White Feminists and Antiracism in Higher Education:
"A Journey of Learning and Unlearning and Relearning"

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ABSTRACT

Nationally, deep divisiveness around issues of sociopolitical identity, particularly race and ethnicity, has increased the urgency for systemic organizational change around diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in higher education (Chun & Evans, 2018). Overt and covert acts of race-based oppression directly impact the morale, safety, and success of college and university students from global majority populations. A transformative agenda geared towards the intentional and sustainable reform of U.S. educational systems and structures must have at its core an antiracist framework. This interpretive phenomenological case study explored the stories and experiences of a group of eight White feminist-identified campus-based women's and gender equity center (WGEC) practitioners participating in a White affinity group, with the goal of advancing their antiracist feminist practice within their personal lives and at their respective institutions of higher education.

Through individual interviews, a focus group, and written reflections, participants discussed ways in which action for racial justice intersects with their feminist praxis; shared examples of structural and individual factors that they felt either encouraged or prevented them from pursuing antiracist feminist allyship; and articulated how participation in a race-based affinity group had impacted their perceptions of their antiracist allyship development.

An analysis of the findings of this study revealed insights that provide a compelling case for the development of White affinity groups as a strategy for challenging racism in higher education, as well as contributing to a greater understanding of the allyship development process of White antiracist feminists.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

DEDICATION vi

LIST OF TABLES xi

LIST OF FIGURES xii

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS xiii

TYPOGRAPHICAL NOTE xvii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1
- Background 1
- Statement of the Problem 5
- Purpose of the Study and Research Questions 11
- Significance of the Study 12
- Researcher Identity and Positionality 12
- Organization of the Dissertation 16

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 19
- Institutions of Higher Education as Structures of White Supremacy 20
- Critical Race Theory 23
  - The Permanence of Racism 25
  - Interest Convergence 27
  - Intersectionality 28
  - Critical Race Theory in Education 29
- A Brief History of U.S. Feminism 31
  - Challenging White Feminism 35
- Theoretical Frameworks for the Study 37
  - Critical Race Feminism 37
    - Intersectional Feminism 40
    - Antiracist Feminism 40

Critical White Studies 43
White Normativity 44
White Privilege 46
White Supremacy 48
White Hegemony 50
Developing Racial Consciousness 52
White Racial Identity Development 53
Allyship Development 55
Racial Justice Allyship 56
Communities of Practice 58
Race-based Caucuses 60
Chapter Summary 62

CHAPTER 3: METHODS 64
Qualitative Research 64
Research Paradigm 66
Ontology 68
Epistemology 69
Theoretical Frameworks 70
Research Design: Case Study 70
Context for the Study 72
Participants 79
Invitation to Collaborate 80
Data Collection 83
Interviews 83
Focus Group 86
Written Reflections 87
Data Analysis 87
Criteria for Trustworthiness 89
Chapter Summary 91

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
WHITE FEMINISTS AND ANTIRACISM 93
White Feminist Women and Antiracism....................94
Alex....................95
Anne....................98
Claire....................101
Emily....................103
Martina....................107
Olivia....................110
Rebecca....................112
Susan....................115
Themes From the Data....................118
Theme 1: Intersectionality 118
Theme 2: The Influence of Women of Color Feminisms on Antiracist Practice 125
Theme 3: Decentering Whiteness 128
Chapter Summary 132

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
BARRIERS, INCENTIVES, AND THE JOURNEY TO ANTIRACISM....................134
Barriers and Incentives to Antiracist Allyship....................134
Systemic/Structural Barriers 135
White Dominance and the Invisibility of Racism....................136
Early Experiences 136
Societal Norms....................140
Institutional Moments 143
Intrinsic/Individual Barriers....................154
Theme 1: Preserving Relationships with Other White People....................155
Family Experiences....................156
Societal Norms....................157
Institutional Moments 159
Theme 2: Fear and Guilt 161

Early Experiences 161
Societal Norms 163
Institutional Moments 163
Theme 3: Exhaustion/Burnout 164
Intrinsic/Individual Incentives 167
Theme 1: Cultivating Relationships 168
Theme 2: Education 173
Theme 3: Being a “Good White Person” 177
The Impact of a White Affinity Group 181
Theme 1: Reinforcing Accountability 182
Theme 2: The Importance of a Community of Antiracist Practice 188
Theme 3: Supporting Self-Work 192
Chapter Summary 195

