questions for today's interview. Do you have any questions for me? (Answer all questions.)
If there are no further questions, I will stop the recording now. (Stop both recording devices.)

Conclusion:
Thank you for being part of this research experience and for the ways you gave your time, energy, vulnerability, and investment in change. If other thoughts or reflections come up for you in the next few weeks, please feel encouraged to reach out to me.
- I will be reaching out to provide you with your gift card.
- You should have already received an email with a doodle poll for a next meeting – if you choose to move forward, are you comfortable with me sending you a calendar invite that would be sent to the group (and thus your email would be visible to others)?
- I will also be in touch as I analyze data for member checks.

Thank you again, and have a great rest of your day!

Adapted from Clandinin & Caine (2008), Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000), and Weston (2021).