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## A Critical Phenomenological Study of White Educators who Engage in Antiracism

Maria-Renée D. Grigsby  
Minnesota State University, Mankato

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**Dissertation Defense**

**A Critical Phenomenological Study of White Educators who Engage in Antiracism**

**By**

**Maria-Renée D. Grigsby**

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of Educational of  
Doctorate  
In Educational Leadership**

**Minnesota State University, Mankato**

**Mankato, MN**

**March 2024**

March 29, 2024

A Critical Phenomenological Study of White Educators who Engage in Antiracism

Maria-Renée Grigsby

This dissertation has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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## **Acknowledgement**

To my daughter, Sophia, and my husband, Dan, with whom none of this would be possible. I love you and I thank you.

## **A Critical Phenomenological Study on White Educators who Engage in Antiracism**

Maria-Renée D. Grigsby

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
Doctor of Education

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO  
MANKATO, MINNESOTA  
March 2024

### ABSTRACT

Racism is reflected in political, economic, and educational institutions throughout the United States. These institutionalized systems were successfully designed to have a chilling effect on any progress toward antiracist change. It impacts the achievement level of K-12 students of color in the public school system who make up the majority population in public schools nationwide. Yet, their teachers remain largely white. This is especially important in Minnesota, which ranks fiftieth in the country for graduation rates of Black and Latinx students. The method used for this study is critical phenomenology which is important when looking at the influences of race, gender, culture, racism, and whiteness on educators. This study shows five themes that are important for white educators to engage in antiracist praxis (1) motivations, (2) characteristics, (3) conditions, (4) identity, and (5) the ability to sustain antiracist work. When identity and values are imbued, the level of risk increased as educators' sense of responsibility strengthened. This intrinsic connection motivated most of them to engage in activism despite the high-risk sacrifice to their financial, mental, and social wellbeing.

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## Chapter 1

### Background of the Problem

I am a Black woman who is a descendant of Russian and German Jews and the Meskwaki people. I grew up in a small, rural, predominantly white community. My family was the only family of color in the town from the time I was five years old until I was fourteen years old. My first experience with racism in my memory occurred when I was about seven years old at my elementary school. I was playing alone outside during recess in the back of the school where the playground was located. I stood by the school doors engaged in a solo game of hopscotch. Three boys came out of the building, looked at me, called me “nigger”, and galloped away laughing. Though my parents had made my brothers and me aware of this horrible, cutting, nasty, and degrading word, I was shocked that it had happened nevertheless. I did what my parents had taught me and I found the playground supervisor, a white woman. I told her what had just happened to me. Her response was, “No one did that, Maria. You were playing by yourself up there. No one came out of those doors.” I looked at the ground and walked away. I was shocked that I had not been believed. Though I did not know what kind of response to expect, that was not the outcome I could have imagined. I was embarrassed that I had essentially been called a liar by an adult whom my parents had told me I should go to in times like this. I was deeply saddened that no one seemed to care after I had done what my parents told me to do. As though the isolation of playing alone at recess was not sufficiently apparent that I did not belong or would never be truly included in the elementary school at which I attended, the word *nigger* reinforced it and the lack of concern and outright disregard by a school employee solidified it. Though this was the first time that I was called a *nigger*, it would not be the last time.

Racism is ever-present in the United States and permeates our school systems. My experience as a little Black girl is not unique. I have one daughter who will enter college in the fall. Her educational journey was replete with racism, exclusion, and low expectations. Our experiences are similar though our journeys are decades and a generation apart.

While I had no teachers of color until I entered college, she had three teachers of color. I had no antiracist teachers throughout my K-12 education and she had one. I am not surprised that most of her teachers were not antiracists. I was surprised that a few of them, including principals and superintendents, were overtly racist, and just as surprised, but greatly relieved, that some of her teachers, though not antiracists, were not harmful to her. This was a fascinating observation from a researcher's perspective, but an emotionally and physically onerous decade for both of us. It is the impetus for my research and my initial question, "What causes such a strikingly vast difference in white educators?"

Racial slurs are but one example of racism that occurs in schools across the country; the dismissal of our stories is another. The exclusion of children of color from the curriculum, from the concern of educational leaders, and from buildings, usually in the form of suspensions and expulsions, are other manifestations of racism. Suspensions and expulsions happen to white children. It happens less often to them when compared to students of color, particularly Black students, though the causes of these consequences are the same (Giordano et al., 2020; Shi & Zhu, 2022; Wang & Del Toro, 2021).

Whiteness dominates systems such as public schools thereby centering eurocentricity and creating and maintaining white supremacy. Even the American Psychological Association (APA) is misguided in its intent to be more inclusive and capitalize racial categories (Bauder, 2020; Laws, 2020). APA requires that "white" be capitalized (APA, 2022) as if to suggest that all

racial categories are equal and, therefore, should be treated in the same fashion. White supremacy remains sufficiently supreme without a capital letter to underscore its power. It is the only racial category that is connected to legally sanctioned racial supremacy. White, if one is truly to dismantle systems of supremacy, must be recognized in its cultural context and the imbalance of power associated with it. It is not on equal footing with other racial categories. Therefore, I am making a conscious decision not to capitalize white per the APA rules.

### ***Manifestations of Racism in Education***

Racism infiltrates every aspect of American education (Diem et al., 2022). It impacts the achievement level of K-12 students of color in the public school system who make up the majority population in public schools nationwide (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Yet, their teachers remain largely white (Hussar, B. et al., 2020). As a result of the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. The Board of Education*, schools were expected to desegregate, despite popular support for segregation. This resulted in some schools achieving integration among student populations. But, nearly 40,000 Black educators were removed from their position or forced out of the profession (Fergus, 2016), many of whom were more qualified to teach than the white teachers who replaced them (Will, 2019). When students of color are taught by teachers of color, the dropout rate decreases, and standardized test scores increase (Figlio, 2022).

2024 will mark the seventieth anniversary of the *Brown vs. The Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court decision. As a consequence of court decisions in the 1990s, school segregation has once again increased and the trajectory of segregation is predicted to continue (Frankenberg, et al., 2019). Segregation impacts all students, but the impact is unequal. Students of color, while making up the majority of the student population across the United States (Frankenberg, et al.,

2019; Maxwell, 2020; NCES 2020), find themselves in settings that are often severely underfunded (Frankenberg, et al., 2019). Funding for schools comes from federal, state, and local taxes, with nearly half of the funding from local property taxes (Kearney et al. 2022; Baker et al., 2018). When district boundaries segregate across racial lines, affluent communities with higher populations of white families are disproportionately well-funded while communities with larger populations, but higher rates of poverty, are underfunded.

School closures are often a result of a lack of funding and occur disproportionately in areas with high populations of Black and Brown families. School closures force students to attend schools outside of their communities (Kearney et al., 2022). In areas where poverty is concentrated, low-income families become impacted by transportation and disruptions to their daily lives leading to chronic absences (Kearney et al., 2022). This ripple impedes students' access to a fair and appropriate education.

Education in the United States is rooted in a system designed for the wealthy and members of the dominant American culture. It was not meant for, nor did it typically include, children who were not wealthy and white. It was created to manifest and reinforce white epistemologies:

The educational system was designed to exclude marginalized students and communities through beliefs, policies, procedures, and practices. These [beliefs, policies, procedures, and practices] manifest in many ways, including through exclusionary discipline and White-centered curricula; schooling that was formed by whiteness as the operating norm; and a system that all too often replicates the anti-Black racism that is a ubiquitous part of the United States. (Hernández et al., 2023, p. 2)

History serves as a frame of reference. It provides the answers to why systems and institutions operate in the manner that they do, especially when at profound levels of racial inequity and inequality. The United States is not an exception to this, nor is its education system. It is only through history that a deeper relationship can develop between understanding the sanctioned maltreatment of Black people and its continuation manifested in school systems and other institutions throughout the United States, “Such a discussion illustrates the centrality of antiblackness to preserving white supremacist power structures in the present day, which includes naming the conditions that ensure black people’s education in the U.S. remains a violent enterprise” (Warren, & Coles, 2020, p. 385).

If racial justice via antiracist education liberation occurs, it will happen, in part, because educators have learned, not just become aware, of the complexities and horrors of America’s past. Antiracism, the dismantling of systems rooted and designed to maintain racism, requires antiracists to learn how such systems were erected, and more importantly, the purpose for which they serve. The past and future are immutably tied:

Advancing a social justice agenda in (black) education requires a sober understanding of our past and present. Interweaving lessons from history that shape our future, or what [Alondra Nelson] conceptualizes as past-future visions, ‘insist that who we’ve been and where we’ve traveled is always an integral component of who we can become.’

(Nelson, 2000 as cited in Warren, & Coles, 2020, p. 385)

### ***The Legal Construct of Race***

Before one can understand racial identity development, it is important to understand the social and legal development of racial categories. The implications of legally sanctioned and socially accepted racial categories codifies the superiority of people for no reason other than that

which is capricious thus creating a caste system. India has a caste system and those placed on the lowest rung are known as “untouchables” (Wilkerson, 2023). The United States, too, has “untouchables”, but they reside at the highest rung of the caste. So greatly removed are they from the other rungs due to their wealth, political influence, and economic power that they are untouchable. When race is both legally sanctioned and socially acceptable, a caste system becomes intentional and unavoidable. There are two court cases that exemplify the American legal system’s obsession with race. In *Ozawa v. United States* (1922), a Japanese man petitioned the United States Supreme Court to be classified as white. The court rejected his petition because the man was Japanese, with no evidence of ancestral connections to Caucasians. Therefore, the court deemed it an impossibility for him to be legally white (Tehranian, 2000).

One year later, in *United States v. Thind*, a man from India with brown skin petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court for a white identity and proved that anthropologically, he was of Caucasian descent. Again, the court denied him the status of white. The court ruled that “scientific evidence would no longer be relevant to the racial-determination in” who is white and who is not white. Hence, the legal reform and perpetuation of the myth and construction of race (Tehranian, 2000, p. 822).

The concept of whiteness is the ability to assimilate into a Northern and Western European value system (Gerber, 1999; Tehranian, 2000). Christianity, formal education, wealth, and speaking English are the elements that make up whiteness. Whiteness is the ability to conform to those aforementioned elements that exemplify white culture.

When white immigrants arrived in the United States, they maintained their ethnic cultural practices until it was more beneficial for them to give those up to become white (Historical Foundations of Race, 2021; Tehranian, 2000; Utt. & Tochluk, 2020). The legacy of this decision

created the inability among white Americans to identify their culture, their positions in it, or their dominance of it. Giving up their European cultures was a trade that they were willing to make to have access to American power. In other words, they were willing to give up their ethnic identities to accept a racial identity.

In the United States, when one is white one can assert racialized privilege to acquire the economic and political power that came and still comes with it. When people no longer associate with an ethnicity, but rather with a race, the collective power increases exorbitantly, and the race that holds that power is in a substantial position to maintain that power, “The privileges attached to white skin are undeniable, if merely conceived as the freedom *not* to have to think constantly about race, a freedom that it is said has yet to be conferred on non-whites” (Gerber, 1999, p. 441). It becomes burdensome when they must confront a culture that oppresses and *others* those who are not white in order for their culture to thrive; to remain at the top of a racial hierarchy that grants them political, economic, and social power unlike any other racialized group in this country.

Justices of the court determined who could be considered naturalized citizens based upon, in part, the petitioner’s ability to assimilate into whiteness. “[C]ourts played an instrumental role in limiting naturalization to those new immigrant groups whom judges saw as most fit to carry on the tradition of the ‘White Republic’” (Tehrani, 2000, p. 821). “Most fit” remains a racist dog whistle and is used as an excuse to deny a person in a legally protected category from employment or promotion. They are told that they are “not the right fit” and those who say it have been empowered to do so through the legal system.

Courts often rely on the precedent and intent of those who created the law (American Bar Association, 2022). It is not uncommon for constitutionalists such as Supreme Court justices

Clarence Thomas and the late Antonin Scalia, to approach the law through the lens of the founding fathers (Lawson, 2018; Segall, 2014). This is a systematic approach to justify and maintain whiteness and racial categories. In other words, it sustains racism. Courts determined that whiteness was performative assimilation. For example, the United States does not have a national language. However, based upon past legislation in states such as Arizona the average person would, and often does, believe that English is indeed the national language of the United States (State of Arizona, 2000). Hence, the construction of whiteness through legal means and false information.

White supremacy is rooted in every sociopolitical, educational, and economic system in the United States. Acting or assimilating to whiteness gives people the sense that they will be accepted in white spaces, a partner in white power structures, literally into white supremacy. Hence, here I am working on a doctorate, using my practiced academic language, and abiding by most of the rules of the white power structure hoping that such things will give me the opportunity to dismantle the very systems that require these manifestations of achievement.

White supremacy as racial dominance did not initially exist when colonists first arrived on Indigenous land. When Africans first came to the colonies, they were not oppressed based on their skin color, but rather because of their religions which were not rooted in Christianity (Tehrani, 2000). Christianity remains an element of whiteness. The United States created and maintains the expectation that to survive and thrive, its residents must assimilate to whiteness. Yet, it has done everything in its power to ensure that only select groups can attain such a standard. Black people and Indigenous people are not among the chosen (Historical Foundations of Race, 2021).



Americans are taught, and too many are convinced, that meritocracy leads to wealth and wealth leads to acceptance in a country that values profit over people. And yet, “Over the course of U.S. history, Black people have consistently been locked out of opportunities to amass assets through the major components that build intergenerational wealth, including, financial assets, homeownership, business ownership, retirement funds, and non-residential real estate” (Hicks et al., 2021, p. 6). Therefore, no matter how hard and long disenfranchised people work, if they do not have access to acquire wealth, then wealth cannot be attained. Thus, meritocracy is a myth, and so, too, is the American Dream for Black people. The United States established a very effective caste system, one that can only be abolished and not merely reformed. Such an economic caste weighs heavily on school systems that are dependent upon the wealth of their local communities.

### ***Education was Never Intended to be Neutral***

The first schools in the United States were not public and enrolled primarily white children from affluent families (Kober & Rentner, 2020; (University of Minnesota, 2016). Thus, education was not intended to be a neutral system of disseminated unbiased knowledge. The audience for American schools was intentionally chosen with the aim of teaching its white audience “the skills, knowledge, norms, and values they need to learn to become good, productive members of their society” (University of Minnesota, 2016, par. 1). To attain this goal and maintain it once it was achieved, cultures would have to be eliminated, whiteness mandated, and the freedom to think freely would need to be oppressed. Achievement was measured by the students’ ability to understand and apply the morals of those who defined society’s values and norms. “Public schooling in the United States was built and continues to be maintained by white normative values, and beliefs, which inevitably create spaces for inequity and marginalization for

anyone who does not comply with this standard” (Hernández et al., 2023, p. 43). It is through the colonization of the First Nations people, the subjugation of Black people, and the division of those who are not white that the American school system was able to instill and perpetuate white supremacy. De Saxe aptly summarizes the trajectory of American colonization:

a geographic location is not ‘liveable’ until the initial inhabitants are pushed aside, eradicated, or assimilated. Society becomes ‘established’ once the colonisation process begins and continues. Further, and in regard to education, the spatial element of the subcontract is preserved through tracking, test scores, and ‘achievement.’ Examples such as advanced placement classes, English-Only policies, etc. serve to reinforce the notion of ‘othering,’ as well as create a climate of institutionalising inferiority, as such grouping becomes normalised and part of the sorting process. Domination, acquiescence, and the maintenance of whiteness is hegemonic and omnipresent.

(2021, p.64)

Despite the intentional creation of an educational system to uphold white supremacy, there have always been pockets of antiracism that existed within educational settings and outside of it. Africans and African Americans have resisted racism, and its especially unique offspring, anti-blackness, from the beginning of colonial capture throughout the centuries since. From ship mutiny; meeting clandestinely to plan insurrections; purchasing relatives from slaveholders; writing letters of abolition; preaching sermons of antiracism; touring Europe to expose America’s injustices; creating literary societies; building schools; violating laws to be autodidactic; working in racialized institutions; to preparing teacher candidates and supporting those already in the profession to revolutionize a public school system that works to marginalize and sustain the preschool to prison pipeline, African Americans have always led their liberation

from both literal and metaphorical shackles of American racism (Aptheker, 1993; Muhammad, G., 2020; Prengler et al., 2023; Williams, 2009); in spite of a racist system that dehumanized Black people even to the extent of fabricating a medical condition, *Drapetomania*. Drapetomania is a phenomenon invented by medical doctor, Samuel Adolphus Cartwright, to explain the desire of enslaved people to escape from the American holocaust. Drapetomania is defined as, “A form of mania supposedly affecting slaves in the 19th century, manifested by an uncontrollable impulse to wander or run away from their white masters, preventable by regular whipping” (Oxford Reference, n.d.). While the extent to which white people went to accumulate wealth, maintain an excessive level of comfort, and dehumanize people unlike themselves may be surprising, it is only thus so to those who have not learned how racism was operationalized and continues to operate to attain these goals. While wealth and excessive comfort may appeal to those who can obtain them, there exists an integrated population who actively work to eradicate the means by which they are acquired. “The pervasive quality of racist thought and practice throughout the history of the United States is clear, but it has never been without substantial challenge.” (Aptheker, 1993, p.15)

### ***Antiracism and Whiteness***

Antiracism has been in practice for as long as racism has existed on what is now American soil. And yet, it remains an understudied area. Whether intentional or not, its lack of scholarship is consequential. Without pervasive awareness of antiracism, too often whiteness goes unchallenged and remains invisible to those who benefit from it. Whiteness too easily remains the standard by which everyone is not only measured but to which they must assimilate if they are to be granted privileges attached to cultural whiteness.

Like the mythology of race, whiteness is not merely pigmentation. It is a concept that dictates forms of knowledge, behaviors, dress codes, and religion. Whiteness is “a social construction that embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions and experiences, epistemology, emotions, and behaviors” (Matias, et al., 2014, p. 290). Whiteness provides access to political, economic, and educational benefits “oftentimes at the expense of people of Colour” (Matias & Boucher, 2023, p. 69). Because of this access to power, there is a junction at which race, racism, and power intersect. Antiracist people, therefore, question and investigate this intersection looking not to deny such existence, but to understand its impact and work towards the elimination of those impacts because “the Negro’s experience of the white world cannot possibly create in him any respect for the standards by which the white world claims to live. His own condition is overwhelming proof that white people do not live by these standards” (Baldwin, 1993, p. 22). There are many articles that discuss how to be an antiracist primarily due to the work of Ibram Kendi. But, rarely do we come across why people, especially white people, engage in antiracist work (Aptheker, 1993; Malott, et al., 2015).

### ***The Longevity of Antiracism***

The existence of Black people in America will always be marked by the institution of slavery (Warren, & Coles, 2020). During the 1800s, racist narratives to justify African enslavement were dominant, while antiracist views were suppressed or omitted (Aptheker, 1993). Understanding history is essential to antiracism. It is a prerequisite to antiracism:

The importance of facing our history should not be underestimated...This is all part of an antiracist worldview—to reclaim that knowledge that has been submerged, marginalized, distorted, stolen, or hidden from all of us because of the race, class, gender, bias, and

political privilege of those who have the power to determine whose ‘knowledge’ gets known. (Kailin, J., 2002, p. xv)

Aptheker (1993) makes an important distinction between those who were against slavery and those who were antiracist. Not everyone who opposed slavery opposed racism, “...some, in opposing slavery, nevertheless evinced racist views, but others were moved by feelings of compassion and a sense of common humanity” (p. 151). Abraham Lincoln was indicative of such a position. One might not oppose the subjugation of Black people, but order them released from slavery to preserve the union of the American Republic, for example. There are those who appear to be antiracists in action, but examining the motivations and the goals of such actions is critical to evaluate whether someone is an antiracist.

Aptheker (1993) distinguishes racism towards those who are not considered white in the United States from that of Black people referred to as *anti-blackness*. He explains that “the central focus of racism in the United States has been upon African-derived people.” (p. xiv). While antiracism was included in publications by historians, it was never the focus of their work. This lack of attention to antiracism helped create the false notion that antiracism is a relatively new phenomenon. Yet, a closer review of socio-historical contexts and critical analysis of racist laws tells a different and more accurate story of cross-cultural and cross-racial relationships.

Antiracism was not inconsequential as the lack of research suggests. It warrants historical attention especially as it effectively threatened a global economic system dependent upon human bondage; a system created entirely for white people who could and would profit from it. This system allowed white people to acquire a level of material wealth and emotional comfort that remains elusive still today to most of whom are not white.

Comradery across racial demographics was common and often acceptable even in southern states like Alabama and North Carolina (Aptheker, 1993; Weinberger, 1966). Not only did friendships exist, but, “...sexual contacts between the races were not the rare aberrations ... but a frequent occurrence involving whites of all social and cultural levels” (Stamp, 1968, p. 350-351). This is not to suggest that Northern states found interracial relationships acceptable. States such as Wyoming and Indiana prohibited interracial marriages until 1965 (Weinberger, 1966). However, Gary B. Mills attempts to explain this reality:

....that because the free Negro's relative proportion of the population was so small, he may have been considered numerically powerless. Indeed, the issue of numbers takes on an even greater significance and may offer one key to the understanding of race relations in antebellum society. Wherever whites and free blacks met each other on a one-to-one basis, toleration and often friendship resulted. Nothing has emerged thus far to support the theory that whites in Alabama hated or feared free blacks; they did not fear the widow next door who was a founding member of their church or hate the barber with whom they hunted. Instead, it was the vague and theoretical mass of black freedmen that troubled them-the one popularized by political demagogues who built careers by swaying the emotions of voters, the one condemned by social malcontents...

(Mills, 1981, p. 32).

In other words, Black people as individuals were acceptable, but Black people as a collective were feared. Thus, antiracism is the concept of transcending from the individual to the collective to dismantle racist structures (Aouragh, M., 2019).