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS 198
Implications of the Study 198
Implications for Practice 201
Implications for Scholars 204
Limitations 206
Directions for Future Research 208
Final Reflections 211

REFERENCES 215

APPENDICES
Appendix A: Sample Agenda for White Accountability Group Meeting 242
Appendix B: Recruitment Email 244
Appendix C: Participant Demographics Form 245
Appendix D: Informed Consent Form 246
Appendix E: Interview Protocol 250
Appendix F: Prompts for Written Reflections 253

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participant Demographics 80

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Study 20
Figure 2. Model of Antiracist White Feminist Activism (Linder, 2015) 57
Figure 3. Conceptual Model of an Antiracism Caucus (JustLead Washington, 2019) 61
Figure 4. The Ladder of Empowerment (Okun, 2006) 76
Figure 5. Characteristics of Participants' Antiracist Feminist Praxis 94
Figure 6. Systemic/Structural Barriers to Participants' Antiracist Action 135
Figure 7. Intrinsic/Individual Barriers to Participants' Antiracist Action 155
Figure 8. Intrinsic/Individual Incentives to Participants' Antiracist Action 168
Figure 9. Impacts of Caucusing on Participants' Antiracist Action 182

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Kendi (2019) discusses the importance of providing clear definitions of terms in order to facilitate common understanding of the language used in antiracism work. Below, I provide a brief description of select terminology used in this dissertation. Some key terms not included in this glossary are defined elsewhere in the paper.

Ally – An ally acknowledges the benefits they receive from membership in a dominant group and takes action to challenge systems of injustice that privilege certain sociocultural groups over others (Bishop, 2002). Racial justice allies are “Whites who are actively working to end racism and racial oppression” (Reason et al., 2005, p. 530).

Antiracism – Scholars have outlined a number of definitions of antiracism. Bonnett (2000) defines antiracism as “those forms of thought and/or practice that seek to confront, eradicate and/or ameliorate racism. Antiracism implies the ability to identify a phenomenon—racism—and to do something about it” (p. 3). Kendi (2019) argues that antiracism necessarily involves action, emphasizing that an antiracist is someone “who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea” (p. 13).

Color-blind ideology – The idea that race no longer poses an obstacle to social and economic success in the U.S., color-blindness is used by White Americans to defend White supremacy and to deny and downplay continuing racial inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2014).

Eurowestern – Originating from “the West,” that is, schools of thought from countries with developed economies predominantly populated by White Europeans or their colonists.

Feminism – Feminism is a broad range of sociopolitical and cultural movements and ideologies whose goals are to define and establish political, economic, and social equality for people of all genders. Individuals engaged in activism for gender justice describe feminism in

a multitude of ways. The definition that resonates most closely with my own understanding and practice of feminism is offered by bell hooks, who declared feminism “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (hooks, 1984, p. xii).

Global majority – A collective term for racial and ethnic groups that comprise up to 85% of the world’s population, this term challenges the deficit narratives and racial subordination that exist around terms such as “minority” and “underrepresented,” commonly used to describe “people who are Black, African, Asian, Brown, Arab, and mixed-heritage, are indigenous to the global south, and/or have been racialised as ‘ethnic minorities’” (Campbell-Stephens, 2021, p. 7).

Individual racism – The “beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism” (Wijeyesinghe et al., 1997, p. 89).

Institutional racism – The “patterns, procedures, practices, and policies that operate within social institutions so as to consistently penalize, disadvantage, and exploit individuals who are members of racial minority groups” (Better, 2008, p. 11).

Oppression – The exercise of structural power that devalues the work, experiences and voices of individuals due to their membership in a marginalized social group/s (Frye, 1983).

Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) – Institutions of higher education in which Whites comprise more than 50% of the student population, and which are steeped in the historical context of racially segregated education in the U.S. (Lomotey, 2010).

Privilege – An individual’s unearned access to certain advantages and benefits conferred by virtue of their membership in a particular social identity group or groups (McIntosh, 1988).