Despite clusters of white antiracists, they were disproportionately overshadowed by a pervasive notion that “racial prejudice was all but universal” (Foner, 1980, as cited in Aptheker,

1993). Yet, if this was an accurately widespread belief, it would not have been necessary for laws prohibiting people from consorting or marrying across racial groups. In the 1800s, various cities passed laws segregating people based on race and prohibiting the integrated socialization of residents. For instance, in New Orleans, laws were passed that made “interracial activity” (Aptheker, 1993, p. 4) illegal. The penalty for such an offense was whippings if an enslaved person was found guilty, or fines if a white person was guilty of the same offense. Still, in other places, antiracism was evident. In 1865, 45.2% of Minnesota white men who voted supported the right of Black men to participate in elections. This percentage increased to 48.8% by 1867 (Aptheker, 1993, p. 4). Amicable relationships between Black people and white helped to bolster antiracism through the ages.

Reverend Lemuel Haynes, an African American man, led a white congregation in Connecticut. He married a white teacher, Elizabeth Babbit, (or Babbitt depending on the source) (*Africans in America/part 2/Lemuel Haynes*, n.d; Aptheker, 1993;.). Among the people in his congregation were the parents of John Brown, the well-known antiracist who was hanged for leading an attack at Harper’s Ferry. Like his parents, Brown lived among Black people, “listened to them” and “learned from them” (Aptheker, 1993, p. 175). Antiracism is not something that can be done without the direction, support, and collaboration of Black people and other people of color.

Antiracism has always existed in the United States. From famous activists such as Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, Sojourner Truth, Bettina Love, John Brown, William Loyd Garrison, and Angela Davis, to lesser-known people such as Charles Neale who was white and had invited Black people to gather (illegally) at his home. When slave patrollers showed up one night, Neale threatened to harm them if they touched any of the Black attendees (Johnston,

1931). Lydia Maria Child, a white American author, wrote, spoke, and advocated against racism. She refused to let her death end her activism. When she died, she insisted on being buried on land that belonged to Black people, “...as the *last* testimony it is in my power to bear against the wicked, cruel, and absurd prejudice, which so grievously oppressed them in a country that boasts loudly of its free institutions” (Barlett, 1979 as cited in Aptheker, 1993, p. 171).

One of the founders of the National Academy of Sciences was J. Peter Lesley. He was a leading geologist and taught and published his scientific work from 1856-1892 (Chance, 1906). He was incredulous of propagandized theories such as eugenics and argued that “racism was false” (Aptheker, 1993, p. 143) and that not only integration, but interracial activity is natural. However, Lesley is rarely mentioned in texts for his antiracist views. This exemplifies a system that is intentionally designed to maintain, if not increase, racism and thwart antiracist efforts. It is no different than contemporary movements by governors and conservative right-wing congresses to eliminate books and diversity, equity, and inclusion programs that aspire to promote antiracism (Kumar, 2023).

### ***History of Antiracism in Education in the United States (1600s - 1880s)***

Education was another system used to at least mitigate, if not, eliminate racism. Gilbert Haven, a white, outspoken, antiracist leader in the Methodist Church wrote in 1857, “Blacks must serve in our workshops, our schools, our pulpits and as our physicians” (The *Liberator* as cited in Aptheker, 1993, p. 173). Aptheker (1993) gives numerous examples of both Black and white educators who instructed Black children, sometimes in integrated settings, and if they did not provide direct instruction, they created the environments in which the instruction occurred.

Alexander Twilight, after becoming the first African American to graduate college in 1823, was the principal of an integrated school in Vermont and later elected to the state



legislature in 1836 (Aptheker, 1993). Like Twilight, John Chavis was a teacher of both Black and white children. Unlike Twilight, he did this in southern states such as North Carolina and Virginia (Aptheker, 1993; Siström, n.d.). James Pennington escaped from slavery and became a teacher. In addition to educating Black children, he traveled to Europe where he lifted the veil of American slavery (Aptheker, 1993). Christopher McPherson who was released from enslavement opened his own school and employed a white instructor, Herbert H. Hughes, to teach Black children, some of whom were free and some of whom were still imprisoned in slavery (Aptheker, 1993).

Born free, some African Americans like Benjamin Banneker, were educated in integrated settings (Aptheker, 1993). This education happened despite laws that prohibited it and the promise of prison sentences for those who taught them. Such was the case of Margaret Douglas. Douglas was a white Virginia teacher who taught free Black children to read and write in her home. Her motivation for their instruction was to improve their “religious and moral” ontologies (PBS, n.d.). Explaining that she did not realize she had committed a crime and believed that the law only applied to enslaved Black children, she defended herself. Despite her motivation and ignorance of the law, she was sentenced to one month in jail (Aptheker, 1993; PBS, n.d.).

Myrtilla Miner, a white woman from New York, began teaching Black children and in the 1850s trained Black women to become teachers (Aptheker, 1993). She taught Black children in a Black-owned home (National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum, n.d.). Ironically, the National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum neglected to provide more information about the homeowner or even mention his name, though they provide the location of the house. Was he not also a conspirator to end racism? Was he less important than Myrtilla Miner?

### ***Upholding Racism in Antiracist Work***

One of the reasons that antiracism has been unsuccessful is that as antiracist work is done, racism continues to be upheld. An early example of this is William Gaston, a North Carolina judge and slaveholder in 1835, who espoused antiracist rhetoric, "...I do think he [free Black men] should not be politically excommunicated and have an additional mark of degradation fixed upon him solely on account of his color" (Aptheker, 1993, p. 140). Though, other than color, there is no explanation for which Judge Gaston justified commodifying Black people as he did his livestock. This kind of racist schizophrenia, in which people delude themselves of the reality of their actions and disassociate their words from their behaviors remains a contemporary phenomenon and one that explains why I dispute Apethker's assessment of Gaston as an antiracist. An antiracist does not fluctuate between racism and antiracism.

The United States continues to be, for all intents and purposes, a two-party political system of Republicans and Democrats; Republicans who get elected on platforms that suppress antiracist education and label African locations as "shithole" countries (Vitali et al., 2018) and Democrats who support white supremacy (Philpot, 2007). Thus, Americans, including some who identify as antiracists, myself included, are caught in a two-party system and vote for one party over the other knowing that both evils maintain white supremacy. Out of fear of one being more detrimental than the other, a ballot is cast which only perpetuates that which we work to dismantle thus contributing to the permanence of racism and simultaneously, antiracism. The conclusion of this paradox is that racism is so pervasive and embedded in the political, economic, and social systems all of which frame the educational system, that antiracism must not only work against racism but perhaps, must also work within it. This positional duality is what Ladson-Billings calls, "epistemological limbo" (2021, p. 168).

It will take years and a multifaceted approach to change the teaching profession into one that not only welcomes teachers of color and students of color into it but becomes a place in which they wish to stay; that is the ultimate challenge and goal of a nation that professes equality and justice for all. Until this is achieved, and achieve it must, white educators who currently teach and enter the profession at a greater number than educators of color must dedicate their lives to antiracism, "...a focus on White teachers in K–12 schools is an urgent national imperative for many reasons, not the least of which is the extent to which they can effectively teach students of color in the classroom" (Durand & Tavaras, 2021, p. 149).

### **Problem Statement**

Racism infiltrates every aspect of American education (Diem et al., 2022). It impacts the achievement level of K-12 students of color in the public school system who make up the majority population in public schools nationwide. Yet, their teachers remain largely white (Hussar, B., et al., 2020; Durand & Tavaras, 2021). As a result of the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. The Board of Education*, schools were expected to desegregate, despite popular support for segregation. This resulted in some schools achieving integration among student populations, but it forced many Black educators out of the profession, many of whom were more qualified to teach than the white teachers who replaced them (Will, 2019; Sabati et al., 2022). Research shows that when students of color are taught by teachers of color students are sent out of the classroom for behaviors less often than by white teachers (Lindsay & Hart, 2017), and the dropout rate decreases and standardized test scores increase (Figlio, 2022). This is especially important in Minnesota, which ranks fiftieth in the country when it comes to graduation rates of Black and Latinx students (Severson, 2019).

### *Racism in Racial Disparities*

“...he had a terrible life; he was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him” (Baldwin, 1993, p. 4). The quote from Baldwin applies to the consequences of having a profession dominated by white teachers in the United States who make up seventy-nine percent of the profession while fifty-two percent of students are students of color (Hussar, B., et al., 2020). In Minnesota, the number of white educators increases to eighty percent in urban areas, and ninety-four percent statewide (Kats, 2021; Minnesota Department of Education). Under white teachers and white leadership, students of color are suspended and expelled disproportionately more often than their white peers for the same subjective offenses such as disrespect, noncompliance, or disruptive behavior (Lindsay & Hart, 2017, MDHR, 2022). This exclusion not only increases the likelihood that these same students will spend time in prison but will likely face disproportionately harsher punishment in the justice system when compared to white people who commit the same crimes (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Shi & Zhu, 2022), As James Baldwin aptly wrote, “...they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. (Baldwin, 1993, p. 5).

In Minnesota, this occurs at a horrifyingly disproportionate rate. Indigenous students account for less than two percent of student enrollment but are ten times more likely to be suspended and Black students who account for eleven percent of the student population make up forty-one percent of the expulsions (Kats, 2021; MDHR, 2022). Additionally, Black students are recommended for gifted and talented services less often than their white peers. White teachers grade their Black students and Latinx students more harshly and are less likely to believe in their ability to successfully graduate compared to Black teachers (Rizga, 2016). The marginalization

of Black and Indigenous students is systematically perpetuated “in many ways, including how schools are funded, how school residential assignments are made, the design of curricular materials, the policy that govern discipline and safety, the governance of school boards, and other organizational features of schools as institutions” (Marcucci, & Elmesky, 2022, p. 3). Thus, Baldwin was correct, of course, when he wrote, “We cannot be free until they are free” (Baldwin, 1993, p. 10).

If the teaching profession does not diversify expeditiously and the white educators who dominate the American public school system do not instruct through an antiracist pedagogical lens, racism will continue to fester and permeate the education system (Durand & Tavaras, 2022). “Teachers from any ethnic, cultural, or racial background can be successful with any group of students when the teachers possess (or have the skills to acquire) the knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, and beliefs necessary to meet the needs of their students” (Milner, 2008, p. 336). Education is the cornerstone of the United States. Who it produces either has the knowledge to maintain that which already exists or the epistemology necessary to create that which should exist.

### ***Antiracism in the 21st Century***

Antiracism is not a trend, nor is it a description. It is a way of life. Those who are antiracist do not segregate antiracism in their professional life from their personal life. It is life, “....antiracism is more than a stance; it is an embodied everyday practice” (Diem et al., 2022). Antiracism is demonstrated in people across racial and cultural demographics. It manifests in disrupting racism and advocating against systemic racism (Kordesh et al., 2013). It lies in the ability of those who are antiracists to center those who are marginalized rather than reinforcing whiteness (Duran & Jourian, 2022).

### *Antiracism in Education Today*

There are current and former white educators who are considered antiracists (Rizga 2020; Thompson, 2001). They create meaningful relationships with their students, regardless of racial background, and believe in their success. What has not yet been answered is why some white educators achieve this level of antiracism. What has happened to some white educators that inspire them to be antiracists, and just as importantly, what has occurred to make them successful and persist in this endeavor? Is it possible to replicate and teach this paradigm shift to aspiring and current white educators who fail at antiracist work, including those educators who believe they have already achieved this?

The question of morals may lie at the heart of antiracism and the motivation of it. The answer to the question of morals is found in the pathology of racism that permeates our educational system; that it remains a predominantly white teaching institution with curriculum that is biased and Eurocentric while curriculum such as *Rethinking Schools!* (Home - *Rethinking Schools*, 2010) and *Cultivating Genius* (Muhammad, 2020) exists that counteracts Eurocentricity. It is less a matter of awareness or more so a reflection of the morality of a nation, that despite its long history of racism and antiracism, one clearly dominates the other. “If we look at this ignorance/ innocence as a deliberate strategy to maintain hegemonic whiteness ideology...a new consciousness appears” (Matias & Boucher, 2023, p. 68); one that does not excuse such ignorance, real or feigned, but seeks accountability. Baldwin postulated this decades ago when he wrote, “Ask any Negro what he knows about the white people with whom he works. And then ask the white people with whom he works what they know about *him*” (Baldwin, 1993, p. 103).

### *American Capitalism and Racism*

Fear coupled with power is perilous (*We Are All One - an Inspiring Short Film to Watch*, 2009). Fear can suppress rational judgment, but there are solutions to alleviate fear (Delagran, 2016). Therapeutic approaches, education, and living among those who are unfamiliar can mitigate fear. But, how does one eliminate the desire for power? Ladson-Billings (2021) writes:

...race continues to be salient in U.S. society; that the nation was premised on property rights, not human rights; and that the intersection of race and property could serve as a powerful analytic tool for explaining social and educational inequities. (p. 164)

Perhaps, then, it is eliminated by removing the benefits of power (i.e. the redistribution of property via reparations) and redefining power. This becomes a cultural shift; one in which humanity for all people becomes the priority rather than the individual's right to pursue their own happiness at the expense and exploitation of others. One's right to pursue liberty, freedom from fear, and freedom to pursue exorbitant economic profit has come at the confiscation of liberty for another. Wealth, in the United States, too often equates to happiness and liberty. There can be no justice in societies in which there is inequitable wealth while unconscionable poverty exists.

If white educators fail to realize this and live accordingly, the opportunity gap, the achievement gap, and economic gap, (Assari, et al., 2021; Long & Dam, 2020; U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2020) by which a capitalistic society measures success will continue to exist. For instance, "In some states, particularly those in the upper Midwest, like Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, and Minnesota, the white-black achievement gap has generally been larger than a standard deviation over the last decade, regardless of grade or subject" (Center for Education Policy Analysis, n.d.). The opportunity gap is largest when white parents have higher education

and increased income than Black parents (Reardon, 2019). The racial hierarchy upon which this nation places its people will remain, and outcomes in education and poverty will continue to be predictable by racial category.

### **Purpose**

While there is extensive research on racism, motivation for antiracism remains an under-researched phenomenon (Davis & Wilson, 2022; Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). Antiracism requires the intentional identification of racism and the necessary individual and collective actions to eliminate it. This is especially difficult for white people to do. It means that they speak out and oppose a system from which they benefit and for which they may not find support from friends and colleagues (Davis & Wilson, 2022). The purpose of this critical phenomenological study is to understand the motivations of white, antiracist educators and what sustains them in this lifestyle. It is about removing ideological, institutional, and individual obstructions created to keep African-derived people, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian students at the margins and, instead, absorb them into the nucleus of education, the microcosm and cornerstone of American society.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I am a multiethnic woman. I am five generations removed from African enslavement on the soil that my Meskwaki ancestors and other Indigenous groups call home. I am also a descendant of Russian and German Jews, many of whom were murdered during the Nazi terror of Jews in both Poland and Germany. I have one daughter who entered college last fall. Her K-12 educational journey was replete with racism, exclusion, and low expectations. Our experiences are similar though our journeys are decades and generations apart.

We both attended school in small, rural, but different, communities. While I had no teachers of color until I entered college, she had three teachers of color. I had no antiracist



teachers throughout my K-12 education, and she had one. I am not surprised that most of her teachers were not antiracists. I was surprised that a few of them, including principals and superintendents, were overtly racist, and just as surprised, but greatly relieved, that some of her teachers, though not antiracists, were not harmful to her. This was a fascinating observation, yet, an emotionally and physically onerous decade for both of us. It is the impetus for my research and my initial question, “What causes such a strikingly vast difference in white educators?”

In addition to being a mother (and wife), I am also an educator who has taught every age level—birth to undergraduates. I have taught in a variety of educational settings including preschools, a charter school, and traditional schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas. I have taught in settings that were predominantly white and predominantly Black. But, most often I was one of few, if not the only, educator of color surrounded by white teachers, most of whom were women, and two of whom were white antiracists. The teachers of color with whom I worked were usually antiracists. While I worked alongside many white educators in the K-12 system who were not racist, and understood and could articulate the racist barriers that were in place for Black and brown students, they did not act to dismantle such barriers but rather expressed frustration at seeing such barriers while doing little to eliminate them. But, it is witnessing the experience of my only child and learning how very little had changed that motivated me to understand antiracism in white educators.

At the time that I began the doctoral program, I worked at a predominantly white university in the Midwest. Some of my colleagues are antiracist white professors and all of them taught in the K-12 system prior to becoming university faculty. In my role, I am the faculty advisor of two groups. One group exists to support aspiring educators of color, though it is an integrated group. The second group are graduates of the first group who work as educators in

some capacity and continue to collaborate and learn together as they continue their paths of antiracist educators. Why is it that some white educators become antiracist? What did they learn or experience that compels them to antiracist praxis and how do they sustain themselves among their colleagues who choose not to evolve into antiracist educators? What can we learn from them and those who remain in the system and continue to work to dismantle racism in the educational lives of their students?

### ***Research Questions***

Previous research has identified the development of the racial identity of white educators. The studies discuss the importance of white educators learning how to recognize their whiteness, why this needs to happen, and how they operate in their classrooms when this work has been done (i.e. Chandler-Ward & Denevi, 2022). Research has also been done that reflects the resistance of white teachers to critically self-examine, confront their beliefs, and analyze the reasons behind their resistance (i.e. Marcucci & Elmesky, 2022). While efforts are made to diversify the teaching profession, it will be years before the demographics of those in the teaching profession proportionately reflect the students they teach. Therefore, it is important that white teachers develop an antiracist lifestyle, “It is necessary to employ a more holistic approach that takes into account the complexities of teachers’ lives and professions, as well as their historical positioning in society as (mainly) white people” (Kailin, 2002, p. 75).

To understand the influential experiences of antiracist white educators, the following question and subquestions will be explored:

1. What motivates white educators to engage in antiracism?
2. What characteristics do white educators exhibit who engage in antiracist work in the classroom?

3. What conditions are conducive for white teachers to engage in antiracist work?
4. What sustains them as they do this work?

### **Significance**

Understanding why and how white educators become antiracist informs teacher preparation programs and district professional development teams of the criticality of antiracist education and those who implement it, "...a focus on White teachers in K–12 schools is an urgent national imperative for many reasons, not the least of which is the extent to which they can effectively teach students of color in the classroom" (Durand & Tavaras, 2021, p. 149). By understanding the influential factors of white antiracist educators, experiences can be created that increase learning to motivate more white instructors to live a life of antiracism. If K-12 schools and teacher prep programs can cyclically provide the necessary experiences and knowledge educators need to be antiracist educators, then the profession is not only easier to diversify, but the curriculum can be critically analyzed through a racial justice lens, relationships with students become culturally meaningful, and structural racism becomes less common, less ordinary.

As recently as 2021, the American Psychological Association published an article about the psychology of American racism (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). It noted that while there are a plethora of studies related to the perpetuation of racism, studies "on the psychology of American antiracism is comparatively lacking, particularly among white Americans" ( p. 484). One of the questions raised from that work was, "How can individuals and collectives be mobilized toward antiracism in their everyday lives?" ( p. 484). The recommendation was for future studies to focus on how white people become antiracist. My study helped to answer this question and

contribute to this gap in research. It uncovered some of the motivations that my participants had for living antiracism.

### **Delimitations**

Antiracism is an area of study that warrants more attention. Studies exist that explore white antiracists and their motivations for living this way of life (i.e. Aouragh, 2019; Badenhorst, 2021; Case, 2012; Chandler-Ward & Denevi, 2022; Dull, et al., 2021; Ford & Orlandella, 2015; Frankenberg, 1993; Kailin, 1994; LaCosse, 2021; McAdam, 1986; Thompson, 2001). There are few studies that included the motivations of educators, but it was not the focus of the study (Utt & Tochluk, 2020) nor was it inclusive of K-12 educators (Landreman, et al., 2007). This present study serves to help fill this gap.

This study included subjects who self-identified as white and who had taught in the K-12 system. Because this study explored the motivations of white, antiracist educators, people of color were not included in the focus group. However, people of color have always been and remain essential to the fight to eradicate racism. It cannot be done without us. We are the only people who can determine and assess antiracist practices and their levels of efficacy. Therefore, I relied on antiracist activists of color to identify and recommend white educators who they deemed antiracist. The focus group was one virtual session, which was video and audio recorded via Zoom in the fall of 2023.

### ***Key Terms***

*Antiracism*— a lifestyle in which people actively identify racism, particularly systemic racism, and work to dismantle it (Diem et al., 2022; Perry & Shotwell, 2009)

*Outgroup*- those with whom there is not shared racial social construct for whom they advocate; for example, white educators who engage in antiracism.

*Racism*– An imbalance of power aimed at oppressing people of color. Such oppression can be individual or systemic, intentional or unintentional, and permeates “institutions, policies and culture” (NEA Center for Social Justice, 2021, para. 26).

*Whiteness*– A culture of “embodied politics in which one actively invests” to gain “material, institutional, and societal benefits, oftentimes at the expense of people of Colour” (Matias & Boucher, 2023).

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

Racism is common throughout the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Sabati, 2022). It permeates American economic, social, and educational institutions and has since before the founding of what is now the United States (de Saxe, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Historical Foundations of Race, 2021; Sabati, 2022). Household incomes, physical and mental health, as well as housing all have an impact on students’ educational experiences (Bécares & Priest, 2015; Harvard School of Public Health, 2020; Rosmond & Bjorntorp, 2001; Russell et al., 2012; Spinks-Franklin, 2019; Williams, 2016). Because of this, to eradicate racism, antiracism must be a multifaceted approach that happens both in the professional and personal lives of those who commit to this way of living.

The many factors that influence the success or failure of students of color in education are each worthy of a dissertation. I would be remiss if I had not acknowledged such factors despite that they go beyond the scope of this dissertation. While white antiracist educators cannot rectify racism on their own, they are integral to its eradication. Schools, like other social

institutions, have the power to dehumanize or heal. They are constitutive in the futures of students and nothing illustrates this more than the school-to-prison nexus (Gardner et al., 2022).

### ***Public Schools and Prisons in the United States***

School systems eerily mirror prison systems, in practice, terminology, and processes (Sabati, 2022). Both institutions demand compliance and conformance even using similar terms such as "lock-down" (Sabati, 2022, p. 182). Black men outnumber all other populations in the United States prison system. There are four Black men incarcerated to one incarcerated white man, and in Minnesota, this drastically increases from nearly ten incarcerated Black men to one incarcerated white man (The Sentencing Project, 2021). The rate of youth incarceration is similar to the rate for adults. Black children are almost five times more likely to be incarcerated than white children (Sabati, 2022).

There is a strong carceral link in schools, particularly in special education. According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD, 2020), Black students have been over-represented nationally in special education since 1968 and this is true for Minnesota as well (Barnes & Migambi, 2020). Over half of Minnesota's Black students who receive special education services were determined to have emotional or behavioral disorders (Barnes & Migambi, 2020; NCLD, 2020). They are segregated more often from general education classes than their white peers and are determined to have disabilities in subjective categories of special education such as intellectual disabilities and emotional or behavioral disorders (NCLD, 2020). Students with disabilities who are suspended from school are more likely to end up in jail in the future, even when suspended for minor incidents such as playing in the hallway instead of being in the classroom (Butrymowicz & Mader, 2020).

Special education federal settings and federal prison levels of security sadly correlate with and illustrate this pipeline. Special education federal setting 1 includes students with disabilities in general education settings for at least 22% of the school day. As the federal setting increases, so does the segregation of students. Students placed in special education federal setting 4 have no access to general education settings (MDE, 2023). Like federal prison levels, level 1 has minimum security, less restrictive supervision, and more autonomy. There are either no barriers around the periphery of the prison or they are minimal (Federal Bureau of Prisons, n.d.). The higher the prison level setting, the more restrictive measures are in place for inmates. The U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons identified four security levels with varying levels of supervision and access to the general population (Sawyer, 2019). When an inmate is placed in a maximum, or high, security level the purpose is to subjugate them to the maximum extent possible, “This classification is for individuals who, by their behavior, have been identified as assaultive, predacious, riotous.... or seriously disruptive to the orderly running of an institution” (Sawyer, 2019, p. 14). This runs parallel to policing in K-12 schools, targeting students of color disproportionately, and creating a pipeline into a very profitable prison system (Sabati, 2022).

### ***Racism in K-12 Schools***

Racism in K-12 schools is not an aberration. It is the consequence of maintaining white supremacy through pedagogical practices, economic disparities, policies, beliefs, and epistemologies engrained in whiteness (Hernández et al., 2023; Kailin, 1994; Marcucci & Elmesky, 2022; Sabati, 2022). As a result of the implicit bias of teachers and staff, students of color are marginalized and receive differential treatment compared to white students (Sabati, 2022). African American students are excluded from learning opportunities at a greater rate than other student populations (Kearney et al., 2022; NCLD, 2020) and more so by white teachers

than Black teachers (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). This is often a result of subjective interpretations of student behavior by teachers (Lindsay, & Hart, 2017). In other words, behaviors that are based upon teacher judgment are negatively assessed more often between white teachers and Black students than objective transgressions such as being in a school construction site that is off limits to students. They face harsher discipline for the same “infractions” committed by white students (Sabati, 2022, p. 185). “One in four Black boys with disabilities are suspended each year, compared to only one in ten White boys with disabilities” (NCLD, 2020, p. 4). Black boys are put into physical holds more often than their white peers (NCLD, 2020). Time spent outside of the classroom due to suspensions, expulsions, and other forms of exclusions are all decisions made by educational leaders at the expense of student learning (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Kearney et al., 2022). In Minnesota, Indigenous students are expelled at ten times the rate of white students, and Black students are expelled at eight times the rate of white students (MDHR, 2022). These practices were developed and implemented by adults and, thus, can be eliminated by adults, because “disproportionality is not a child issue; it is an adult issue, and it’s not about fixing children, it’s about fixing a racist system” (Hernández et al., 2023, p. xiv).

Black students who have white teachers are recommended less often for gifted and talented programs as well as for advanced placement courses than they are when they have Black teachers (Barshay, 2020; NCLD, 2020). This is due to racial bias and a deficit mindset of white teachers toward their Black students (Durand & Tavaras, 2021). White teachers are less critical of systemic racism, if they acknowledge it at all, and are more apt to accept current systems as normative rather than analyze and investigate deeper consequences of those systems on Black and Brown students (Durand & Tavaras, 2021; Kailin, 1994).



Curriculum remains Eurocentric and students of color remain marginalized in an educational system that is resistant to change (Durand & Tavaras, 2021; Sabati, 2022). White teachers dominate the teaching profession. They are constitutive in the success or failure trajectories of students of color. If students of color, particularly Black students, are to progress and have access to success at new and increased rates, then white teachers must do things differently (Durand & Tavaras, 2021; Sabati, 2022). They must become antiracists.

### ***The Lack of Antiracist Educators***

Antiracism has existed as long as racism has been enacted. Yet, it remains an area that warrants further research (Case, 2012; Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). There are studies on racial identity development (Helms, 1993; Lensmire, 2010; Malott et al., 2015), motivating factors for antiracism among white people (Badenhorst, 2021; Case, 2012; McAdam, 1986; Moore, et al, 2015) and white people advocating against racism (Dull et al., 2021; Malott et al., 2015; Thompson, 2001). Though antiracism remains an under-researched area, the few studies that have been published include some that perpetuate the very whiteness that they intended to dismantle (such as Malott et al., 2015; Shim, 2019; Skerrett, 2011) making the body of meaningful existing research even smaller.

### ***Antiracism and The Irony of White Researchers***

Malott et al. (2015) completed a qualitative study of ten white people who self-identified as antiracist. There was no inclusive measure that determined if people of color agreed with their self-assessment. Frankenberg's seminal study (1993) finds that those who are oppressed are best situated to identify that which oppresses them. Her work suggests that white people, as members of the dominant group in the United States, are not in a position to determine whether or not they are antiracist and if their actions have an impact on racism. Many researchers agree with

Frankenberg (Badenhorst, 2021; Burns & Granz, 2022; Chandler-Ward & Denevi, 2022; Durand & Tavaras, 2021; Grigsby-Leonhardt, 2023; Kunstman & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Pham et al., 2023; Thompson, 2003; Williams et al., 2022). They contend that it is imperative that when white people engage in antiracist work, they collaborate with people of color to get feedback and to trust what they are told. Meaningful cross-racial relationships benefit not only white antiracist people and their level of efficacy but also increases the likelihood that people of color also see them as antiracist activists (Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Burns & Granz, 2022). The study by Malott et al. does not indicate that the white subjects formed intentional relationships with people of color to whom they could be accountable. They write that, “The White researchers acknowledged that their personal racism could potentially restrict their perspectives when analyzing and interpreting the data, thus calling for increased vigilance in the form of ongoing reflexive conversation and journaling across the span of the investigation” (Malott et al., 2015, p. 335). In other words, verbal reflection with one another and writing their thoughts without the inclusion of those who are best positioned to identify racism was considered sufficient to not “restrict their perspectives”. The white authors included one person of color, a Black woman, as an auditor based upon her identity:

Two peer auditors were used in an effort to reduce bias, thus enhancing the trustworthiness of the meaning derived from the data. They were selected because of their WRI-related [White Racial Identity] instructional and research experiences, as well as their respective White and Black racial identities, with an understanding that persons of different racial identities may have varying perceptions of race-related data because of their distinct socialization process in a racially stratified society.

(Malott et al., 2015, p. 335)

The team of four white researchers relied solely on a single person of color to provide insight and an unguaranteed diverse perspective from their own. This practice essentializes Black people. This is the reinforcement of whiteness of which other researchers are critical (Badenhorst, 2021; Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Studies like this do not consider whether people of color would agree with such a self-identification (Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Indeed, “observers are more likely to regard actors in ways that diverge from how actors regard their own behavior” (Brown & Ostrove, 2013, p. 2217). Studies that consider the multiple perspectives of people of color are more likely to determine whether white antiracism is impactful for people of color (Brown & Ostrove, 2013, Burns & Granz, 2022).

In contrast to Malott et al. (2015), Nnawulezi et al. (2020) conducted a study on racial consciousness in white people. Three women coded the data, two of whom were women of color, and one who was white. Because whiteness is invisible to many white people, people of color, especially Black people, often have a unique insight into the world because racism has prevented them from entering as equal participants. The African philosopher, Lewis R. Gordon, aptly describes this when he writes about South African Activist Steve Biko in the forward of Biko’s book, (2002), “He reveals....the unique, double relationship blacks have with European civilizations: blacks face a world of lies in which they are forced to pretend as true that which is false and pretend as false that which is true” (Biko et al., 2002, p. viii). And as they are consciously aware of this interplay of survival, Black people are in an uncommon position to see what white people may not readily identify.

### ***Centering Whiteness***

Shim (2019) conducted a qualitative, year-long study in which she met with three white males to learn how they confronted their racial biases. Her methodology included reflexive

activities based on the research of Dr. Richard Milner (2008). Students were asked to keep a journal and write down their reflections regarding racism. In Shim's study, the men were assigned to examine their thoughts around their perceptions of race. The study aligns with research that indicates that to be antiracist, educators must examine their belief systems (Badenhorst, 2021; Chandler-Ward and Denevi, 2022; Harsma et al., 2023; Thompson, 2003). However, Shim did not define what it meant to critically self-examine.

She uses incorrect statistical data nor she does cite the statistics that she included. She wrote that "...40% of students" in public schools are children of color (2020, p. 345). This statistic is outdated (Maxwell, 2020; NCES 2020). In the year 2014, just as predicted, students of color made up more than 50% of the population in public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). She also used the "second wave scholarship" of whiteness and white privilege theory in her study (Shim, 2019, p. 346). She explained that this eliminates the perception of white teachers as a monolithic group and permits them to creatively identify their own relational transformation with race and racism. Shim called this "identification creativity" (Shim, 2019, p. 346). This second-wave of whiteness studies is critical to understand the perspectives of white people within the context of white supremacy and, yet, it recenters white people (Matias, & Boucher, 2023). This is the antithesis of antiracism.

Shim concluded that the students gradually came to dislike reflecting on what they did wrong (i.e. racist thoughts) and by a quarter of the way into the study "were somewhat getting tired of making similar confessions about automatic racist judgments" (Shim, 2019, p. 349). Ongoing opportunities for reflexive practice are essential and people must be willing to experience discomfort (Landerman et al., 2007). The challenge is that there is no requirement for white people to engage in discomfort and remain there. Shim concluded from her study that,

“The fear of feeling vulnerable expressed by all three participants can be interpreted as racialized feeling, which maintains the ideologies of white racial supremacy while keeping the focus away from protecting their interest.” (p. 352). Shim had difficulty maintaining objectivity in the study and struggled to bracket her emotions so as not to encroach on the experience of her subjects. For instance, Shim writes that her study was to understand how her participants experienced their transition to committing to antiracism. However, through her written reflections she realized that instead of understanding their experiences she had attempted to coerce their “behaviors and attitudes” and her “initial analyses were guided by such focus” (p. 348).

### ***Reinforcing the Essentialization of Racialized Populations***

Bécares and Priest (2015) conducted a study of eighth graders in which they were able to show the impact of racism and sexism that resulted in “inequalities in academic outcomes” (p. 12) independent of financial advantages. They cautioned that when making comparisons across racial populations, people must remember that:

The Latino ethnic group is a large, heterogeneous group...[and]...is composed of a variety of different sub-groups with diverse national origins and migration histories, which has led to differences in sociodemographic characteristics and lived experiences of ethnicity and minority status among the various groups. Differences across Latino sub-groups are widely documented, and pooled analyses such as those reported here are masking differences across Latino subgroups, and providing biased comparisons between Latino children, and Black and White children (p. 13)

In other words, Latino history in the U.S. is varied and by coalescing them into a homogenous group it creates bias when making comparisons of them to Black and white children. And yet,

with the diaspora of immigration from such regions, for example, in Africa and the Caribbean, or Europe, this also happens among those identified as Black or white.

### ***White Supremacy and The Adultification of Black Children***

This last example of a study that inadvertently upholds racism is Skerrett's study (2011). She identified three categories that explain English teachers' approach to discussing race, or racial literacy, in their classrooms: "apprehensive and authorized; incidental and ill-informed; and sustained and strategic" (p. 218). In her study, Skerrett described a situation in which a white, female teacher intentionally called out male students of color in front of the rest of the class and used them as examples. In one premeditated scenario, the teacher compared her experiences as a white woman to one of her students who was a Black boy; teacher to student, adult to child, as if they are peers due to their respective racial demographics. Skerrett does not critique this teacher's decision to call attention to students who are diverse from their instructor. Rather, she calls them out in a manner that isolates and segregates them from her and the rest of the class. This is the manifestation of the adultification of Black children (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Epstein et al., 2017).

Rather than point out the improprieties of the teacher's actions, Skerrett validates this interaction under the heading in her study, "***Sustained and strategic***" (p. 324). Adultifying Black children has grave implications that extend beyond the classroom and into violent interactions with law enforcement, harsher discipline practices, and perpetuates the school-to-prison pipeline (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Demby, 2018; Epstein et al., 2017; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). It warrants ethical considerations related to the role of the researcher when they become aware of the perpetuation of harm to students (Kodama Muscente, 2022). If the researcher fails to acknowledge the harm in such interactions, they reinforce the behavior of the teacher by

legitimizing it. This is both problematic and paradoxical in a study in which the larger purpose is to eliminate the maltreatment of Black children (Durand & Tavaras, 2021).

### ***Teacher Preparation Programs***

There are insufficient numbers of white antiracist educators due in part to teacher preparation programs. Most educators receive a teaching license or certification from universities and colleges (Schaeffer, 2022). Many white teachers hold the belief when they enter the profession that to act in any way other than in a race-evasive manner would be racist. Some researchers, particularly those who use Dis/ability Critical Race Theory are moving away from “color-blind” and instead use “race-evasive” and “color-evasive”, because to conflate racial colorblindness with a medically diagnosed condition of colorblind is considered an insult and ableist (Annamma et al., 2017).

To act in a race-evasive or color-evasive manner requires that educators ignore a salient social fact when they claim not to see race which releases them from having to acknowledge that race impacts the lives of their students and their own life as well (Durand & Tavaras, 2021; Nnawulezi et al., 2020; Powell, 2015). The programs from which they graduate are often reflective of the hegemony of the broader society (Sabati, 2022). Therefore, most of the teachers who come into the field of education reflect neoliberal, colonial, whiteness (Durand & Tavaras, 2021; Sabati, 2022). As Sabati wrote, “We cannot keep the same structure and expect change” (Sabati, 2022, p. 187). If we want different results, if the goal is to eliminate racial disparities, then the structure must change. The expectations of aspiring teachers must change. What they are taught, and how they are expected to act, intervene, and advocate on behalf of students of color must be radically different from the neoliberal, colonial whiteness that is rampant throughout teacher preparation programs.

Teacher preparation programs generally teach that education is apolitical and culturally neutral (Durand & Tavaras, 2021; Landreman et al., 2007). The invisibility of whiteness in these programs is maintained and unchallenged. Oftentimes, students graduate from teacher preparation programs without a developed critical consciousness which, if it develops, happens when they are older (Landreman et al., 2007) whether this is due to cerebral maturation, new and different experiences in the profession, or other related factors. The definition of “critical consciousness” by researchers like Landreman et al. (2007) becomes especially important when taken into context with Fanon and Dubois’ work, which is described in the following section (Dubois, 2014; Fanon & Philcox, 2008).

### ***Critical Consciousness, to Be or Not to Be Remains a Question***

Landreman et al. (2007) does not define “critical consciousness” but only equates it to “habits of mind” (p. 277). Fanon (2008) and Dubois (2014) argued that critical consciousness is something that racism has effectively prohibited in white people. Racism is so common that it is nearly invisible (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and so nuanced that white people can deny their relationship with it:

Antiracism turns racism into a moral/ethical position. Ethics are simply a form of secularized morality. As such, whites get to distance themselves from racism. It is no longer the way society, the state, and the law have always been structured to produce the effect of racism, without having white people to necessarily believe in their racial superiority. It allows them to transcend race. Second, racism is a peculiar experience. In the way that both Fanon and Dubois describe it. Fanon describes race as a third person consciousness, and Dubois describes it as double consciousness. In both descriptions, to be racialized equips one with a peculiar way of seeing the world and one’s self in it, a



second sight as Dubois would say. This means that white people, because they have no experience seeing themselves as a race, and no experience of being racialized, cannot develop a critical racial Consciousness. Only the oppressed have the ability to see the world pure of ideology, of lies, of politics.

I. Al-Atiyat (personal communication, June 19, 2023)

This appears to be particularly true for white people who have more wealth (Williams et al., 2022). Affluent white people struggle to accept that there are racial disparities that exist between them and people of color. They believe that racism is less common, and they do not see themselves as complicit in maintaining racism or even perpetuating it:

It is necessary to centre and prioritize the voices of people who are racialized. It requires a life-time philosophy of humility, acknowledging personal privileges, confronting acts as well as systems of racial discrimination, and working to change personal racial biases (Williams et al., 2022, p. 9)

Therefore, if white people are unaware of racial disparities then they are unaware of the necessity to decenter themselves, unaware of the need for critical transformation, and unaware of the need to exist in different ways. This makes it impossible for them to shift to antiracism.

### ***The Necessity of Antiracism***

Antiracism can subvert racism (Chandler-Ward, & Denevi, 2022; Davis & Wilson, 2022; Diem et. al., Welton, 2022). It is notably associated with civil rights activists such as the Black Panther Party; Malcolm X; Clyde Bellecourt and the American Indian Movement; and César Chávez and Dolores Huerta in the Chicano Movement. Seldom are white antiracist activists highlighted (Aptheker, 1993). While such activists exist, there is a dearth of research focused on them (Chandler-Ward & Denevi, 2022; Harsma et al., 2023). Such role models are important to

increase engagement among white people in the fight against racism (Chandler-Ward & Denevi, 2022; Utt & Tochluk, 2020).

### ***Antiracist Leaders, Directors, and Supporting Cast***

There is a danger, however, when white people claim the fight against racism as their own (LaCrosse et al., 2021). The concepts of white antiracists and antiracism alongside people of color are not in conflict with each other. Indeed, both are necessary. Antiracism without people of color as the directors perpetuates white racial superiority and paternalism. It ultimately upholds the systems and institutions from which white people continue to disproportionately benefit (Finnegan, 2022). Analogically, it is like the teacher who is deemed to be a good teacher. Those of whom the teachers instruct are far better positioned to evaluate if the teacher was successful. It is the responsibility of white people to eradicate racism systemically, but it is the allyship of Black people that guides them to success (Burns & Granz, 2022; Grigsby Leonhardt, 2023; Williams et al., 2022). Grigsby Leonhardt explained:

....racism is a collective power that white people can enact in this country,..... they are the only ones who can decide without economic, political, physical, or social force, to dismantle it. Therefore, Black people are allies to them in the white struggle to dismantle what white people created. If one does not experience racism, one will be challenged to determine if racism is increasing or decreasing. Systemic racism, like microaggressions, is so effective, common, and nuanced, it is often invisible to those who operate within it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This is an integrated struggle. But, white people are stars of the show because they are also the producers. Black people are not only the supporting cast, they must be the directors. Those who are most immediately and negatively

impacted by racism are best positioned, and often the only people who can evaluate its progression or regression.

(Grigsby Leonhardt, 2023)

This sentiment does not exist without controversy. Badenhorst (2021) highlights South African Activist, Steve Biko, who distrusted the notion of white people as allies. In contrast to Grigsby Leonhardt's claim that white people are the "stars of the show", Biko believed that white people are unnecessary in the fight for Black liberation. Such allyship, he believed, only reinforced the centrality of white people and placed the additional burden onto Black people "to recognize, forgive, and absolve [white people] so as to secure our sense of comfort and belonging" (Badenhorst, 2021, p. 294).

### ***Motivations for White Antiracism***

Few studies exist that focus solely on white educators that include K-12 teachers. My literature review was broadened to include the motivations of antiracist activists. Motivations of antiracist activists vary from empathy with oppression and witnessing racial injustice (Frankenberg, 2005; Landreman et al., 2007; Pham et al, 2023) to self-gratification (Badenhorst, 2021; Pham et al., 2023; Williams et al., 2022) and a sense of moral duty (McAdam, 1986; Pham et al., 2023).

### ***Motivation Through Connection***

Studies have long identified that when white people are connected to organized movements such connections help shift them to antiracist praxis (Landreman, et al., 2007; McAdam, 1986; Pham et al., 2023). For people to be activists, there must be a dispositional motivation as well as a pathway to activism. These must work in tandem especially if people are to engage in what McAdam (1986) calls "high-risk" activity. He defines "high-risk" as the

increased likelihood that the consequences will be “legal, social, physical, [and] financial” (p. 67). So while self-examination is critical to identifying white privilege (Chandler-Ward, & Denevi, 2022; Price-Dennis, & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021), and personal goals for antiracist work (Badenhorst, 2021; Pham et al., 2023), belonging to a group that is committed to disrupting racism is an important part of white people becoming antiracists. This sense of belonging increases their belief in their self-efficacy (Pham et al., 2023). When people have an affinity with those who endure oppression and have a high confidence in their ability to effect change, they are moved to action (Pham et al., 2023). This also aligns with the tenet of interest convergence in Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), or in other words, a “win-win.”

Critical Race Theory helps explain why white people may engage in dismantling systems of oppression, though they are the primary benefactors of such systems. Interest convergence is a principle that suggests that social change for people of color occurs when their interests align with the goals of white people. This phrase was first coined by Derrick Bell (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Despite this alignment, it does not preclude differing motivations for these interests and goals.

Aptheker (1993) described such a convergence related to anti-slavery sentiments. People were compelled to eradicate slavery but were not necessarily antiracists. Some abolitionists were morally opposed to the enslavement of human beings, while others were against the expansion of slavery, but still considered Black people second-class citizens who were not entitled to the same rights as white property owners, “...some, in opposing slavery, nevertheless evinced racist views, but others were moved by feelings of compassion and a sense of common humanity” (Aptheker, 1993, p. 151). This paradox occurs still today. Some people work towards rectifying racial

injustice while others work to separate themselves to be identified as good white people (Badenhorst, 2021; Pham et al., 2023).