Race – An artificial social construct created to sustain racism, the domination of one racial group over others (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2014, 2015). In the U.S., White supremacy, the

ideology that positions the White racial category as dominant and normative, and White people as racially superior, is sustained and operationalized through systems and structures that often subjugate and dehumanize people of color (Frankenberg, 1997).

Race neutrality – The attempt to address racial disparities without directly targeting benefits to racial minority group members (Myers & Ha, 2018). Kendi (2019) denies the existence of race neutrality, asserting that "There is no such thing as a nonracist or race-neutral policy. Every policy in every institution in every community in every nation is producing or sustaining either racial inequity or equity between racial groups" (p. 18).

Racial paternalism – The view that communities in developing countries are unable to progress without the assistance of White, Western benefactors (Easterly, 2006).

Racism – The "pervasive, deep-rooted, and long-standing exploitation, control, and violence directed at people of color" (Kivel, 2017, p.13). Racism is characterized by an unequal and unjust distribution of power, privilege, wealth, opportunities, and resources that benefits White people and oppresses people of color. It is operationalized on four different levels of societal interaction: interpersonal, institutional, structural, and cultural, creating a matrix of domination and exploitation that situates White people in positions of power, and disenfranchises people of color. Kendi (2019) defines racism as "a powerful collection of racist policies that lead to racial inequity and are substantiated by racist ideas" (p. 20). As emphasized in the definition of *Antiracism* above, "being an antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination (p. 23).

Systemic racism – The racialized character, structure, and development of U.S. society, resulting in racial oppression that is systemic across all major institutions (Feagin, 2006).

White saviorism – The “confluence of practices, processes, and institutions that reify historical inequities to ultimately validate white privilege” (Anderson, 2013, p. 39). A White savior is someone who receives emotional rewards and external accolades for making a difference in the lives of oppressed communities of color.

Whiteness – A cultural location and sociopolitical construction of power that allows White people to assert superiority over those who are not White (Gusa, 2010).

TYPOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The National Association of Black Journalists, in their *Statement on Capitalizing Black and Other Racial Identifiers* (June 2020), recommends that whenever a color is used to describe race, it should be capitalized, including Black, White, and Brown. In this dissertation, I have followed this recommendation, capitalizing White to be consistent with references to other racial and ethnic groups. When quoting or paraphrasing an author, I have reverted to their original usage.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study examined the experiences of a group of White feminist campus-based women's and gender equity center (WGEC) colleagues in the U.S. participating in an online community of antiracist practice. For the past 18 months, I have been the co-convener of a small group of White WGEC practitioners that has been meeting every other week over Zoom to explore, in community, our individual and collective socialization as White people working for gender equity in higher education. Our practice is rooted in a commitment to critical examination of our own internalized racial dominance and superiority; in connecting with and supporting each other in our racial equity journeys; in learning how to develop and nurture authentic relationships for meaningful and productive allyship with students and colleagues of color; and in supporting each other to challenge the personal, institutional, and structural dynamics that allow racism and White supremacy to flourish in both our professional and personal environments. Each of the participants in this study considers themselves to be on an intentional journey of antiracism and allyship for racial justice. Our group process has provided critical insight to moments of struggle and vulnerability, cycles of unlearning and relearning, and deep self-reflection. We have spent many hours engaging in and debriefing uncomfortable conversations around race. And our work continues.

Background

Nationally, deep divisiveness around issues of sociopolitical identity, particularly race and ethnicity, has increased the urgency for systemic organizational change around diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in higher education (Chun & Evans, 2018). Overt and covert acts of race-based oppression directly impact the morale, safety, and success of

college and university students from global majority populations[1]. Highly public acts of violence against people of color—especially Black people—garnering national attention, such as the brutal murders in 2020 of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and many others, have exposed a longstanding culture of violence towards people of color in the United States. Institutions of higher education, which represent a microcosm of U.S. society, have also seen a significant uptick in race-related tensions and unrest (Museus et al., 2015). Data from the FBI reveals that incidents of bias-inspired hate crimes on college campuses are on the rise (Bauman, 2018), and in the last decade, highly publicized acts of racism such as those at the University of Missouri and the University of Virginia have underscored the urgency for colleges and universities to take swift and concrete action to ensure the safety and well-being of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. White professionals in higher education, who typically have always disproportionately occupied positions of leadership and power within those institutions, are positioned to respond proactively to the ongoing waves of racism engulfing our nation. The necessity of this work is increasingly urgent as the racial and ethnic demographics of the U.S. continue to shift, and education professionals—particularly those working in social justice fields—face mounting pressure from students and colleagues of color to work intentionally towards creating safer and more equitable learning environments.