### ***Individual Motivation***

Personal motivations of white antiracist people vary. Individual motivations arise from a level of empathy as people face their own oppression. Often this occurs from membership in oppressed groups such as the LGBTQIA+ community, or as women living in a patriarchal society (Frankenberg, 2005; Duran & Jourian, 2022). Altruistic motivations have also been exhibited throughout history (Apetheker, 1993). People across racial demographics have felt a moral obligation to eradicate racism. They value diversity, inclusion, and justice (Williams et al., 2022). But, “even with altruistic motivations, the development of the idea of an ‘altruistic self’ ultimately functions to reproduce the global means and relations of production that serve the ruling ideology of capitalism” (Finnegan, 2022, p. 618). Therefore, altruism, though not spurious, still leads to that which perpetuates oppression and exploitation. Interest convergence thus appears to be ever-present in capitalistic markets where white antiracism occurs.

### ***Guilt***

Some of the reasons for antiracism motivation stem from guilt. Dull et al. (2020) define white guilt as “an emotion experienced by white people regarding behaviors or attitudes related to racism as well as historical or present-day racial injustice” (p. 1081). Guilt is a complex emotion. It can spur people into action particularly when they become aware of their unearned racial advantage, learn about the imbalance of racial power, and feel a sense of responsibility to contribute to social justice (Dull et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2023; Williams et al., 2022). However, guilt can also impede the shift to antiracist praxis (Badenhorst, 2021; Chandler-Ward & Denevi, 2022; Helms’ Racial Identity Theory, 1993; Utt & Tochluk, 2020; Williams et al., 2022). This

impediment manifests in those who express their guilt and acknowledge their white privilege but do not actually engage in dismantling racist systems. Badenhorst (2021) argues that their need to be dissociated from racist white people does not advance them to action, but rather to pontificate their self-identified allyship, thus avoiding the high-risk of antiracist work.

White teachers report experiencing fear and guilt during internal reflection. For many, this causes them to deflect, become defensive, and disengage (Nnawulezi et al., 2020; Dull et al., 2021). White people may have a desire to understand racism and act against it but worry that they will say or do the wrong thing and then do nothing (Nnawulezi et al., 2020). Audre Lorde wrote:

Guilt is not a response to anger; it is a response to one's own actions or lack of action. If it leads to change then it can be useful, since it is then no longer guilt but the beginning of knowledge. Yet all too often, guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness (Lorde, 2018, p. 30)

White people who experience guilt must learn to address and manage it if they wish to further develop their antiracism (Ford & Orlandella, 2015). If mismanaged, guilt can impede a person's ability to act or cause them to misconceptualize antiracism and, instead, exhibit white saviorism.

### ***White Saviorism***

White saviorism is a concept that centers white people as rescuers of the oppressed (Finnegan, 2022). Such saviorism has been manifested through large-scale events such as multiple attempts to overturn the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). These attempts suggest that white people are better parents than Indigenous people (Chakraborty, 2019). It is important to

note that the desired outcomes of white saviorism are different from those that work to eradicate racism.

The result of white saviorism is increased proficiency among people of color to navigate systems grounded in whiteness rather than support them to challenge those same systems (Williams, et al, 2022). White saviors often seek acknowledgment and gratitude from people of color for what they do. They may self-identify as supporters or antiracists without any thought that others could or would see them differently. The desire to be known as an ally overshadows their desire to become one (Badenhorst, 2021) thereby they avoid the high-risk of antiracist work described by McAdam (1986). Even if they cause harm in what they do, they expect gratitude nevertheless for their efforts (Williams, et al, 2022). Badenhorst (2021) equates this kind of antiracist work to a “libidinal investment” (p. 287) and “narcissistic ego masturbation.....disparate experiences of pleasure in which the *giver* benefits at the expense of the one receiving.” (p. 288).

This group relies on the oppressed to remain oppressed because it provides a sense of charity to those who wish to save them. Any charitable efforts made by the saviors incite internal personal gratification. By helping those who are less fortunate, this group becomes an optically better version of themselves (Badenhorst, 2021; Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Burns & Granz, 2022). This same group of people induces further harm when they not only escape antiracist work and, in so doing, maintain racism, but in their creation of an illusion of antiracism (Badenhorst, 2021).

They convince themselves of this illusion in which they repeatedly invest via their abnegation of racism. Yet, they fail to make effective efforts to dismantle racism harming both themselves and those who do not benefit from racial privilege. In other words, some white

people engage in seemingly antiracist work to both separate themselves from other white people and to project themselves as a good white person who saves others (Burns & Granz, 2022; Pham et al., 2023; Williams et al., 2022).

This manner of self-pleasure does not come without cost. Badenhorst (2021) explained that it comes at the expense of those for whom the work is done. Not only is the motivation self-serving, but it leads to the subjugation of people of color. The perpetrators maintain dominance and centrality through metaphoric onanism. Thus, it becomes psychological rape.

The motivation of white saviorism is different from the motivation of white people who engage in antiracism. Behind white saviorism is the need to center members of the dominant group (Duran & Jourian, 2022). Whereas the motivation of white antiracists centers those who are oppressed (Freire et al., 2020). White saviors claim to help without engaging in self-reflection and self-interrogation. White antiracists work in collaboration with people of color to ascertain the efficacy of their work (Finnegan, 2022; Williams et al., 2022). It is this second group of people who understands that those who are oppressed must be the directors of their liberation from oppression (Finnegan, 2022; Freire et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2022).

### ***Motivation through Experience and Knowledge***

There appear to be two prominent themes for the motivations of antiracism: (a) Motivation that stems from one's lived experience that makes a personal impact and (b) Motivation developed by what is learned. The work of Pham et. al (2023) indicates that when white people become aware of their white privilege, they are more likely to engage in antiracism. However, their research also suggests that those they studied target antiracist work at systems of racism rather than at individual levels.



Pham et al. (2023) further identified six influential factors that stimulate motivation. These include (a) concern for those they love, (b) the media, (c) learning about racial inequities, (d) being the target of racism, (e) advocating for improvement, and (f) seeing racially motivated violence. Their study included people across racial demographics and was not specific to motivations in white people, leaving questions unanswered such as if these motivations vary across racial demographics, and if so, how so? They were able to determine that beliefs, values, and emotions of individuals are significant influences to becoming (or not becoming) antiracist. The authors of this study report that further research is necessary to uncover which societal racial inequities, if any, seem to be the strongest motivators for antiracism by white people. This present study contributed to the existing body of research by shedding light on the micro-level, or personal, motivations of white antiracist educators and included those who teach and have taught in the K-12 public school system.

### ***Critical Reflexive Praxis***

“Radically reflective practices have the potential to move White teachers from a place of complacency, to an active journey toward a radically hopeful teacher pedagogy, where praxis is achieved” (Durand & Tavaras, 2021, p. 149).

Tavaras and Durand (2021) argue that white teachers “must be challenged with insight, intentionality, and radical reflection as a first step in nurturing the supportive, relational context that is necessary for students’ success, and where radical hope can be nurtured” (p. 153). But, what is their motive for engaging in this challenge? Why would they do it when research demonstrates that many white teachers are reluctant to engage in cognitive dissonance; that they are complacent to accept the systems from which they benefit rather than abolish them for their

students who do not gain the same benefits? (Durand & Tavaras, 2021; Kailin, 1994; Nnawulezi et al., 2020). The answers to these questions is one of the purposes for my study.

Personal motivations of white antiracist people vary, but intentional critical reflexive practices are not only necessary (Jemal, 2017; Landreman et al., 2007; Price-Dennis & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021; Utt. & Tochluk, 2020), they have the potential to inspire motivation in educational leaders (Waite, 2021). Without critical self-examination, white people who claim to be antiracist perpetuate racial harm by exploiting people of color to uplift and give legitimacy to the white “antiracist” voice (Thompson, 2003, p. 13). Antiracism without interrogation remains centered on white people. It, therefore, becomes or maintains the glorification of white people rather than the social, economic, and political elevation of those who are not white (Badenhorst, 2021; Thompson, 2003).

Many white educators give little to no thought about whiteness, a privilege of those who have the ability to ignore it or not see it (Diggles, 2014; Lawrence & Tatum, 2012; Utt & Tochluk, 2020). They are produced from systems in which they are not required to consider racism and its impact on school systems. This lack of thought creates an illusion that white people bear no responsibility to effect antiracist change. Coupled with a lack of concern which is a consequence of their inability to even recognize the need for antiracism, they operate in a system that reproduces hegemonic epistemologies without challenging them (Diggles, 2014; Lawrence, & Tatum, 2012; Utt & Tochluk, 2020).

It is essential that white people scrutinize not only the work that they do to dismantle racism, but to determine their motivations for doing it (Badenhorst, 2021; Thompson, 2003). Studies (Burns & Granz, 2022; Kunstman et al., 2016) show that Black people who distrust the motivations of white antiracists are able to correctly assess the sincerity (or insincerity) of them,

“...Black participants are better able to accurately discriminate between Whites’ authentic and inauthentic smiles and are more accurate in assessing Whites’ actual external motivations to avoid prejudice” (Burns & Granz, 2022, p. 472). Because the war on racism is an integrated effort, developing trust between activists across racial demographics is essential.

Price-Dennis and Sealey-Ruiz (2021) coined the phrase, “*archaeology of self*” (p. 8). It is both a “theoretical concept and practice” (p. 8) that requires people to uncover their “biases, stereotypes, and prejudicial beliefs” (p. 8). It describes critical self-examination as a practice intended to bring educators to a realization of antiracism. Badenhorst calls this type of deep-level work, “soulful justice work” (Badenhorst, 2021, p. 298). This level of self-inquiry is a continuous cycle. It involves and requires the examiner to question what they know, what they believe, and acquire an understanding of the ontology of their motivation. It is understanding that one’s “personal values, opinions, and experiences impact every decision” (Price-Dennis & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021, p. 72) made. This critical self-reflection can reveal the harm that they may impose on those who are impacted by these decisions which include educators and their effect on their students. Antiracism can heal not just those who have been excluded because of racism, but also those who receive automatic inclusion because of it. Like Price-Dennis and Sealey-Ruiz, Badenhorst also proposes a question that white individuals must answer to discern the real motivation for antiracism, “Why do.... I care about antiracism work?” (Badenhorst, 2021, p. 285).

Williams et al. agree that self-examination is important, and an examination must extend beyond oneself. In addition to the self, they emphasize the need to interrogate the disproportionality of power, and employ “cultural humility....the desire to advocate with, not for, minoritized groups...” (Williams et al., 2021, p. 3). As Badenhorst (2021) noted, when done for

unselfish reasons, antiracism is both helpful and healing for those who practice it. It is “valuable soulful work performed upon the self in conjunction with a broader social work—a simultaneous internal excavation accompanying social renovation that constitutes a form of *care of the self*” (p. 298). In this lies another manifestation of interest convergence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Critical self-examination requires fortitude. It results in self-awareness and reveals both the positive and harmful behaviors that support racism. When people engage in honest and raw critical self-examination, they are more likely to participate in antiracist work (Matias & Newlove, 2017). The ability to self-examine is the prerequisite to comprehending one’s experiences and the consequences of such experiences, “...any process of self-interpretation is also and at the same time a moment of critical re-appropriation and re-evaluation of contextual knowledge.” (Magri & McQueen, 2023, p. 39).

In summary, racism harms everyone, regardless of racial demographics. But, its victims and its targets have unequal consequences. Antiracism is necessary. There are many motivations identified for white antiracism, though not all motivations lead to the actualization of antiracism. Some motivations are characterized as moral imperatives and others are self-focused and are intended to distinguish and segregate good people from racist people. Regardless of the motivations, critical self-reflection is necessary. This type of “radical” reflection (Durand & Tarvaras, 2021, p. 146) is necessary to both determine the sincerity of antiracist motivation and move white educators to antiracist praxis.

Studies about antiracism are not necessarily beneficial and may uphold racist practices. Researchers must be mindful and critical in their analysis and have a broad understanding of the manifestations of racial harm. Studies that reveal or focus on white people are improved by the perspectives of researchers of color. Antiracism is something that must be done in collaboration

with people of color to minimize the risk of essentializing racialized communities. Integrated collaboration reduces the perpetuation of white supremacy and patriarchy.

Teacher preparation programs play a significant role in education. Many programs fail to require that aspiring educators transition from race-evasive to racial justice activists. Such programs maintain the false narrative that teaching is both politically and culturally neutral.

Nationally, white educators are the majority in public schools, and they teach a national majority population of students of color. To eradicate the racism that exists in public schools, white educators must eliminate their racial bias, advocate for policies and practices that do not produce racial disparities and continue to interrogate themselves and the decisions that they make that inevitably impact their students, both inside and outside of the classroom. They must stop advancing a system that was never designed and intended for students of color. Instead, they must reimagine the possibility of something new and how they will situate themselves within the revolution.

By understanding the influential factors of white educators who engage in antiracism, opportunities for impactful experiences and effective learning can be created that motivate more white instructors to live a life of antiracism. If K-12 schools and teacher prep programs can cyclically provide the necessary experiences and knowledge educators need to be antiracist educators, then the profession is not only easier to diversify, but the curriculum can be critically analyzed through a racial justice lens, relationships with students become culturally meaningful, and structural racism becomes less common, less ordinary.

## Chapter 3

### Methods

Racism is pervasive in the American education system. White people make up the majority of the teaching profession in K-12 public schools while children of color are the majority of the students. To eliminate racism, or at least mitigate its impact, teachers must act against racism. They must be antiracist. But, why would white educators engage in antiracism? Why would they actively oppose a system that does not require them to do so and one from which they benefit; one that normalizes whiteness in a system that was designed for them? Using qualitative research with a focus group, white, antiracist educators were asked questions that explored their motivations and how their lived experiences related to their antiracist praxis. The overarching research questions for this study were:

1. What motivates white educators to engage in antiracism?
2. What characteristics do white educators exhibit who engage in antiracist work in the classroom?
3. What conditions are conducive for white teachers to engage in antiracist work?
4. What sustains them as they do this work?

### *Research Design*

This critical phenomenological study focused on the experiences of white antiracist educators and their motivations to be antiracists. It is necessary to have a more nuanced understanding of the influential factors of white antiracist educators. This contextual understanding has the potential to help agencies such as school districts and teacher preparation programs create experiences and learning opportunities that motivate more white instructors to engage in antiracism.

## *Phenomenology*

Phenomenology is both a descriptive and an interpretive process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Gordon (2008) explains that “Phenomenology examines the formation of meaning as constituted by consciousness where the latter is relationally understood as always directed to a manifestation *of* something.” (p. 83). He confirms that we exist and emerge in relation to those around us and are influenced by our environments.

Phenomenology is diverse in its methods and there is no consensus on the role of the researcher. At the turn of the twentieth century, Edmond Husserl founded phenomenology as a descriptive method. He believed that the role of the researcher was to bracket their thoughts and judgments and describe the conscious experience of the phenomena with the subjects in the study (Dunn, 2014).

Martin Heidegger, a student or assistant to Husserl (depending on which sources one uses (Wheeler, 2011; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007), and a member of the Nazi party, developed the interpretive approach. He believed that it was incumbent upon the researcher to understand their own experience with the phenomena before they could interpret the experiences of those whom they study. By investigating and understanding themselves, researchers are better able to understand others and distinguish between their own experiences and that which they learn from their subjects (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). He diverged from Husserl who prioritized the researcher’s ability to bracket over the intersubjectivity of researchers and the subjects. Heidegger argued that the conceptual act of bracketing was not only impossible, but it would work in opposition to the process of understanding, “....it is only possible to interpret something according to the interpreter’s own lived experience” (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009, p. 665). Thus, one cannot remove themselves from the world because nothing, not even the researcher and their

observation, exists in isolation and without influence from external stimuli (Magri & McQueen, 2023). Phenomenology is an appropriate approach to understanding how white educators experience their transition to antiracist praxis. Because phenomenology helps the researcher understand how “one examines consciousness as a lived, embodied reality” (Gordon, 2008, p. 89) it was an appropriate methodology for this study. Gordon explains that “Phenomenology examines the formation of meaning as constituted by consciousness where the latter is relationally understood as always directed to a manifestation *of* something” (p.89). In other words, and for the purpose of this study, phenomenology helps to understand the consciousness of white educators as they experience their motivations to engage in antiracist praxis and how those motivations manifested in their lived realities. However, critical phenomenology requires that the researcher investigate deeper and consider the intersubjectivity “between embodied experience, social identity, and power relations” (Magri & McQueen, 2023, p. 3).

### ***Critical Phenomenology***

Critical phenomenology (CP) follows Heidegger’s interpretive philosophy. But, it has the added element of transformation, “Critical phenomenology seeks not only to describe and understand the world we live [sic] but also to transform it” (Fielding, 2020, p.1). CP is the intersubjectivity of the researcher and the participants and our influence on one another. Usher (2018) reminds the reader that researchers, like participants, “are socially, historically, and contextually situated” (p. 141) and this influences the interpretations of the data.

In Critical phenomenology (CP), the role of the researcher shifts to not only a position of observing, describing, and interpreting how subjects experience a phenomenon but also to consider “an intersectional understanding of how the subject is positioned in the world” (Magri & McQueen, 2023, p. 4) specifically as it relates to race and gender. The critical



phenomenologist is not neutral nor objective in their approach (Miglio & Stanier, 2022).

Therefore, the researcher is not restricted to that of a scientific bystander who is expected to bracket their thoughts and emotions but rather limit those qualities so as not to encroach on the experiences of the participants. This requires that the researcher engage in reflexive practice and understand their own experiences and relationship to the phenomena (Behal, 2022).

CP investigates constructions that affect and effect people's lived experiences and interrogates them. Therefore, it is an important methodology when looking at the influences of race, culture, racism, gender, and whiteness on educators who practice antiracism; an ideological praxis that is the antithesis of racism and hegemonic whiteness. Without questioning and challenging the world in which we live, such constructions remain invisible to white people who do not have the (unfortunate) advantage of what Dubois (2014) calls a "double consciousness" (p.3).

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Elements from several theories were used to make meaning from the data collected. Chapter Two discussed Badenhorst so the others are highlighted here. The first theory is what Matias and Bouchar (2023) call "*Black* whiteness studies," which they refer to as critical whiteness studies (CWS) (p.1). Leonardo (2013) used the phrase "Black Whiteness Studies" (p. 97) in which Matias and Bouchar's CWS is grounded. In my study, it is the criticality of the *Black* perspective that centers CWS, so I use the term Black whiteness studies (BWS).

BWS advances the understanding of whiteness as white supremacy. Blackness is critical to that understanding and cannot be ignored. One does not exist without the other. However, they do not exist equally. Whiteness is hegemonic. Consequently, Black people, and by extension, people of color, are deleteriously affected by it. When applying BWS, it is necessary to examine

the behaviors, thoughts, and emotions of white people to understand the impact on people of color, primarily Black people.

BWS is informed by critical race theory. Critical race theory (CRT), developed by Derrick Bell, is the analysis of race and racism in relationship to power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Although there are five tenets of CRT, I chose to apply two for this study: (a) racism is common and (b) interest convergence.

Racism is common and ingrained in American economic, political, legal, and social institutions (Crenshaw et. al; 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Walls, 2015). It “is deeply ingrained in all facets of historical life in the U.S., and is in no way unusual” (Walls, 2015, p.1550). This is evident in outcomes that are predictable by race such as who makes up the majority of students in advanced placement classes, or which racialized group receives a disproportionately high number of suspensions or expulsions (Lindsay, & Hart, 2017).

Interest convergence explains that social change occurs for those who are oppressed when their interests align with the goals of the oppressors, “White people will seek racial justice only to the extent that there is something in it for them. In other words, interest convergence is about alignment, not altruism” (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 43). One of the most well-known examples of this in education is Derrick Bell’s analysis of the 1954 United States Supreme Court Decision, *Brown vs. The Board of Education* (Lynn et al., 2013). The federal decision to desegregate schools was not altruistic, but rather a decision to enhance the global image of the United States, increase economic production in the South, and to alleviate the anger of Black WWII veterans who “saw continued discrimination as a direct affront to their service” (Lynn et al., 2013, p. 339).

Kunst et. al (2018) theorized that high-risk activism for members of an out-group happens when ideologies align among them. This theory advances the work of Artis International, a nonprofit organization that uses social science to understand people's motivation to engage in high-risk activism (Atran, 2016). However, it is more than just an alignment of ideologies. It is the infusion of one's identity with their values, "people will become willing to protect morally important sacred values through costly sacrifice...particularly when such values are embedded in or fused with group identity, becoming intrinsic to 'Who I am' and 'Who We are'" (Atran, 2016, p. S192). Outgroups, for the purpose of this study, are those with whom the activists do not share a similar racial social construct; for example, white educators who engage in antiracism.

Kunst et al. identified three conditions for which members of an outgroup would likely engage in high-risk activism, two of which are consistent with the theory explained by Atran (2016), the integration of identity *with* sacred values. The third condition identified was when,

people feel morally obliged to enforce the kinds of relationships and values they endorse.

For instance, in the fight for equality against oppression, people are especially likely to support an out-group when the norm is to feel moral outrage about the group's maltreatment (Kunst et. al, 2018, p. 19)

Similarly van Prooijen's theoretical framework helps to predict who will engage in activism by understanding how they view or interpret justice. This includes whether their motivations stem from a perspective that is focused on the self or from the perspective that is focused on others. Those whose concerns focus on others will be more willing to engage in activism even when the answer to mitigate the concerns provides less benefits to some activists such as what is observed when white people engage in antiracist praxis, "justice judgments are

largely inspired by social motivations such that the needs and goals of others are part of a perceiver's reasoning about justice. This proposition conceptualizes justice judgments as a result of other-oriented motivations" (van Prooijen, 2013, p. 60). This theoretical framework is similar to critical race theory's tenet of interest convergence. Both theories are necessary because of van Prooijen's framework. His framework includes members of the ingroup and those of the outgroup, but it does not specify race. The parallel of both theories is easy to see.

Lastly, Perry and Shotwell (2009) argue that if white people are to move to an antiracist praxis, they must have (a) an understanding of race, racism, and their positionality to power, and (b) that this understanding is developed through three forms of knowledge: tacit, propositional, and affective. All of this works in relation to one another. Those who develop the three forms of knowledge are moved to antiracism. If one of those pieces is feeble or missing, the shift to antiracism does not occur.

Perry and Shotwell (2009), define propositional knowledge as "knowledge that can be expressed in and received by words and evaluated by conceptual reason" (p. 34). This happens when people are taught to identify and analyze systemic racism. It also happens when people learn of racial disparities and the underlying causes of such disparities through a racial justice lens. Perry and Shotwell discuss the necessity for white people to understand the impact of racism, not just on Black people, but on themselves as well. This understanding triggers emotive responses thus engaging their affective domains.

Affective knowledge is, "knowing experienced as feelings or structures of feelings. It manifests in our emotive, often inarticulate, or inarticulable responses to the world around us" (Perry, & Shotwell, 2009, p. 34). This type of epistemology happens through experiences identified in Chapter Two. Witnessing racial violence, the ability to empathize through one's

own membership in a marginalized or oppressed group, emotionally investing in those who are members of racially oppressed groups (i.e. white parent of a Black child), etc. are all examples of experiences that contribute to white antiracist praxis.

Lastly, tacit knowledge or what Perry and Shotwell (2009) also call “common sense” refers to a type of epistemology that is, “presuppositional, assumed knowledge of the form that can be schematized and put in propositional form, but that usually is normalized and relatively incognizant to the knower” (p. 34). The longevity of whiteness and the readily acceptance of it as the standard by which all others are judged is tacitly learned, practiced, and promoted. It is in the color-evasive practices in schools, Eurocentric canons, and the unwillingness to acknowledge the impact of the social construction of race. Therefore, to unlearn this informal epistemology, ideologies embedded in white institutions, institutions that are controlled by white people, have to disseminate a new cultural ontology; one that does not reinforce whiteness as the norm. Perry and Shotwell (2009) explain that for white people to progress to antiracist praxis, they must have a,

cognitive breakthrough on the level of their ‘common sense,’ developed a critical awareness of power and their own social location within that, and experienced a felt sense of compassion and accountability, and were provided alternative ideological, conceptual, and interpretative frameworks with which to give language and structure to their cognitive and emotional shift.”

(p. 42)

### ***Participants***

My study investigated the motivational factors of white, antiracist educators. The participants were those of whom taught K-12 education. All the participants taught in Minnesota

for at least one year and self-identified as a white person. Minnesota educators were chosen specifically because Minnesota has the poorest graduation rate for Black and Latinx students (Severson, 2019). Participants were initially recruited based upon my own personal assessment, observation, and knowledge of specific white K-12 educators in Minnesota who engaged in antiracism. Racism is a collection of social, economic, and political power aimed at the oppression of people of color. Therefore, people of color, like me, are uniquely positioned to identify it. As we are able to experience racism, we are well-positioned to identify when racial oppression lifts (Badenhorst, 2021; Brown, 2017; Burns & Granz, 2022; Chandler-Ward & Denevi, 2022; Durand & Tavaras, 2021; Frankenberg, 1993; Kunstman & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Pham et al., 2023; Thompson, 2003; Williams et al., 2022).

Unfortunately, my initial recruitment attempt did not solicit a sufficient pool of eligible participants. I reached out to other educators of color within my professional and social network and asked for their recommendations utilizing the definition of antiracism in this study that antiracism is ontological existentialism. It is integrated throughout a person's day-to-day life. It happens in their work and their personal lives. This outreach resulted in a sufficient sample.

### ***Focus Groups***

Phenomenology, whether it is grounded in Husserl's descriptive approach, Heidegger's interpretive approach, or existential phenomenologists like Frantz Fanon and those of whom critical phenomenology is rooted, all have the individual lived experience at the forefront. Focus groups coincide with phenomenological aspects in that nothing exists in isolation, "each is shaped by the other" (Perry & Shotwell, 2009, p.35).

A small focus group allowed individuals to tell their stories while the researcher focused on the phenomena (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009). Therefore, the number of participants was

limited to no more than six. An initial recruitment email was sent out to both men and women, which included a survey to confirm participant eligibility and consent to participate. Eight eligible applicants, all of whom identified as female, completed the survey, but only six were able to attend at a common time on a common day. Though efforts were made to involve men in the study, none followed through. Of the eight women who completed the survey, only five of them attended the focus group. All five participants self-identified as white as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Participants*

| Pseudonyms | Years Taught | Current Role                    | Geographic area of School                | Other identities shared that were important to the participants |
|------------|--------------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Eleanor    | 15           | High School English Teacher     | Suburb                                   |   |
| Ann        | 1            | Fourth Grade Elementary Teacher | Suburb                                   |   |
| Michelle   | 12           | Educational Consultant          | Works with schools throughout the nation |   |
| Sid        | 7            | Special Education Teacher       | Suburb                                   | Bisexual  |
| Sarah      | 10           | K-5 Library Media               | Rural                                    | 45 years old  |

CP recognizes individuals' need to know themselves (Magri & McQueen 2023). Their ability to be consciously aware of who they are and how they operate in any society is dependent upon their ability to understand their own positions and to make meaning from such interactions with those who exist in a given society. This sense-making happens "...through the confrontation with another's embodied perspective..." (Magri & McQueen, 2023, p. 171). The focus group

setting supports the enhanced understanding of the researcher and the participants in the study. Focus groups hold space for critical individual reflection, the opportunity for participants to share their experiences and narratives, as well as the necessary interaction with other participants. These interactions provide opportunities for clarification, which enhances the credibility of qualitative research. Focus groups have many benefits, each essential to the nature of phenomenology.

There are ethical concerns (Sim & Waterfield, 2019) of which I was aware prior to conducting the focus group. One concern focused on confidentiality. Unlike in a one-on-one interview, the other participants were not only aware of who was in the study, but what stories they chose to share. This concern was mitigated by explicitly informing each participant of the study and the focus group.

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the topic, and the type of information requested. They were also told that the setting was a focus group in which the participants would share their stories and experiences (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). The nature of what was shared could have been problematic for some of the subjects. For instance, a participant described a sexual assault. The researcher affirmed the human responses and managed the discussion while being sensitive to those who were present. This highlights Heidegger's notion that all people, including the researcher, are in the world and not simply of the world (Magri & McQueen, 2023). Breaks were offered as well as external resources if a participant wished to access a mental health professional. No participant accepted either of these offers.

It is notable that I had previous knowledge of most of whom were selected for the study. This is a method known as "purposive sampling" (Tongco, 2007). Purposive sampling:



is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. It is a nonrandom technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of informants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (p. 147)

Purposive sampling was chosen for several reasons. In addition to having the opportunity to identify antiracist educators, participants felt more at ease to share what they otherwise might have found challenging to share with an unfamiliar interviewer. Knowing that the participants have similar political views and realize the importance of antiracist work, the group was less distracted by people who share different outlooks around the central purpose of this study. Lastly, by having an existing relationship with the participants, it was more conducive for the researcher and, perhaps, other members to reduce potential harm (Sim & Waterfield, 2019).

Consent remained important in the focus group approach. The information that participants received conveyed what they could reasonably expect to hear while being cognizant that each person had unique experiences to share. Thus, engaging in a group interview, contributors were not only prepared to listen to that which may have been unpleasant but had opportunities to share what they perceived as challenging experiences. This type of encounter increases the credibility of qualitative research.

### ***Data Collection***

Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A) were conducted in the focus group. The setting and sample size permitted participants to expound on open-ended questions. The setting and size lent well to the creation of opportunities for participants to provide context to their individual experiences while reflecting on their motivations and antiracist work. It was also a

setting that had the natural potential to provide member checking that can enhance qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

With participation and a liberatory approach, participants were able to share beyond the interview questions. They commented and built upon the responses from the other contributors. This created opportunities for each person to clarify what they said and for other group members to question what they heard (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009) thus increasing validity and reliability. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained the concept of “consensual validation” as an important method to attain the level of credibility that gives credence to a study (p. 256). However, the term validation is contentious, and this is explored later in this chapter.

Observation and questions were used to solicit answers from the participants. Data was collected through audio and video via Zoom. Participants chose pseudonyms. The audio was transcribed initially by Zoom software and reviewed and edited by the researcher for accuracy.

### ***Data Analysis***

Braun and Clarke’s six steps of thematic analysis were used to analyze the data:

1. Familiarization of data.
2. Generation of codes.
3. Combining codes into themes.
4. Reviewing themes.
5. Determine significance of themes.
6. Reporting of findings.

(Clarke & Braun, 2013)

Thematic analysis is identifying themes or patterns in the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). It is conducive to a wide variety of theories and works well when analyzing data from focus groups. Clarke and Braun (2013) describe thematic analysis as:

an analytic method...[that]...works with a wide range of research questions, from those about people's experiences or understandings to those about the representation and construction of particular phenomena in particular contexts; b) it can be used to analyse different types of data, from secondary sources such as media to transcripts of focus groups or interviews; c) it works with large or small data-sets; and d) it can be applied to produce data-driven or theory-driven analyses. (pp. 1-2)

Delve, a computer-assisted, qualitative data analysis software was used to organize the data. I open-coded the data using a semi-inductive approach. In the first phase, I read through the transcription and categorized salient words or phrases. I looked for keywords in comments made by the participants that would help me understand the phenomenon of antiracist motivational factors that were revealed during the focus group discussion. The first round of coding resulted in one hundred forty-seven codes. During the second round of coding, codes were merged, and repetitive comments were eliminated, thus reducing the number of codes to forty-seven. A third round of coding was performed, and my advisor and debriefing team collaborated with me to think through codes and some of the participants' statements. The final round of coding resulted in thirty-nine codes which were later made into larger themes.

### ***Interpretations***

Interpretation within the context of social identities and power relations related to race is the essence of CP. The intent is not to generalize but to understand how the phenomena is experienced by the participants, which is done through the lens of the researcher. This is

particularly true for researchers who practice interpretive phenomenology. McConnell-Henry et al. (2011) asserts that:

interpretive researchers would benefit from establishing the foundations of rigour for themselves, rather than being pressured into attempting to fit into the language used by positivists.... there is no directive in interpretive research to prove or generalise, so the idea of validation is illogical” (p. 30)

So, it also stands with the misconception that interpretation must be neutral. Objective interpretation is not attainable, nor is it expected in qualitative research (Dodgson, 2019).

The interpretations are that of the researcher and, therefore, it is important to be forthcoming that interpretations are subjective and shaped by the experiences and epistemologies of the researcher, “We as readers of qualitative research need to understand who is doing the research in ways that go beyond their name and professional affiliations to include the researcher’s positionality in relation to what is being studied” (Dodgson, 2019, p. 220). Therefore, transparency is vital. Researcher reflexivity contributes to “transparency and clarity” of the study thus increasing the quality of the work (Dodgson, 2019, p. 220). Researcher reflexivity will be employed throughout the study.

### ***Researcher Reflexivity***

Reflexive praxis is similar to reflection but with some distinguishing factors. They both require that the researcher think about their position to the data and the participants, but reflection is meant to achieve an endpoint (Barrett et al., 2020). Researcher reflexivity is ongoing and requires a critical approach that is meant to “construct (and shift) our understanding and social realities as we interact with others and talk about experience” (Barrett et al., 2020, p. 10). Valandra’s (2012) critical reflexive questions (see Appendix B) were considered during

researcher reflexivity. This happened at each stage of the study, planning, implementation, analysis, and results.

### ***Member Checking***

Member checking is often upheld as “the gold standard” (Motulsky, 2021, p. 390; McConnell-Henry et al., 2011) in quantitative and qualitative research. However, it is not always necessary and can be problematic. McConnell-Henry et al. (2011) describes this as the “halo effect”:

Revisiting a participant for clarification is a potential threat to the rigour of interpretive studies. When asked to revisit a concept, a participant may over emphasise it, believing the researcher must think it important or relevant to the study. The desire of participants to say ‘the right thing’ is known as the ‘halo effect’ (p. 30)

Phenomenologists recognize that there are multiple truths (Motulsky, 2021). The intent is not to generalize qualitative findings but to develop a nuanced understanding (K. Colum, personal communication, July 14, 2023; Motulsky, 2021) of the phenomena, which in this case were the motivations of white teachers using the interpretations that I explicated in the context of who I am as a Black researcher. Thus, member checking outside of the focus group was very minimal in this study.

### ***Credibility***

As described above, member checking does not necessarily increase credibility and, indeed, may work against it. To enhance the credibility of this study, I convened a small team of phenomenological researchers who agreed to collaborate in what McConnell-Henry et al. (2011) describes as an “interpretive team” (p. 32). I purposefully chose this team because of their expertise in interpretive phenomenology and their social identities. This small team was

composed of two people, one of whom identifies as a white, heterosexual female and the other who identifies as a queer, Black female. Both women teach in higher education. As part of this interpretive team, their role was to challenge me in a “continuous process of questioning, examining, accepting and articulating [my] attitudes, assumptions, [and] perspectives” (Barrett et al., 2020, p. 10).

Focus groups can be an effective setting to get confirmation from the participants and ask for clarification. Paraphrasing can help with this, “paraphrasing is invaluable.... It allows the participant to hear the researcher’s interpretation and to be immediately able to confirm or deny the accuracy of the interpretation” (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 35). While McConnell-Henry et al. (2011) do not consider paraphrasing the same as member checking, I argue that its intent to provide clarity and confirmation is still a form of member checking. The additional benefit was that paraphrasing occurred during the focus group. The organic interactive nature of the focus group, an interpretive team, and researcher reflexivity created the triangulation necessary to achieve credibility in my study.

In this chapter, I explained the process I underwent to execute my study. This chapter included the stages of research and the method used to analyze the data. The semi-inductive approach was an effective method to ascertain keywords, patterns, and develop themes related to the overall topic of the motivations of white educators who engage in antiracism. This approach permitted me to uncover various motivations among the participants to help explain how this phenomenon presents among different white educators. My analysis is consistent with the research design and methodology. The findings of this study are identified in Chapter Four.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

This critical phenomenological study sought to gather data to deepen understanding of the motivations of white educators who engage in antiracism and what sustained them in antiracist work. I approached the analysis and interpretation of the data from a place of curiosity. As I shared in Chapter One, I am a multiethnic woman. The code of Jewish law, Halakha, states that being a Jew is matrilineal. Only one born of a Jewish mother can be a Jew, regardless of the father's ancestry. I am the only daughter of four children born to my Jewish mother, and therefore, the only one in my family who can continue our Jewish lineage. I consider Jews to be racially white. Despite all of this, I have no idea what it is like to be a Jewish woman. I don't know what it is to be white. It is not my lived experience. The more that I understood myself as a racialized woman in a nation predicated on race, the more I realized that I knew very little about white people. So, I approached this study, the data, and the analysis with an intense enthusiasm to learn more. I was especially interested to learn more about those with whom I shared a profession and particularly those who actively engaged in antiracism. I read through the transcription several times to familiarize myself with the data. I did four rounds of coding and learned that coding could be endless. And when I interpreted the data, I was able to develop themes based upon statements from the participants that I had not anticipated, nor had I tried to anticipate them short of developing some preliminary research questions for the study. I simply wanted to hear their answers, and learn more about their antiracism, and their motivations for engaging in it. This inductive process concluded with themes I could not have predicted and most of them did not directly correlate with half of my original research questions.

Two of my original research questions remained the same, “What motivates white educators to engage in antiracism?” and as well as the question related to activism sustainability. But what I interpreted based on my codes were three other themes: Characteristics, Conditions, and Identity. Some of the codes overlapped and were evident across themes. The findings relate to conditions that were conducive for white teachers to engage in antiracist praxis and the conditions that participants experienced which provided safety and security for them as they faced challenges to their antiracist work. The findings illustrate various characteristics exhibited by the participants as they practiced antiracism in professional and personal environments. Such characteristics include the ability to question despite feeling discomfort, critically reflect, and meet the expectations that someone set for them, or they imposed upon themselves. This chapter also includes findings about how participants see themselves and how this intrinsic identity contributed to their motivations. But overall, most of the educators felt a tremendous sense of responsibility to leverage their racial status to change a system that resists change. The findings of the present study help explain the motivations of white people who work to change a system from which they benefit and how they sustain themselves while doing so.

### *Participants*

For the convenience of the reader, I also include participant information in chapter four.

| Pseudonyms | Years Taught | Current Role                    | Geographic area of School | Other identities shared that were important to the participants |
|------------|--------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Eleanor    | 15           | High School English Teacher     | Suburb                    |   |
| Ann        | 1            | Fourth Grade Elementary Teacher | Suburb                    |   |



|          |    |                           |  |              |
|----------|----|---------------------------|--|--------------|
| Michelle | 12 | Educational Consultant    | Works with schools throughout the nation |              |
| Sid      | 7  | Special Education Teacher | Suburb                                   | Bisexual     |
| Sarah    | 10 | K-5 Library Media         | Rural                                    | 45 years old |

Table 2 shows a sample of codes developed based upon keywords in the participants' statements. This sample provides a trail of how I moved from open coding the statements to axial coding, and then encompassing them into the larger themes. For instance, one of the characteristics, or qualities, of the participants was their willingness to disrupt racism by asking questions. They asked questions of their colleagues, themselves as they reflected, and of their family members as shown in the example in Table 2. I initially had coded examples of questioning as "speaking out". But, "speaking out" can present in a number of ways such as making a declarative or imperative statement when calling someone out for racist practice or racist remark. But, the overwhelming number of examples that each of the participants described manifested as interrogatives. Therefore, I believe it to be more accurate to label this characteristic as "questioning."

## Table 2

### *Sample Audit Trail of Thematic Analysis*

| Themes   | Codes       | Quotes  |
|--|-------------|---|
| Characteristics of White Educators who Engage in Antiracist Praxis | Questioning | "My aunt had said something at the holiday table like, 'Oh well, aren't the Somali students scary to you?' I was like, 'What? What do you mean by that?'" |

|  |                         |   |
|--|-------------------------|---|
| Conditions for White Educators who Engage in Antiracist Praxis | Legislative Support     | “Maybe even supported by, you know, some of the new legislature that protects the teachers for teaching these things” |
| Identity   | How They See Themselves | “I think that's like the antiracist in me going”  |
| Motivations of White Educators who Engage in Antiracist Praxis | “It’s really our job”   | “like it's really our job to continue to do this work”  |
| Sustaining Antiracist work                                     | Hope                    | “Hope sustains me”  |

The tables below indicate the strongest factors for the participants that influenced their antiracist praxis. I label them as “strongest” because I identified them repeatedly through my analysis of the data. Beginning with research question one, I interpreted three motivations based upon the comments and stories that participants shared in the study. The final codes are listed in the tables.

**Analysis of Research Question 1:** What motivates white educators to engage in antiracism?

**Table 3**

*Motivations identified for antiracist praxis*

|   |                         |                   |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------|
| RQ1. Motivations<br>What motivates white educators to engage in antiracism? |                         |                   |
| Need to educate   | Sense of Responsibility | Intersectionality |

The educators in the study described what I interpret to be characteristics of the participants who engage in antiracist praxis. After merging several codes, Table four lists the final codes that reflect the characteristics of the participants. While categorizing some of the codes, it is important to note that some of these overlap. For instance, “it’s really our job” can just as easily be placed into Table Three as a motivation for why some white educators attempt

to change a system from which they benefit. However, as chapter five will show, this factor fuses with their identity as educators engaged in antiracism, thus also making it a characteristic.

**RQ 2. What characteristics do white educators exhibit who engage in antiracist work in the classroom?**

**Table 4**

*Characteristics of white Educators Engaged in Antiracism*

|                       |                        |                       |          |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| RQ 2. Characteristics |                        |                       |          |
| Questioning           | Learning and Improving | “It’s really our job” | identity |

Table Five describes the conditions that make it conducive for some white teachers to engage in antiracist praxis. Though there were many examples given, such conditions were merged into two categories, support, and protection. In this case, protection was defined as something that would mitigate the high risks of activism such as the loss of a job or financial income. However, protection was also a motivator for one of the participants, Michelle. She felt an inherent need to protect students from racial bias.

**RQ 3. What conditions are conducive for white teachers to engage in antiracist work?**

**Table 5**

*Conditions Conducive for white Educators to engage in antiracism*

|                  |            |
|------------------|------------|
| RQ 3. Conditions |            |
| Support          | Protection |

In Table Six, the strongest categories for self-sustaining activism were identified. Again, words such as “responsibility”, “learning”, and “support” encapsulate some of the codes that were analyzed to determine how the participants sustain themselves but these also overlap with

motivations. For instance, some participants felt tremendous responsibility to disrupt racism, thus it was motivational. At the same time, their sense of responsibility held them accountable to not quit antiracist praxis despite being tired or facing significant repercussions.

#### **RQ 4. What sustains educators as they remain involved in antiracism?**

**Table 6**

*Sustaining Antiracist Work*

|                       |                |         |      |           |             |                |
|-----------------------|----------------|---------|------|-----------|-------------|----------------|
| RQ 4. Self-Sustaining |                |         |      |           |             |                |
| Support               | Responsibility | Beliefs | Hope | Self-Care | Improvement | Accountability |

*Themes*

I developed five themes that centered on antiracist engagement: (1) motivations, (2) characteristics, (3) conditions, (4) identity, and (5) the ability to sustain antiracist work. Four of the themes (motivations, characteristics, conditions, and sustaining the work) are directly tied to the research questions. They are distinct from one another in the following ways: Motivations explain *why* the educators engage in antiracist praxis. Characteristics are the *intrinsic qualities* exhibited by the educators to disrupt racism. Conditions include the settings, security, and other *external elements* that make them likely to engage in antiracism. Lastly, the ability of the participants to sustain antiracist work is the interrelated connection of motivations, conditions, identity, and characteristics. So, while I have done my best to segregate them into well-organized categories of their own, they remain cross-categorical at times, and I argue that to contextually understand them, this is necessary. If each theme is dissected without consideration of another, they not only lose context, the way in which they are framed morphs into something that does not reflect the integrity of my findings. These themes are shaped by one another, as is everything created by human beings. None of them are mutually exclusive from another; none of them can

exist in isolation. The first theme that I begin the Findings with is Identity. Identity was a strong influence on the participants and was woven throughout other themes.