Despite the exclusionary policies and practices embedded in our educational institutions, the demographics of U.S. college and university populations are shifting rapidly,

[1] The term *global majority* challenges the minority status attributed to Black and other marginalized groups, proposing "a psychological cognitive resetting… to permanently frame conversations about race, equity, community, and leadership, from a majority, post-colonial mindset" (Campbell-Stephens, 2021, p. 10). Using this term centers those whose racial and ethnic identity groups constitute up to 85% of the world's population, rather than accepting the colonizing narratives of White domination imposed by racial hierarchies.

and institutions of higher education are enrolling increasing numbers of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Grawe, 2019; U.S. Dept. of Education, 2016; Moriña et al., 2015). The National Center for Education Statistics reports that the U.S. resident undergraduate enrollment for Fall 2020 in four-year degree-granting postsecondary public institutions comprised the following racial and ethnic demographics: 54% White, 21% Latinx, 11% Black, 8% Asian, 1% Native American, >1% Peoples of Oceania, and 5% identifying with two or more races (NCES, 2022). The student body in higher education reflects the increasing demographic diversity of the United States, which is estimated by 2044 to be a global majority nation, in which no racial or ethnic group will comprise a majority population (Chun & Evans, 2018). These students bring unique backgrounds, perspectives, experiences, and learning needs to the landscape of higher education. Structural racism deeply embedded in the fabric and function of most colleges and universities creates persistent barriers for students of color in a multitude of forms: for example, high-stakes standardized testing perpetuates the myths of meritocracy and racial differences in intelligence (Au, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995); the declining affordability of higher education drastically limits the ability of many low-income students, including students of color, to pay for a college degree (Museus et al., 2015); the underrepresentation of faculty of color at institutions of higher education (NCES, 2021) and service burnout caused by the phenomenon of cultural taxation (Padilla, 1994) potentially limits students' access to mentors who understand and can empathize with their racialized experiences; and prejudice and harassment in the form of racial profiling, bullying, slurs, and systematic exclusion by White students, staff, and faculty can cause marginalization and isolation (Museus et al., 2015).

As administrators of colleges and universities become more attuned to the race-based oppression occurring on their campuses, the tendency has been to move towards developing more diversity initiatives and support for global majority populations as a solution, instead of focusing on the hegemony of Whiteness (Cabrera et al., 2017). Hegemonic Whiteness (Hughey, 2009) is the power dynamic that presents Whiteness and its associated norms and practices as standard and desirable. In higher education, this creates and sustains systems and structures that advantage and privilege White students, staff, and faculty, and disadvantage and marginalize constituents of color. Focusing energy on developing diversity and inclusion initiatives, rather than examining the problematic ways in which higher education policies and practices privilege Whiteness and exclude and marginalize students and employees of color, results in often superficial “box-checking” efforts by institutions of higher education. Rather than tackling the historical and contemporary racism embedded in educational institutions, colleges and universities often promote largely performative efforts to infuse diversity and multiculturalism into academic spaces by “enhancing” the curricula with limited and underfunded course offerings, developing unenforceable institutional policies of tolerance and inclusion, and pushing (often ineffectual) mandatory diversity training for faculty and staff. Successfully creating the conditions for more inclusive and equitable teaching and learning environments in higher education necessarily involves prioritizing an intentional dismantling of White supremacy in the academy. This includes the thoughtful and well-supported diversification of curricular and co-curricular offerings, including promoting academic scholarship that emphasizes the importance of decolonizing traditional Eurowestern-centric research and teaching practices; the transformation of classroom instruction through culturally relevant pedagogy; the development of intentional and enforceable anti-discrimination

policies; and scaffolded diversity training efforts for faculty, staff, and students that provide opportunities for the development of individual racial consciousness. When deployed intentionally and systemically, these actions have the potential to meaningfully contribute to an equitable transformation of the higher education landscape.