***Identity: An Unexpected Theme***

Through my analysis of the data, *identity* became an important theme. Identity is how the participants viewed themselves in relation to antiracism. While related to the other themes, it is unrelated to my original research questions. Nevertheless, it is an important finding of this study. Identity was relevant throughout the focus group. It showed up throughout the theme of characteristics, motivations, and sustainability.

Sid and Ann were the youngest members in the focus group. They were both explicit that their social identities as white women required them to disrupt racism. I coded this as critical self-awareness. This marginalized identity created empathy for Sid, and it was evident that she was conscious of her identity throughout the study. While the intersectionality of a bisexual white woman created empathy and motivation for her activism, she remained focused on race and the position in which racism placed her in a society rooted in and centered on race. For example, she stated:

I've brought a lot of awareness to my position as a white woman and how that relates to different races. So, for example, like the 'white woman tears' kind of thing that happens that we see on the internet and/or even in our personal lives. I've done a lot of reflecting lately about being a white woman and how that can impact my conversations and my interactions and making sure that I'm aware of what I'm doing and presenting and not falling into those stereotypes.

Ann articulated consciousness of how her social identities place her differently in society and give her differential power from someone who is not white and heterosexual. And with that

power differential comes responsibility. Ann discussed how her identity impacts her global perspective,

I identify as a straight, white female. And just going back to when I first learned about intersectionality, like, yes, I have a lot of privilege because I am white and because I am straight. It's just so interesting how race and gender and sexuality intersect and how those aspects of how you identify really contribute to your everyday [life]; how you see and interact in the world.

Ann's and Sid's critical awareness of their identities influenced their motivations and how they engaged in antiracism. This is discussed further under motivations and a sense of responsibility.

Unlike Sid and Ann who exhibited critical self-awareness when they spoke about their identities in relation to the broader society, Sarah and Eleanor discussed their identities from an individual scope in which they centered themselves. Sarah expressed empathy which was based upon her own marginalization as a low-income female,

I don't know if it was my own bias that I felt just growing up in poverty and knowing in my small town that I was not as special as everybody else because I was, you know, from a lower socioeconomic class. So, I felt that pain of what that was. I've felt what it was like to be judged. I didn't come from money, and I have been told, 'That's not for you to do. That's a man's job' or that there are things that I don't want to do that is supposed to be my job. I think my gender and the socioeconomic class that I grew up in definitely kind of lit the fire for me to be the fighter that I see myself as today for doing this kind of work.

Eleanor's identity is grounded in her own perceived goodness. Her inclusion of her husband and children are there to support that she is a good and socially just person,

My husband is Black, and I have 2 biracial children and I think that that's kind of changed my perspective obviously as far as the lenses I look through. As a mother and as a wife, and as a teacher, I've always been really I guess grounded in—like, I wrote my master's thesis on social justice education, and I've been so proud of that for so long. I guess I always feel this comfort just because that's who I am.

Eleanor's use of the word "obviously" assumes that anyone who learns that a white person married to a Black person and has biracial children must readily understand that the white person's perspective changes. It ignores the power of racism, especially if it can so easily be ameliorated. Through her response, Eleanor homogenized everyone and eliminated even the possibility that racialized people have diverse perspectives particularly regarding racism. This identity, the way in which white people see themselves, proved to be important to their motivation for antiracist praxis and even how they involve themselves in antiracism.

### ***Mothers of Biracial Children***

Sarah and Eleanor were two white mothers of biracial (Black and white) children. Eleanor and Sarah described situations in which they were reluctant to speak up against racism even when their own children suffered the consequences. Their identity as mothers did not mobilize them to protect their children, and their experiences as white women prohibited them from seeing the need to protect their children of color. They believed in an educational system that despite centuries of harm to children of color, they were slow to learn and even acknowledge in Eleanor's case, the racial harm that was done to their children. Eleanor's story involved her son,

An experience I had with my son [in] the district [where] they go to school had a teachers' strike. So [my children] were home after COVID and had an option to go to school if we

needed them to. I had to go to work and so my son was the only [student at the school]. He was a second grader at the time. And I got a picture from his teacher who was a very caring and loving woman; definitely not in a place of an antiracist perspective yet and she took a picture of him alone in the gym and the caption was, “It's a Ruby Bridges Kind of Day.” And it took me— but, I mean, so many things ran through my head at that moment of, “What does she mean by that? Is it because he's Black?” I don't think she meant ill intent. I don't know why she's saying that. I, you know, went to colleagues and friends and my husband. And looking back, I should have said and done more. And I didn't. So, I just, when I look at the question of this place of race and racism and antiracism in different facets of my life, it impacts me so differently. And I'm just learning every single day through my practice professionally and then my life here; being a mommy [laughs]; how I can do things differently and better for everyone.

Even though a white teacher demonstrated racial bias towards Eleanor's son, Eleanor was apprehensive to identify that teacher's actions as racist. The caption, the thought, the scene would not have made sense if her son had been white and yet, Eleanor wondered, still, if the teacher was motivated “because he's Black”. Years later, in the time of post-COVID fears, Eleanor was still inclined to characterize the teacher as “very caring and loving” and that the teacher's intentions were not malicious. How does she know?

I wish I could have asked that question to Eleanor, but I could not determine a way in which to ask it that would not have come across as potentially combative. An element of critical phenomenology is the intersubjectivity of the researcher and the participants and our influence on one another. It recognizes that the researcher is not neutral nor objective in their approach. So, while I am not restricted to that of a scientific bystander who is expected to bracket my thoughts



and emotions, I am required to limit them so that I do not impinge on the experiences of the participants. I chose not to ask that follow-up question which could have caused a shift in the environment of the focus group and impede the study.

Sarah, too, described an incident where she should have protected her daughter against a racist system. Instead, she relied upon a school system that supports, promotes, and enables racism. She believed that it would have the best interest of her child regardless of her child's racial construct,

I think even more as I've educated myself on being antiracist and biased and particularly bias in schools and being the mother of a biracial child, like there's been moments where I've gone, 'Oh, I should have stood up for her more because she was, I think, targeted or more harshly punished because of the color of her skin.' But in the moment, I stood by the district and the consequences, and you know wanting to raise a well-behaved child. You know those [types of] things. But in hindsight and becoming more informed myself, I think I—I failed her in some ways. I should have maybe stood up for her more. You know, I'm continuing to grow and learn and yeah, like even as a white mom of a brown girl, I had to learn and I'm still learning.

There is a common assumption among Sarah and Eleanor that suggests that simply by association with Black family members, the mothers assumed that they would have the keys to special insight and knowledge that would unlock their ability to gain a perspective that they would not otherwise have if they had not had the same association. Sarah and Eleanor failed to understand the prodigious amount of work and the reflexive praxis necessary to unlearn racialized conditioning to be able to advocate for their children. Instead, their unconscious whiteness and its offspring, the invisibility of racism that inevitably results when it is common

and normalized, prohibited them from understanding how a system that benefits them will work against and harm their children.

### *Characteristics of White Educators who Engage in Antiracist Praxis*

#### *Questioning*

There were several characteristics manifested by the focus group members. Questioning was common among all five members to either disrupt racism or move them further along in their own praxis. It was a tactic they used to question family members and colleagues to bring awareness to racism and to try and stop it from moving forward. They also used it internally to interrupt their own thoughts and/or improve their activism. Ann described a time during a family gathering that her aunt had made prejudicial statements regarding Somali students, “My aunt had said something at the holiday table like, ‘Oh well, aren't the Somali students scary to you?’ I was like, “What? What do you mean by that?”

Sarah described her evolution as an antiracist educator. She explained that it began with her refusal to lead her students in a stereotypical Thanksgiving celebration and over the years progressed to questioning her colleagues to think in new and different ways,

As an educator, I think that I started [to engage in antiracism] by just kind of refusing to do things that I didn't think were appropriate. For instance, I worked in a rural school teaching kindergarten and my partner teacher was going to do a very traditional pilgrims and Indians feast and I just looked at her and said, ‘I won't be doing that’ and I turned around and walked back to my classroom. I didn't have the courage at that time to tell her why or what I was gonna do differently or what I would hope that she would do differently. I just simply [said] ‘I'm not going to do that.’ I think kind of my next step with that was questioning things that I didn't think were okay. For instance, in the same

district that I was just talking about, I questioned whether or not 'Hick Day' should be allowed for a dress-up day. I got to the point where, you know, my colleagues were, 'Oh, it's just funny and it's this thing that they do.' And I was like, 'Well, but it's not, it's not funny. And it's not appropriate.' Then I went to [the] administration with my concern and 'Hick Day' was removed. And then I think I progressed more to suggesting. But then I kind of reached the point where I was [asking colleagues] 'Have you ever thought about teaching this or have you ever learned this or have you ever thought?' So, kind of that's where I'm at now. I am an antiracist teacher and I'm hoping that I can bring some more people along with me. But it didn't happen overnight. It was definitely a buildup.

Questioning practices and people was something for which Sarah said she was given explicit permission before she became an adult, "I was always taught to speak my mind. I was given that permission that yes, I should respect authority and I should respect those things, but if something's not right, you should always question it." Sarah later explained that she considers herself antiracist. She sees things critically and calls them into question,

Our community police [are] out in the community doing.... events with kids.

Great, right? That's what we want them to be doing. But I always look at the [media] pictures and go, 'But where are the students of color? Where are the children of color? Why aren't they there?' And you know, it's wonderful. You want [there] to be community police. That's what we want. But [they're] not targeting the children [they] should be targeting. Why aren't [the police] reaching out to work with those kids and getting the kids to have that relationship building? That is the whole goal of those activities for playing basketball with the cops in the park, those kinds of things. So, I think that's like the antiracist in me going, 'I think I'm always aware of that where other people are

saying, ‘Oh, the police are doing all of this wonderful stuff.’ Whereas I see it and it makes me more angry because [they are] doing this work but [they are] not connecting. The white kids don't feel afraid of them. It's the Brown and Black kids in this community that need to have that time with those officers. [I want to say] ‘Get the fricking uniform off! Put on your damn jogging shorts!’ You know what I mean? Like, just be a man with these kids or just a woman with these kids. Most of them are men. Those are where my thoughts are a lot whereas other people see the good and I see where they need to do better.

Sarah’s description, as well-intentioned as she was, demonstrates the necessity of including perspectives from people of color in situations that are about them. As she shared her story, I wondered internally, “What if the white officers in Sarah’s community built friendly, safe relationships with the children of color? How would that translate for them when they became adults and live in a different community?” Through the parameters of critical phenomenology and the requirement that it be transformative, I responded to Sarah’s story, “I wonder, too, about Black and Brown children forming friendships with police officers and then growing up and living in a different community where they think all police officers are safe, good people because of their experience.” Sarah replied, “I've never thought of that that way and that's very terrifying to think of, too.”

### ***Critical Self-Reflection***

Questioning also manifested through self-reflection at different points in the participants’ lives. Earlier, Sarah’s own reflection about her daughter’s discipline by the school was questioned internally after Sarah failed to advocate for her. Eleanor, too, explained how she questions her thinking, “I really need to stop and think.... why am I thinking the way I am? Sid

explained that, though she grew up in a politically conservative family, coupled with an unhealthy relationship with a boyfriend as an adult, she began to question if the Republican party was appropriate for her,

I grew up in a very Republican household which isn't that different for white families. I did not grow up religious at all and then very young in college like 18 [years old] 19 [years old] I started going to church. I was in early college coming out of this like Republican life, trying to find myself in religion. I was also like in this really toxic relationship where my partner was Republican and I was watching all the debates with him and so I was also like, I was starting to be like, well, I think I'm gonna vote for Obama and not Romney like this feels really weird. I went down to the library and I made a spreadsheet of all the candidates and I started looking up all their different views and really like learning the difference between Democrat and Republican. And I was like part of the Gay Straight Alliance and all of this. So I feel like my actions felt very liberal, but then my thoughts felt very Republican and so I was trying to sort that out in my head. I dipped out of religion again and have remained out of it. But that was like the start of my journey of really recognizing my own thoughts and my own biases. All of these things kind of converged in my head. Then, like, the further I got into teaching and my first couple years it just became like so obvious that antiracist, antiracism, is the only option.

Michelle explained that, unlike Sid who began questioning her political beliefs, and Sarah who was encouraged to question what she heard, Michelle questioned out of a need for clarity. When things did not make sense to Michelle and it left her confused rather than ignore them, she questioned them,

I honestly think a lot of it has to do with [the fact that] I would fit into several categories that would be considered neurodiverse. And so, my entire life I have always struggled with rules that don't make sense, things that seem binary that were created just out of socialization. Lack of clarity never made sense to me, and I think a lot of this just falls into that same realm in terms of like, “What is this thought process in my head?” And then, just that I have an intense feeling of responsibility. So, my whole life I've kind of felt like –whether that comes from being in an alcoholic, abusive, traumatic home where I always was looking to see like what could I have done different to prevent things that a child couldn't prevent. But that's just how the child's mind works. Like, what could I have done differently? What was my responsibility? That thought process was fostered really early. And I had lots of racist role models. I also had lots of Black [role models] particularly Black female role models that really directly taught me how to be antiracist in the classroom and what that looked like, and how to do that. And that it was my responsibility. It was part of my job.

***“It’s really our job”***

Michelle was not alone in her belief that antiracism is part of her responsibility as an educator. The theme that antiracism was part of their job was evident among Ann, Sid, and Sarah as well. Ann explained that societal positioning brings added responsibility to engage in antiracism,

I think I thought I knew more than I did and I didn't realize that until I got to college and was educated further by [college professors], by other educators of color...that I realized, you know, the importance of not only being a white person in America, but a white female teacher in America. It's my duty to inform both myself and the kids about it. It's really our job.

Sid agreed,

[I feel] that obligation to my students and that they deserve to be educated and treated and welcomed into a classroom that is antiracist and supportive of all of their needs, abilities, everything. Like, that is my job. That's my obligation. So that's kind of the bottom line for me.

Participants were motivated to engage in antiracism to make change and expressed hope for a better future. But, Sid explained that for her, “It's not so much like hope and those kinds of things. It's more just like I have to do my job and my job is to be an antiracist educator.” Sarah, too, explained that “I do my best to encourage and share resources and bring it back to how we can prove that it's our job to teach [antiracism].”

### ***Learning and Improving***

A desire to continuously learn and increase the efficacy of their antiracist work was a characteristic of all the participants. This desire converged with their interests. Eleanor said she asks herself, “How can I do better for my students and my family?” Sid explained diversity fueled her desire to learn more and do better,

I'm from a very white community. To this day I live in a very white community and it really wasn't until I started teaching that I understood the importance of diversity. I went to a white college, it wasn't purposeful, it was just what I did. Then I got into teaching and I was like, ‘Oh, I see why this is so important’ because I've been missing out on all of this my whole life and I'm learning so much [that is] new about different cultures and meeting new people.

She also talked about the lessons that she had learned so far as she practiced antiracism,

It's taught me that it's okay to make mistakes and mistakes are going to happen and they're unavoidable. So, it's taught me to be more gentle with myself and that it's okay that I don't know everything and that I still hold that value. I always think of the Maya Angelou quote like 'when you know better you do better' and so I always think—and this is maybe more like me bullying myself, but like I have an obligation [that] once I know better than I have to do better. There's no like falling back into that white privilege because I know better, so I have to do better. I have to do better for [my students]. So, [I] just continue learning.

This is an example of a characteristic that is woven across categories. Learning is not just a characteristic of these participants. It is also a way in which they sustain themselves and arguably a condition of their practice.

Michelle knew that opportunities to demonstrate improved antiracist advocacy are endless. So, though she was caught off guard sometimes and does not always have the words to intercede in every given situation, continuing to learn prepares her for these times,

I think of a different way [that] I can attack that very same topic the next time it comes up [rather than thinking], 'Well that didn't work so now I'll stop [trying].' I take every opportunity as a learning opportunity. I want to know how I can articulate something in a different way, use a different example, be ready to say something that I maybe wasn't ready to say [before]. I just always want to learn and grow and do things better the next time. That is part of also what drives me.

Ann told the group that she finds "joy in research. I'm a big reader. So, you know, doing my own research on white supremacy and antiracism is something that's interesting to me."

Lastly, Sarah discussed that continuously learning was one of the ways in which she sustained



herself as she continued to engage in antiracism, “Two things that I'll do to make sure that I can continue doing the work is to continue to educate myself and to educate others; making sure that I continue to grow.” Sarah’s desire to increase her knowledge converges with the way in which she sustains herself as well as her motivation to teach other people.

### *Motivations Identified for Antiracist Praxis*

#### *Motivated to Educate*

There were several motivations that I identified in this group of educators. Many of the motivations were out of concern for others. Those people included family members and friends, but the overwhelming motivation was that of their students. All of the participants described their willingness to change, oppose, and/or question the epistemologies and ontologies of other educators and district leadership. All of the participants, with the exception of Eleanor, explained this because they believed that the students would benefit from these challenges. Such challenges resulted in significant consequences for some of the participants. This is described later in the chapter. Though faced with adversity, Sarah explained that,

I still do it because it matters that the children know the truth and that they're able to find the truth and they're able to know that everything I hear, even from trusted individuals, isn't always accurate and I need to do my own research.

Ann has not faced the same kind of adversity. She had changed districts and at the time of the focus group was in a district in which students of color were the majority population. While her teaching had not changed, her reasons for curriculum that promoted cultural understanding had changed,

Being in a space where the white students are the minority in this case, you know, they also need to have this knowledge.... it's more important for them in a different aspect

because they are growing up in a space where they're surrounded K through 12 with diverse students and it's important for them to understand the historical context of the students that they go to school with.

This is a nuanced motivation. Ann's motivation is within the context of who she teaches rather than espousing the belief that all students need to have this information. While she articulates that white students are the minority, her central perspective remained through a dominant white lens. She still considers the students of color who make up the majority of the student body as “diverse”, different from the norm. I also submit that this is the result of common language rooted in white supremacy that uses “diverse” as a euphemism for people of color rather than its literal definition.

Four of the five participants expressed intrinsic needs to educate people about antiracism as Sarah expressed in the previous passage. Sarah’s critical awareness began when she was in high school. She described a situation involving the perceptions of her white peers.

The first time I realized that people needed to be educated about diversity was when I was in high school. We were having a conversation surrounding interracial relationships and somebody commented about one of the students that was in our school; the only student of color. And they said ‘Yeah, but he's not really Black because he was adopted by a white family.’ So, therefore [little chuckle], they wanted to take his Blackness away from him. And I stood up and said, ‘Yes, yes, he is. And why would we say that he's not?’ Their jaws dropped [little chuckle] and couldn't believe that I had acknowledged that he was actually Black. Even if he had no contact with a biological family, he still had to walk through the world in the skin that he was born in and I don't know, maybe part of me wanted them to recognize that having a black friend is a good thing. You know what I

mean? It's just that it's a quality. It's a good thing. It's not this thing we have to hide from or that he should be ashamed of. So, I think that I definitely grew. [And] I have a biracial daughter. So, my thoughts have definitely changed around the need for diversity.

Working with different people and knowing different people, especially students, has changed me and my approach to be an antiracist and advocacy for [antiracism]. But I had some very, very distinct moments in my life I think that caused me to believe that diversity is so necessary.

She also explained that her daughter's experience in K-12 motivates her not only to teach important topics like the Civil Rights' Movement, but to teach it in a way in which it resonates for elementary children,

For me, I think that she was maybe a role model [inspiration] for me to [think] 'When I'm in a classroom I need to make this come to life for these kids so they understand, truly, the impact that it has had on society, where we're at now, and how we don't want to go back there.'

### *Sense of Responsibility*

Sarah's identity as an antiracist teacher creates an obligation for her to teach other people. She explained that "I am an antiracist teacher and I'm hoping that I can bring some more people along with me." She also expressed the importance of making other people aware to not take things at face value, but rather learn more, dig deeper to understand the truth. She discussed various groups like those who advocate to ban books in school libraries,

You know some of these groups that are currently really trying to make influential decisions with school boards and what not. They paint themselves as this wonderful group, you know, to really care about kids. But we know that's not true if we look into

what they're actually saying. But you know on the surface they do look very caring and kind and so it's important for me to be aware of that, but also to make others aware of that. And continue to educate peers about how they can, you know, do better with antiracism.

Ann's identity and her sense of responsibility were not mutually exclusive either,

When I was student teaching, I had one student of color and she was the only student of color in the entire grade. And there was just some instances that I was just like, you know, this is absolutely not right. And you know, I was 22 years old. I wasn't even a real teacher yet. I was a teacher candidate. But just reminding myself that I need to say something. You know, just because I'm young and just because, you know, I'm not or wasn't a real teacher yet doesn't mean I don't still have a duty as a person, an educator, to disrupt those thoughts and to also educate the other people in that school and not even just this instance, but in general, other educators and people that work with kids that are of diverse backgrounds that didn't have the opportunity to learn the same things I did; just share that knowledge and experience. And again, I don't know everything. But I just feel that's my duty as a white woman that continues to advocate for antiracism to say something even when it's uncomfortable and to say something to other specifically white educators, too.

The need to educate others was a self-imposed obligation for most of the participants in part because of their societal position, and in part because of their inherent desire to teach. It included a desire to build a coalition of educators who engaged in antiracism. This was mentioned earlier when Sarah had declared that she was “an antiracist teacher” and wanted to teach others to do the same. Michelle agreed,

It's like a snowball rolling downhill. The more of the work I do, the easier it is to keep doing it because it's like a habit of mind. That is what sustains me. That momentum can then help other people get the same momentum.

Unlike Sarah, however, Sid was hesitant to self-identify as an antiracist,

Okay, I'm gonna share one more thing. Piggybacking off of [things] like 'it's okay to make mistakes and you're not perfect and all of this', like even joining this group I don't feel like I belong because like labeling myself as antiracist really feels like a big label that I have to live up to. And, like yes, at the core, that's my value. And I still make mistakes. So, like coming into this group felt at first like, 'Oh I am not gonna fit in. I feel like my thoughts are gonna be way different.'

And yet, Sid's responsibility did not waiver despite her reluctance to call herself antiracist. She provided special education services to high school students with disabilities and said,

I feel the responsibility especially with students with special needs to really provide the information to them because I think a lot of times they get looked over because of their ability level. And yes, we do need to focus on reading, but we can also learn about life. And we can learn about all of the diversity that's in our culture and in our world and that you're gonna see every day and that goes with ability, sex that goes with gender, that goes with race, it goes with everything.

### ***Intersectionality***

It became evident that antiracism was a gateway to include other marginalized social identities such as gender, sexual orientation, and people with disabilities. Sarah spoke about her experiences growing up in poverty and the patriarchal oppression she experienced earlier in this

chapter. She uses her experiences to create a pathway to teach young children about inequality, explaining that:

Because I've felt what it was like to be, like I said earlier, judged because I didn't come from money and when I talk about things with students, sometimes I use that to help them to relate because even if they can't necessarily really specifically relate to whatever topic we might be talking about there's something that most kids can connect to and they can see how they know that doesn't feel good in life or that isn't fair in life; something like the the inequality and pay between genders. And I think that that can help kids [make] connections. In my current school we have about 70% white kids, 27% Latino, and then 3% other. And what I find with the kids is even when I'm teaching about different cultures, they can relate to different things because they understand the connection.

Sarah's narrative is an example of someone who has good intentions can still perpetuate the very marginalization that she claims to oppose. When she discussed the racial demographics of the student body in her school, she made "other" a part of her vocabulary when she referenced students of color. By making this decision she added to their invisibility and their segregation from the majority.

Sid shared an interaction that she had with a Black parent during her first year at the high school at which she teaches. This gateway conversation was at the intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation,

In my classroom, there's a Black Lives Matter flag and a PRIDE flag. And both of those were there [when] I got my classroom. So, I'm new to this classroom this year and they were both there when I got in there. So, like great whatever I work for a district that

claims to affirm all of those things. I had a meeting with a parent, a black parent. And it was like a big team meeting. And after the team left, she called me aside and was like, 'I see these flags in your classroom and I just want to tell you that I don't agree. And I don't want my student to be taught these things.' She was really focused on him not being indoctrinated to be gay. But she also like, 'I believe that all lives matter. I think it's really horrible that the white kids in your class have to sit here with this Black Lives Matter sign.' And so, I just simply responded by saying, 'Well, I can tell you a couple things. The first is that these flags were here when I got here. The second is that I do stand behind them and so does the district. And the third is that I will teach your children what these flags mean. I will give them context. But at the end of the day, I can't control what you say to them at home.' I wanted to give [the parent] the autonomy to teach her student what she thought was right [without] giving into what is in my opinion, kind of hateful thinking, especially towards the LGBTQ community. She said some things that were not great. And just like I feel the responsibility, especially with students with special needs, to really provide the information to them because I think a lot of times, they get looked over because of their ability level. And people think like, 'Oh, well, we really, you know, we gotta focus on reading because they're at a low reading level.' And yes, we do need to focus on reading, but we can also learn about life.' I've had [the conversation] with students, but I hadn't quite had it with a parent yet, so it was interesting to confront that and, in a district, where I felt like I was good to go [supported]. I also felt very confident in giving my answer because my answer doesn't change right? Like, no matter what you feel, I'm still going to give this information to your student because they deserve to know about the world and if they were in a gen ed classroom they would.

Embedded in Sid's answer is intersectional motivation, a desire to teach her students more than reading, and a sense of obligation. Eleanor was the only participant who did not express a desire or need to teach other people about antiracism. Instead, she shared a story in which she felt that the political environment prohibited her from conducting her classroom in her usual way,

Things really started to shift in America with our [federal] administration and people's viewpoints and just the climate around politics in life in particular the school district I work in. I started to feel like I couldn't do the things I used to do in my classroom. And that made me— I'm still very upset— like I just feel like I— and I do—I have all the right in the world and my [building] administration supports everything I do.

Eleanor was more incensed when she explained the injustice happening to her than when she told the group about her son's teacher sending the racist caption. The way in which she spoke about the situation with her son was tepid and unsure. But, the emotion that she displayed when she spoke about her own situation was heightened and animated.

### ***Protection***

Michelle was motivated by her need to protect children. She spoke about the misalignment of white people's actions and their beliefs,

I move towards pushing to change actions because those are the things that will directly impact a child. Really well-intentioned white folks might have beliefs that don't align with their actions and that is really harmful to kids.... the acceptance of the behavior is harming all kinds of Black and Brown people, children in particular.

She discussed the need to be intentional as teachers in order to protect students, “[Instead of] using the hope and pray method and just kind of think something might happen....you can disrupt it before it gets to the child”.



### *Conditions Conducive for white Educators to Engage in Antiracism*

The participants identified several conditions which made it conducive to practice antiracism. Protection was interlaced throughout many of the responses. Protection thus became a motivation for Michelle but was an important condition for the other participants. As a condition, protection manifested as support and it, too, had various manifestations. These conditions as support included legislative support, administrative support, communal support including family and colleagues, as well as financial support. All of these forms of support were ultimately manners of protection for most of the participants.

### *Systemic Support*

Sarah explained that having systemic support was instrumental to what she teaches her students, but she also identifies multiple conditions that empower her to disrupt racism,

I feel a little bit more knowledgeable about it and a little bit more confident with explaining the reasoning and maybe even supported by, you know, some of the new legislature that protects the teachers for teaching these things. And maybe just with age, I don't care as much about what people think of me. I'm very privileged to be able to not care what my colleagues think about me. I think that I'm more willing to feel uncomfortable.

Michelle stated that administrative support was also important to a teacher's longevity in a district or building,

When you [have an] administrator that creates a safe place for [antiracist] people to push and shove, you might be able to stick somewhere for a little longer if you have someone to protect you.

Ann moved from a rural district to a suburban district after her first year of teaching. She was able to see the evidence that antiracist pedagogy was no longer unique but something that was done beginning with the littlest of learners,

I'm proud of the district I'm in now because you know starting in pre-K, the teachers are teaching antiracist pedagogy. My class is very diverse and to have a white girl raise her hand in front of a class of Black and Brown students and say that we already know that Columbus didn't even discover anything, and it was just like, wow, like, you are 9 or 10 years old and you're already aware of that.

Ann's description also insinuates a hidden fear that she projects onto the white student. She is surprised that the girl raises her hand in a sea of students of color. I did not make this observation until I began writing chapter 4 or it would have been a question that I posed to Ann at the time to understand the significance behind her surprise.

Other types of support offered added levels of security for some of the participants.

Eleanor discussed longevity in a district that provided protection through teacher tenure, "I do feel very comfortable now after spending fifteen years in one district being able to say, 'No this isn't right.' or 'We need to do this.' And yet, perhaps her comfort stems from the way she raised concerns,

I feel like I might not always go about it the exact right way. As far as, I don't know, I guess like, maybe, passive-aggressiveness would be a good way to explain it. So like, for example, I have an administrator [and] we were working closely with [Dr.] Sharroky Hollie. And my administrator just didn't get it and I discussed it with [Dr. Hollie] instead of her. Maybe I could have gone about it in a different way.

If a white person seeks an alternative to address racism in which they prioritize their own protection and, instead, knowingly place the burden onto a person of color to redress it, then they have exhibited the understanding that racism is wrong and should be stopped, but they are not willing to contend with the consequences of their actions. Should be stopped rather than needs to be stopped is what distinguishes Eleanor from the other participants. In both of her narratives in which people of color were involved, Eleanor declined to confront the white person. Instead, she either avoided it altogether as was the case in her son's situation, or she placed the responsibility with the presenter of color. And yet, both situations are memorable and remain with her. Avoiding confrontation may indicate safety for self, protection of social status, preservation of relationships if the person can still be considered nice.

### *Accepting Consequences*

All of the participants described their willingness to change, oppose, and/or question the epistemologies and ontologies of other educators and district leadership. Such challenges resulted in significant consequences for some of the participants. Though faced with adversity, Sarah explained that,

I still do it because it matters that the children know the truth and that they're able to find the truth and they're able to know that everything I hear, even from trusted individuals, isn't always accurate and I need to do my own research.

The other participants differed from Eleanor. They were willing to accept the consequences of their antiracist actions. Michelle, a former teacher, currently owns her own education consulting business and has several employees. She knows the high risks of speaking out and opposing racist practices,

It's doing the right thing, but it can be scary. When you live an antiracist life publicly and privately and if people are aware [and] are really watching you whenever those things come up and that can feel pressure whether that's good pressure or bad pressure. Every contract helps me pay their salary. And so it would be really easy to just decide to not say something.... but that's not being true to who I am.”

Over the course of the focus group, Sarah explained the evolution of her feelings around antiracism starting in her early teaching career,

I wasn't ready for the discomfort and [what] would have come with that or what I thought would come with that. I think there's a certain amount of fear every time you're teaching something that you know in this day and age, and maybe it's more historical as well, but could be considered something that people might be offended by.

She identified some of the experiences that led to hurtful consequences because of her antiracist praxis,

There's a stigma. You know, there's been comments, ‘Well, I bet Sarah has a different opinion about this’ because I'm the one that's going to say, ‘Wait, we should think about this differently.’ So, there's definitely that and I think that is that discomfort for me. My extended family no longer invites us to events, Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving. And that's hurtful. I'm the outcast. But at the same time, it's something I'm not willing to change who I am in order to make them feel better about inviting me.

### ***Communal Support***

Four of the five participants also discussed having communal support among colleagues, family, or friends. Michelle discussed the importance of a support network. Her sister and her sister's wife adopted a Black son. Michelle explained,

[Racism] is not a problem that one person can fix. It takes everybody all the time.

Sometimes when my sister is tired of fighting then that's why we need more than one.

Sometimes it will be me that will say or do something or sometimes that's her wife and so not being isolated, which could be really easy to do, just in life in general, you're trying to raise a family or teach school and all of those things, which goes back to the 'it's not a problem that one person can fix.' But then I just remind myself [I] have good friends.

I'm rarely doing my work alone. While we have diverse backgrounds in terms of gender, sexuality, race, age, socioeconomic, we all—the people who I surround myself with— all believe in social justice and that is helpful. The chosen people that I seek out all have a drive to make an impact. All the small impacts make a difference, even if they might not feel like they're making the huge difference at the moment. Those things sustain me as well.

Ann also said that it was important to her to, “continue to be supported and feel supported by other like-minded individuals and not just people in education, although that's a lot of who my friends are.” Sarah was also able to find communal support both professionally and personally,

Of course, my circle that I keep as well and my family and my friends and the people that I can connect with. Right now, I'm also finishing my master's degree and you know my professors have been wonderful about acknowledging my work as an antiracist teacher and saying this 'You're doing good stuff.'

This emotional validation was important to Sarah. She explained that,

There's a stigma about [speaking out against racism] and so that affects your work life as far as how you feel about your colleagues or even where you work. And there's not always a ton of people that surround you that support that, right?

She expressed gratitude that she had a colleague for mutual professional support,

I've found another teacher— another antiracist teacher— in my district and her and I collaborate, talk, [and] run ideas past one another on a pretty regular basis. So, I have that support right within the school; somebody else who's doing similar work within the school and somebody else who's doing similar work to help motivate me to help keep me going.

The environment in which teachers worked is either conducive to antiracist praxis as Ann discovered, or it can be detrimental to teachers' mental health. Sid explained that doing antiracist work in an environment without support can have deleterious effects on her mental health. To help her through this, she has an agreement with a colleague,

On a very very personal level, it can be really exhausting to fight the fight all the time and to feel like you're the only one doing it and then to be making enemies as you're going through that. So, I have a pact with a colleague, that like, we will fight the good fight as long as we can in one job. And then once we start to, like once it impacts your mental health enough that you're —we both have depression, so contemplating suicide, those kinds of things—then we move. So, like just this last year we both moved [Sid changed buildings, but remained in the district]. We were both in a really dark place, and we had been fighting for a couple years, and we were like, 'All right. Time to move.' So, we moved. And now, I'm refreshed and reenergized to do the right thing and to keep working because I'm in a new position. I'm making new people mad. I think this is how I'm going to be able to sustain, just moving and doing different things.

Sarah and Sid both discussed other forms of support that empower them to engage in antiracism.

Sid told the group that her husband supports her activism,

My running motto ever since this first experience I had teaching is that there's no push back or consequence that's as important to me as doing right by kids. So, I could lose my job, I could get in trouble. And my husband affirms that with me too, so that's really helpful to know that I have that. But yeah, there's nothing that's as important as doing right by kids to me.

Sarah, too, has the support of her husband, among others in her network,

Because I have the family and the friends that I have that have my back and [my] partner who makes more money than I'll ever dream of making as a teacher, you know, somebody who can financially support my family if something were to happen and that allows me to do the kind of work I want to do. I'm very privileged to be able to not care if I do for whatever reason end up losing my job.

Like Sarah, other participants understood that their social position allowed them to leverage their advantage to engage in antiracism. Many of them spoke to this through their perspective of what it meant to be “tired”. Sid said,

It's not fair for [racism] to impact me because I don't walk around with Black skin every day. So that exhaustion piece, like it's not fair for me to feel that exhaustion. It's not fair. I feel like I have to really put that all in perspective for me to maintain that antiracist attitude, like I really have to. We are white and we don't have to walk around every day experiencing this.

Michelle was motivated to do it even when she was tired because she owed it to her own children,

When I think of teaching my children how to be antiracist, I have two white men as children, and how they have an intense responsibility to disrupt racism, sexism on all of

the -isms when they see them. I try...because I have raised my children to articulate and advocate and I expect them to and [I] try to model that for them. I still always try [when] I don't want to say something or I feel too tired to say something. Like, 'Would I behave differently if my children could see what I was doing right now?' And if I could not articulate to them why I did not do it especially if it concerned safety for someone else....That often is the motivation for me to do it so I don't have to come home and say that I didn't speak up today.

Michelle also felt accountable to her employees,

In my professional life, I have employees that I also expect to disrupt racism in our work. If I don't address something I see in a classroom, I know I have to account for why I didn't address something. Or when I do address something, I know people are maybe watching to see how I do that. So I have to talk about how I did it, why I said what I did, and all of that just helps me to be a better antiracist every time the situations come up.

Some of the participants acknowledged that even the brief support that they felt in the focus group for this study was meaningful. Sid explained that "This [focus] group has also made me realize that we're all kind of in that similar boat of like, we're still learning and we're going to be learning endlessly." Ann agreed, "But we're [the focus group members] all willing to educate ourselves further." Sarah concluded,

It's really important to continue to find my people and to surround myself with people. I'm sure we all feel like, wow, these, these are the kind of people. Can you imagine if we were all in one building, right? Like what could we get done? Like, so, I need to— that motivates me. My heart feels good. I know I'm not alone. I know people support what I'm doing.



### *Sustaining Antiracist Work*

Throughout the responses, methods that the educators employed to sustain their work emerged. From continuously learning to surrounding themselves with people with whom to share the burden, Sid, Michelle, Sarah, and Ann were able to garner what they needed to sustain their antiracist praxis.

Near the end of the focus group, which lasted longer than the anticipated two hours, and all but Eleanor remained, the teachers were asked how and why they continue to advocate against racism; what keeps them motivated to continue despite the consequences, When it comes to self-care, Michelle said that breaks are important,

There's the cognitive part that you're not going to have the impact if you don't take a break –whatever that would look like– from antiracist work. Everything that people do can make a difference. It all adds up. One of the other things I think about constantly and professionally and personally is like, ideally, I would love to be able to have an impact on people's hearts, minds, and actions. We all are gonna have biased thoughts that come in because we are socialized to do so. It's [important] to reflect on the accuracy of where that thought is coming from. So, I'm really glad you're doing this research because I hope it will raise more antiracists so they out-number everyone else. Hope sustains me.

Sarah also replied with hope,

I guess why I keep doing it is because I think it's important. Acknowledging the growth that we will continue to do and the mistakes that we'll make along the way. If we can focus on that, for me, it makes it feel more manageable to do that work. The future and the hope and the kids... it's worth it. I still do it because it matters.

Mental health was central to Sid's answer,

It has taught me to live to my values. I tend to be someone that pisses off administrators a lot because I push, and I push and I push and I push which can impact my mental health because then [retaliation] can really come back on to [me]. I think I'm going to be able to sustain [myself by] just moving and doing different things.

Ann, the youngest and newest teacher to the profession concluded,

Just remembering, again, why I'm doing this in the first place, not only as a white educator, but as a white woman who is aware of these things and has been able to hear from so many others' experiences. Again, it's really our job to continue to do this work.

Taking care of themselves, remembering their purpose, and holding onto radical hope sustained these four educators to continue to engage in antiracism.

### **Summary**

There are many motivations for their work and different methods that the educators used to sustain themselves in their advocacy. The need to protect, to educate, and be true to themselves motivated four of the five teachers in the study. Through protection, education, and integrity, Michelle, Sid, Sarah, and Ann manifested a strong sense of responsibility to leverage their racial positioning in society to oppose a system that harms everyone. Some participants approached this from a position in which they centered themselves at times, and other participants approached the work from a place of prioritizing students, even at the risk of their own safety and security. The participants whose identities were tied to the work believed that antiracism was their job. They had expectations that were either intrinsically developed or originated externally. Those participants were more likely to decenter themselves. Michelle had even developed a system of accountability for herself to her own children. In what I observed to

be the inverse, Eleanor admitted that she needed to do better for her family and her students, but she had not yet developed a motive to engage in antiracism that reflected someone other than herself.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

The United States is replete with racism. In the U.S., racism advantages white people at the expense of people of color, particularly Black people. At its core, American society has always been a racist chasm and the deity of anti-blackness. From 2012 to 2024, this country hosted some of the most horrific police brutality that the world had ever seen, though the horror was not new to the Black community. Anti-blackness is reflected in political, economic, and educational institutions throughout the United States. These institutionalized systems were successfully designed to have a chilling effect on any progress toward antiracist change. Despite rampant racism that has existed for centuries, there are white people who actively work to eradicate it. This study attempts to begin to explain the personal motivations of educators who work to reform a system, even dismantle it, from which they benefit.

This research examined the motivations of five white educators who engage in antiracism. The phenomenon of motivation manifests within the relationship of the participants' antiracist praxis to their personal and professional conditions as well as their individual and sometimes shared characteristics. Significantly important, this study shows that when identity and values are imbued, the level of risk that some of these activists were willing to incur increased as their sense of responsibility strengthened. Their work is their identity. This intrinsic

connection motivates most of them to engage in activism despite the high-risk sacrifice to their financial, mental, and social well-being.

### ***Characteristics and Conditions***

There were several characteristics that were identified among the participants. Characteristics such as the willingness to speak out, to experience discomfort, and to think critically were evident among some of the participants. However, the characteristics that seemed to have the most influence and resulted in the strongest motivations were the willingness to question, to continue to learn, to engage in critical reflection, and a strong sense of responsibility with a disposition of concern that was focused more on out-group members than on themselves. None of these characteristics happened in isolation but rather were done in tandem with each other.

My findings are consistent with Kailin's research (1994) and the study done by Case (2012). Kailin's research showed that when white educators had critical self-awareness, applied critical thinking skills, and taught honest pedagogy, they positioned themselves to eliminate, or at the very least decrease, racism in education. Case interviewed members of an organized group of white women who engaged in antiracism. Like the participants in my study, Case found that the women she interviewed were also willing to speak up in both their personal lives and professional environments. Like the examples described by most of the participants in my study, the women in Case's research questioned family members rather than ignore racist remarks, were motivated to teach their students antiracism, and courageously spoke out in their professional settings.

Critical reflection was another important finding that was evident in my research as well as other previous studies (Case, 2012; Ford & Orlandella, 2015; Jemal, 2017). The phenomenon

of critical reflection helps white educators to disrupt thoughts that conflict with antiracism, a disruption that might not otherwise occur if left to the subconscious. Price-Dennis and Sealey-Ruiz call this critical reflection the “archeology of self” (2021, p. 8). This praxis is based upon their theoretical framework, which helps uncover implicit thoughts rooted in racism and brings them to the conscious level to be closely examined, eliminated, or reshaped.

Other studies (Chandler-Ward & Denevi, 2022) concluded that white educators need role models of racially conscious white activists who have engaged in social justice. They also put forth that white people need to feel empowered to practice antiracism. Too often, they argued, white educators are paralyzed by guilt and fear that they will not do things correctly (Chandler-Ward & Denevi, 2022; Ford & Orlandella, 2015). This research is inconsistent with the findings of my study. Guilt, profound fear, and a lack of white role models who engaged in antiracism were not factors that could be concluded from the data gathered.

Michelle, Ann, and Sid discussed the importance of their antiracist role models and noted that none of them were white. Their role models were Black educators whom they encountered as professional educators or learned from in undergraduate school. Eleanor and Sarah were unable to identify any role models. None of the participants identified fear or guilt as a barrier to engaging in antiracism. Instead, they experienced discomfort when they spoke up and interrupted racism, but nevertheless, most of them did it anyway. Furthermore, all of the participants discussed the imperfection of their antiracist praxis. They expected that they would execute this imperfectly at times, and therefore, ongoing learning was critical. There was even a level of excitement to be able to apply the continuity of their learning to do better in the future. The salient conclusion of the different findings for each study is that antiracist role models are very

important for white educators, but the race of the role model is less important. Continual learning is both a vital condition and characteristic of antiracist practitioners.

### *Activism at Any Cost*

McAdam (1986) wrote that those who participated in high-risk activism would have four qualities (a) previous experience engaging in activism, (b) dedicated to the ideology and the cause, (c) being part of a larger group of activists, (d) be untethered from “personal constraints” (p. 71) that would increase the level of risk (i.e. financial security, one’s own well-being). Some of these qualities applied to more than half of the teachers in my study.

Sarah and Sid did not fear losing their incomes because of the financial security that their spouses provided for them. Nor did Sid and Ann have their own children to consider. But all four participants, including Michelle, prioritized the students who were ultimately the beneficiaries of their antiracist praxis. The consequences of antiracist praxis for Michelle, Sid, and Sarah manifested in high-risk costs. To remain true to who she was and to the integrity of the expectations that she set forth for her sons, Michelle was willing to risk financial security for her family. Neither Michelle nor Ann have tenure to protect them, nor financial security should they lose their jobs. Yet, they maintain their activism despite the risk. Sarah was willing to be the “outcast” at work and live with severed family ties. And Sid was willing to fight at the expense of her mental health.

There are two theories that help explain the participants’ willingness to sacrifice mental health, financial security, and/or social connections for those of whom they do not share a biological or socially constructed kinship. Both theories incorporate connections with people unlike themselves. And both theories include values and ideologies as core elements for such kinship.

Kunst et. al (2018) theorized that high-risk activism for members of an out-group happens when ideologies align among them. This theory advances the work of Artis International, a nonprofit organization that uses social science to understand people's motivation to engage in high-risk activism (Atran, 2016). The theoretical framework of Artis International, known as the *Devoted Actor* (Atran, 2016, p. S192), explains that people become activists when they feel morally compelled to engage in advocacy for outgroups because what is happening to outgroups is in opposition to the "sacred values" (Atran, 2016, p. S193) held by activists. Sacred values "are nonnegotiable preferences whose defense compels actions beyond evident reason, that is, regardless of calculable costs and consequences" (Atran, 2016, p. S193) However, it is more than just a clash of ideologies. It is the infusion of one's identity with their values, "people will become willing to protect morally important sacred values through costly sacrifice...particularly when such values are embedded in or fused with group identity, becoming intrinsic to 'Who I am' and 'Who We are'" (Atran, 2016, p. S192). Outgroups, for the purpose of this study, are those with whom the activists do not share a similar racial social construct; for example, white educators who engage in antiracism.

Building upon the theory of the *Devoted Actor*, Kunst et. al explained that "the communality felt with larger, abstract groups is not simply the result of arbitrary social construction and communication, but shaped by the evolved logic of altruism directed towards kin" (Kunst et. al, 2018, p. 3). They identified three conditions for which members of an outgroup would likely engage in high-risk activism, two of which are consistent with the theory explained by Atran (2016), the integration of identity *with* sacred values. The third condition identified was when,

people feel morally obliged to enforce the kinds of relationships and values they endorse. For instance, in the fight for equality against oppression, people are especially likely to support an out-group when the norm is to feel moral outrage about the group's maltreatment (Kunst et. al, 2018, p. 19)

It is this sense of obligation that was axiomatic among four of the participants in the study.

### ***The Impact of Identity***

The findings of my study suggest that the way in which white teachers see themselves may determine how they involve themselves in antiracism. Sarah and Eleanor both self-identified as activists. Sarah repeatedly identified as an antiracist. Eleanor considered herself grounded in social justice activism and took greater pride in her work than exemplified by the other participants.

As explained in Chapter Two, white people are not positioned to determine if they are antiracist. They do not have the ability to observe and measure the impact of their actions to discern if they are contributing to or eliminating racism without the feedback of those who are the targets of racism. There is a danger when white people call themselves antiracists or claim to have the ability to determine who is an antiracist. And yet, as Kunst et al. and Atran postulate, it is this assumed identity that, perhaps, motivates some of them to engage in antiracist praxis, regardless of the cost, and feel an intense responsibility to act according to that identity. Applying an added theory, Critical Race Theory, to both theories of sacred values, it is arguable that each of these theories of motivation to engage in high-risk activism are also rooted in interest convergence; a tenet of critical race theory that explains the alignment of goals between the oppressors and the oppressed. Though Eleanor experienced interest convergence for what she



claimed as activism, she fell short of engaging at a level that posed a high risk to her; neither was she prone to put others before herself.

### ***The Limits of Individual Motivations***

The phenomenon of motivation for Eleanor can be understood using various theories beginning with van Prooijen. Van Prooijen (2013) theorized that there are two motivations for advocacy. He began with the premise that “besides the concern that perceivers themselves are treated fairly, people are also concerned that others are treated fairly.” (Van Prooijen, 2013, p. 60) All of the participants in the focus group demonstrated some level of concern for people outside of themselves, but one participant, Eleanor, remained an outlier from the group.

Van Prooijen’s theory suggests that activists are motivated from one of two positions. One position centers on the individual, and another position is centered on other people. He calls this position “other-oriented motivation” (p. 60). Which position one finds themselves in is dependent upon various factors. One factor is their personality which influences how they decide what is just. Another influence regarding the motivational position depends on the extent one feels the impact of the injustice.

In my study, Eleanor felt strongly when she believed that external pressures prohibited her from teaching social justice and practicing antiracism in her classroom. The roots of white supremacy presented themselves in her entitlement to conduct her classroom as she had always done. Her justification was not grounded in her students or something else outside of herself. It remained centered on her “right,” and this “right”, according to Eleanor, was reinforced by her supervisor(s); perhaps the same supervisor “who just didn’t get it”; with whom she did not have a discussion, but rather passive-aggressively diverted her concerns to the professional development facilitator, who was a person of color.

Eleanor was also reluctant to identify her son's teacher as racist. She would only stipulate that the teacher was "definitely not in a place of an antiracist perspective." She characterized the teacher as "caring" and "loving" and could not comprehend that there may have been "malicious intent" behind the caption. If Eleanor had approached this differently and looked at the impact that this would have on other Black students and their families and approached this from an "other-oriented" perspective, perhaps Eleanor would have been motivated to take different actions such as, at the very least, have a discussion with the teacher. Instead, she prioritized the white teacher. Eleanor chose to discuss the situation with people except with those who could prevent this in the future. The lack of antiracist action is indicative of someone who has not yet actualized antiracism. If it remains at the level of the individual rather than evolving to the systemic level, it will never achieve the necessary social transformations that make a society equal (Aouragh, 2019).

Eleanor's outrage over pressure to cease teaching what she considered to be antiracism in her classroom came from an "egocentric" position (van Prooijen, 2013, p. 61). Nevertheless, the motivation by interest convergence may have positively impacted her students. Van Prooijen explained that people are inherently focused on themselves and to take on another person's perspective requires some modification of the focus on self. The extent to which that modification is made depends upon the level, or intensity, that the self is impacted by the injustice, their personality, and situational environments (van Prooijen, 2013). According to van Prooijen, such variables could be the presence of ingroup members and how one approaches the situation. Do they center themselves, or are they more focused on those who are in the direct line of harm?

In the experiences that Eleanor shared in the study, the intensity of the injustice was observed in differing displays of little emotion when she described the situation that happened to her son compared to the heightened level of emotion that she displayed when she described her rights being threatened through political pressure. The difference in emotional intensity may be explained by van Prooijen's theory, "The implication of this is that in many situations, justice judgments are egocentrically biased, presumably to a larger extent than people realize when they evaluate how fair or unfair a situation is" (2013, p. 61). This may also explain why some white teachers may not oppose the administration nor advocate for their colleagues or students of color. In other words, they may be limited in their ability to take on someone else's perspective and fail to see the far-reaching impacts of racism, which are naturally more difficult to view when the perspectives are those of out-group members (e.g. members of another racial demographic). They may lack the gravity of harm being done to the outgroup. Additionally, it is important to note that,

Individualistic motives for justice thus do not need to be restricted to the egoistic pursuit of tangible outcomes only but may be extended to obtaining nontangible outcomes such as respect and status, as these have implications for a perceiver's own sense of self-worth (Van Prooijen, 2013, p. 62).

The phenomenon of Eleanor's motivation to engage in antiracism in her classroom is also an example of interest convergence, the second tenet of critical race theory. This tenet explains that while the impact of motivation is rooted in the white body, its impact benefits marginalized people (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). From a Black whiteness critical studies perspective, Eleanor's reaction to her son's teacher is an extension of white supremacy. She prioritized her concern for the white teacher over the protection of her own son. A reluctance to acknowledge

racism where racism exists prohibits white people from interceding, even on behalf of their own children. So, there can be no reasonable expectation that they would protect children who are not their own even years after the event.

### ***White Supremacy and The Illusion of Antiracism***

Badenhorst (2021) theorized that the desire for some white people to profusely claim that they are antiracist do so to the extent that their claims never lead to antiracist action, thus avoiding not just antiracism but the consequences of being an antiracist activist. The findings in my study regarding Eleanor show the possible connection between the willingness to accept the consequences that come with antiracist work and Eleanor who has yet to do so. It could be argued that she either does not see or understand racism when it occurs with her own child or places the burden on someone else to address the racism as she did with Dr. Hollie. However, as a Black researcher, I argue that that innocence is false and dangerously impedes antiracist progress.

Eleanor was aware that both situations warranted interventions but was unwilling to engage in direct confrontation. In addition to avoiding this antiracist work, she attempted to create an illusion of antiracism. Such an illusion in which people who self-identify as antiracist and repeatedly invest themselves, also delude themselves while failing to dismantle racism and thereby harm both themselves and those who are harmed by racism (Badenhorst, 2021). Lastly, Eleanor may be characterized as a white person who engages in antiracist work to separate themselves from other white people, thus distinguishing themselves as a good white person who is unlike other white people (Badenhorst, 2021). Because interest convergence is part of the phenomenon of motivation for Eleanor, had she understood the impact of racism on herself, perhaps she would have taken a different course of action when these situations presented

themselves. This understanding may trigger emotive responses within her, thus activating her affective domain (Perry & Shotwell, 2009).

Perry and Shotwell (2009) have identified three factors for people to be able to actualize antiracism. They must a) experience ongoing critical awareness, b) understand their position in society, c) experience compassion, and d) have accountability. Out of these four elements, Eleanor manifested only compassion. While a two-hour focus group will never ascertain all of the information about its participants, the other participants encapsulated at least three of the four factors identified by Perry and Shotwell, with only Michelle and Sid articulating manners of accountability.

Black Americans, particularly those of whom are the descendants of enslaved people, have a unique ability to understand our social position as well as how white people view that position (Dubois, 2014; Fanon, 2008). White people are unable to develop this double or third-person consciousness just as they are unable to experience racism. Therefore, they are not positioned to determine what qualifies as antiracism independent of the collaboration with groups who do. And yet, this lack of insight does not prohibit some white educators from labeling themselves as antiracists or making the egregious assumption that they can apply that identity to other white people. This phenomenon occurred when I was asked about my dissertation, and I responded to their questions regarding who would be eligible to participate.

At the time that I began my doctoral journey, many of my colleagues were white female academics, most of whom were professors in teacher preparation programs or graduate programs for K-12 educators. When some of them learned that my study was focused on the motivations of white antiracist K-12 educators, they offered to connect me with people who they deemed to be eligible for the study. In this context, they positioned themselves as antiracist experts. They

assumed that they were equally as qualified as I was if not more so, to determine which white educators were antiracists. This brings me back to the work done by Brown and Ostrove (2013), which was discussed in Chapter Two. White people's views of themselves do not necessarily align with the observations and assessments by people of color.

### *Recommendations for Future Studies*

The aim of my study was to begin to address the problem that Roberts and Rizzo (2021) identified that “the psychology of American antiracism is comparatively lacking, particularly among white Americans” (p. 484). My goal was to provide insight as to why there are white educators who speak out and oppose a system from which they benefit and for which they may not find support from friends and colleagues. I wanted to begin to answer the question asked by Roberts and Rizzo, “How can individuals and collectives be mobilized toward antiracism in their everyday lives?” (p. 484). Though my study is small, it contributes to the existing literature and identified some motivations that a few teachers have to practice antiracism even though the calculated costs were significant. Future research should continue to explore how more white educators can be mobilized to engage in antiracist praxis when the education system is resistant to change, particularly for children who were never meant to be included.

White supremacy impedes progress. Questions such as these can help guide future research and considerations for programs and institutions who want their work to reflect antiracism, “If one has never experienced racism, how does one determine antiracism?” “What makes white people, particularly those with the most formal amount of education, self-identify as experts in a realm in which they are members of the oppressor group without questioning their decision to self-proclaim authority in antiracism?” “What messages are they unconsciously sending to their students, aspiring educators, about racialized power dynamics?” “How does this

translate when the students go into classrooms and teach their young scholars?” “What, if anything, are faculty doing to impede whiteness and racial hegemony to compensate for an absent critical consciousness?” The answers to these questions require courage, critical reflective praxis, progress monitoring, and a willingness to pivot, when necessary, especially as educators are produced to teach in a country that refuses to address its racist legacies.

Future studies should include analyses of cultural institutions rooted in white supremacy, such as the military and Christianity, and their continued role to influence Americans to remain silent and follow orders. When people are discouraged from speaking out against or questioning powerful entities, they learn that challenging authority is wrong and complacency and duty, as defined by such institutions, are rewarded. What will it take for people who have never experienced racial oppression, who are conditioned to believe that they are superior and taught never to challenge power, to learn the importance of diverse collectivism, which is essential to global survival? Can they be taught to take on the perspective of outgroups, even outgroups they have been conditioned to fear, distrust, and oppress? If research focuses more on intersectionality, will antiracism become a core value? How do we leverage cultural epistemologies to transform racist thought?

Other research considerations follow: A longitudinal study should be considered to reconvene the members of this focus group a decade from now and see what changes, if any, have occurred and what precipitated those changes. While qualitative studies result in correlation results, is there a way to determine the causation for antiracist educators and center teacher preparation programs and other professional industries around it? This study was small, and all of the participants identified as women. What results would a mixed-gender study produce?

### ***Limitations***

There are several limitations of this study. One limitation is the sample size. With no more than five participants, it is not representative of more than those interviewed. Another limitation was that each person's experience was unique to themselves. Therefore, the experiences of the participants are not a universal theme. At most, this critical phenomenological study shows a correlation between experiences, motivations, and a shift to antiracist praxis, but it is not possible to prove universal causation. Another limitation was identified more than a century ago. William James, an American philosopher, wrote, "...neither the whole of truth nor the whole of good is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position from which he stands" (James, 1912, p. 46). Therefore, the findings of this study reflect only a portion of the experiences of the participants.

Critical phenomenology, a close relation to hermeneutic phenomenology, does not require the researcher to bracket or even finds it possible (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009). Undoubtedly my lived experience as a cis-gender woman of African, Meskwaki, and Russian-German Jewish descent, as well as being a mother, filters in conscious and unconscious bias despite my best efforts, "As we must situate and contextualize our research endeavors, we must also admit that we *ourselves* are socially, historically, and contextually situated" (Usher, 2018, p. 141). In addition, I know some of the participants outside of the study, which allowed me to determine whether or not they live antiracism. There is always potential for bias when working with people one knows professionally and/or personally. When necessary, I contacted other people of color I knew to help me recruit participants for this study. I relied on them to refer educators who engaged in antiracism at a similar level as the participants that I personally knew. It was evident in the responses of the participants in the study that there was a difference



between those who practiced antiracism and that of the participant who worked to become engaged in antiracism.

Lastly, a limitation of this study is the result of participating in a dissertation process rooted in white culture that promotes individualism rather than collectivism. The most novice of researchers are required to independently conduct research when they require the most support. This is nonsensical. At no other time are they expected to conduct research alone, including when they have more experience, more knowledge, and more opportunity to refine their critical thinking and analysis. There is nothing that mandates this process to exist in this manner, except for the Eurocentric tradition that has existed since at least the 1600s (Zambonin, n.d.). I implore those who impose such unevolved practices to the detriment of advancement in research and scholarship, particularly practices which stem from hegemonic eurocentricity, to reconsider this and, instead, revolutionize a system that reflects collectivism over individuality. For as the African proverb explains, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

### ***Implications of the Study***

The implications of this study lend insight into the antiracist motivations of some white educators. It informs us that there are K-12 educators who understand their societal position and the racial power afforded them by historical and current political, educational, judicial, and economic policies and practices. With critical reflection, mentorship, explicit instruction, well-established expectations, and accountability, white teachers can understand how they have been socialized to be racist and have the ability to disrupt their thoughts to be the leaders that all students need them to be.

White educators can leverage their placement in the racial hierarchy to teach antiracist pedagogy, advocate for, and protect Black and Brown students without crossing over to

saviorism. If the expectations are set for educators to question and speak out against racist practices, if they truly wish to teach, they will educate colleagues, parents, clients, and students and rise to the challenge. Antiracist role models are helpful, but they do not need to be members of the same racial construct, and perhaps, it is even more powerful when the role models, the mentors, are people of color. As soon as these expectations are set, even aspiring teachers, like all students, will rise to meet those expectations despite experiencing discomfort, especially if accountability is present. There are white teachers who are willing to accept the consequences of their antiracist praxis and risk their incomes, their social networks, including familial ties, and their mental health to transform a nation in desperate need of change. If systems are demolished and rebuilt to reflect the values of those who engage in antiracism, there will be no need to engage in high-risk activism. It really is their job, but a job that cannot be done without the insight, mentorship, and leadership of people of color, particularly Black people, if antiblackness is to be marginalized.

### **Conclusion**

Tacit and formal education are the cornerstone of society and a microcosm of it. The United States is replete with racism. It is no coincidence that white teachers make up an overwhelming majority of the teaching profession in the United States. Students of color are the majority student population in public schools which is also not a coincidental statistic. The educational system has the power to transform or maintain; to create or abolish, to harm or to heal. Inspired by the questions posed by Dr. Bettina Love (2023), the question for teachers and other educational leaders is not: Do you love all children? The question is: Will you fight for them? And for how long? Until you tire or until the work is done? The education system is slow to evolve and is resistant to change. But it is not immune to it.

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## Appendix A

### *Semi-structured Interview*

#### *Qualtrics Questions:*

- What is your first and last name?
- Please choose a pseudonym for yourself.
- How do you self-identify related to gender and race?
  - What other identities, if any, are important to you that you would like to share?
- Where did you grow up?
  - What kind of community was this at the time, rural, suburban, or urban?
- Who made up your family?
- Did you attend church growing up? If yes, what religion did you consider yourself?
- What political affiliation(s), if any, did your family have while you were growing up?
- Where do you live now? Is it rural, suburban, or urban?
- If you currently teach, where do you teach? Is this
- How many years did you or have you taught in K-12?
  - What do/did you teach?
  - If you aren't teaching any longer, what kind of work do you do? Is this related to antiracism? If so, how so?
    - If you no longer teach in the K-12 system, what made you decide to leave K-12 teaching, but continue to live antiracism?
- What is your highest level of education?
  - Where did you attend school growing up?

- From what kind of high school did you graduate (traditional, charter, homeschool, etc.)?
- Where did you go to college? Why did you choose that college?
- If you have post collegiate education, where did you go and why did you go there?
- What is your current family structure? Who do you live with at least 50% of the time?
- Do you consider yourself religious, if so, with what religion are you affiliated?
- Are you affiliated with a political party?
  - Do you vote? Why or why not?
- What has influenced your motivations to be an antiracist educator? Which influences do you consider to be the most important and/or the most powerful?

***Focus Group Questions:***

- Why did you want to become a teacher?
- Is diversity important to you? Why or why not?
  - Has this changed during your lifetime?
- Did politics and religion, or lack thereof, influence your belief system around race, racism, and/or antiracism? If so, how so?
- What place does race/racism/antiracism have in your life and how does it impact you, if at all?
  - How do you think your gender and race contribute to how you experience race/racism/antiracism?
- When did you first realize (you were white, your first encounter with race, racism was real, etc.)? How did that affect/effect you?

- Are you aware of ways in which you might benefit from the status quo?
  - What makes you not complacent with the current system?
- Why do you care about antiracism?
  - Does this show up for you in your life including your work as a teacher? If so, how so?
- Will you share your experience becoming an antiracist educator? Did you see or have a relationship with white people who you consider to be antiracist role models? If so, how did this impact you? Please describe your experience becoming an antiracist educator and what motivated/motivates you to do this?
  - If you didn't have white antiracist role models, please share your experience becoming an antiracist educator and how did you learn to do this? What motivated/motivates you to do this?
- Are there societal inequities that motivate you to be antiracist? If so, what are they?
- What motivates you to continue to do antiracist work?
- How does living an antiracist life impact you?
- How do you sustain yourself in this lifestyle?
- Is there anything that you would like to share that you haven't been asked or shared yet?

Probing questions help the researcher get clarity from the participants as well as confirmation.

**From McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 35:**

Examples of probing questions include:

- Tell me more about...
- How did that make you feel?
- What were you thinking at that point? Describe the environment.

- What time of day was it?
- Who else was there?
- What did you do?

## Appendix B

Valandra, V. (2012)

***Reflexive questions to consider before and during the focus group:***

1. How do my life experiences shape the implementation of this study?
2. How do I experience myself in relation to the community from which I would like to invite members to participate in my study?
3. Who are the cultural brokers of this community and what is my relationship and access to them?
4. What potential power dynamics are relevant to reflect upon and/or to address?
5. How does the study participant understand the purpose of the study?
6. How do the study participants demonstrate verbally and nonverbally an understanding of why I am talking to them?
7. What motivates the participant to talk to me?
8. In what ways can what I disclose about myself potentially influence what study participants share or not share about themselves?
9. What am I noticing about study participants' communication patterns?
10. What kind of information do study participants share about themselves without solicitation from me?
11. What do study participants share before and after the formal interview/study begins and ends?

***During Analysis and Results phases:***

1. How do my social demographics shape my interpretation of the data collected?
2. How can I privilege participants' voices in the construction of new knowledge?

3. Whose stories are represented?
4. Whose voices are missing?
5. In what ways did my presence influence the participants' responses?
6. In what ways am I invested in the study's findings?
7. How does my investment in the study influence my interpretations and presentation of findings?
8. What audiences might benefit or be harmed by the study's findings?
9. How does my relationship to the analytic tool shape the analysis and findings?
10. How did participants' responses after the formal interview influence my interpretations of their stories?