Statement of the Problem

Like most student support units and offices at institutions of higher education, women's and gender equity centers (WGECs) have typically been structured to support the learning, and social and emotional needs, of White constituents. The vast majority of WGECs in the U.S. are located at PWIs—their professional staff are usually White, and their programs and services, and even their layout and décor, are largely geared towards the interests and comfort of White students (Salsbury & MillerMacPhee, 2019). Given that race-based discrimination and marginalization is deeply entrenched within the inner workings of institutions of higher education (Cabrera, 2009) and racism has generated and supported the overrepresentation of White students, staff, and faculty on university and college campuses, there is need to understand how and in what ways White staff working in professional diversity and inclusion roles are engaged in addressing racism. The dominance of Whiteness within the culture and climate of institutions of higher education creates alienating and often unsafe environments for individuals from global majority populations, in addition to exacerbating challenges to academic and professional opportunity (Cabrera et al., 2017; Gusa, 2010). A transformative agenda geared towards the intentional and sustainable reform of U.S. educational systems and structures must have at its core an antiracist framework.

Largely founded in the late 1960s and early 1970s to support women-identified students and advance gender equity at colleges and universities, campus-based women's and

gender equity centers (WGECs) are usually accessed by and most frequently serve White students. The philosophical foundations of WGECs and the educational frameworks they promote are usually guided by mainstream (White) feminist values, which have a deeply troubled history of racism. Feminists of color have long criticized the women's rights movement in the U.S. for being elitist, exclusionary, and dominated by the interests of White middle-class women (Zakaria, 2021; Hamad, 2020; Collins, 1990; Lorde, 1984; hooks, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). For decades, the chronological evolution of U.S. women's history, shared and taught through the metaphor of "waves," has focused almost entirely on the experiences, challenges, and triumphs of White feminists (Thompson, 2002). This compartmentalization of women's history has been criticized for ignoring the efforts of women globally prior to the mid-1800s to challenge patriarchal norms, and for crediting the origins of feminism in the West to White middle-to-upper class women (Deliovsky, 2020).

The first wave of feminism, which began in the mid-1800s and lasted into the early part of the twentieth century, documented the struggle for women's suffrage, often highlighting the wealthy White activists in the movement and neglecting to honor the contributions of many women of color fighting alongside them (Terborg-Penn, 2000). Even early in the suffrage movement, women's rights activist and slavery abolitionist Sojourner Truth lamented the lack of inclusion of women of color in her impassioned speech, "Ain't I a Woman?" at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in 1851, and the stories of other prominent suffragists of color remain largely untold to this day. The second wave, which officially began in the late 1960s with the emergence of the women's liberation movement and lasted until the early 1980s, challenged the traditional structure of gender roles, criticized women's relegation to the domestic realm and promoted their increased participation in the

workforce, and advocated for women's leadership in social and political activism (Baxandall & Gordon, 2008). Again, retellings of this era of women's history have traditionally focused on the experiences and achievements of White activists. In the early-mid 1970s, a number of feminist organizations led by Black women began to emerge in direct response to the marginalization of women of color by the mainstream feminist movement (Thompson, 2002). As mentioned, feminists of color have written extensively about the ways in which their lived experiences and contributions had been effectively erased by the mainstream feminist movement, which promoted an essentialist view of womanhood illustrated primarily with examples from White middle-class, heterosexual women's experiences (Hunter, 1996).

When White feminists fail to recognize the ways in which their Whiteness has impacted their socialization and how the mainstream feminist movement has historically promoted the exclusion of women of color, they alienate women of color from the spaces where they gather. It is hardly surprising, then, that campus-based WGECs are often regarded as very White spaces, promoting a "brand" of feminism to which women of color cannot relate (DiLapi & Gay, 2002; Marine, 2011). Creating optimal conditions to examine and engage in activism for gender equality necessarily involves understanding how other forms of identity-based oppression impact gender, and attending to those simultaneously (Zinn & Dill, 2003). Developing greater awareness of the way in which race impacts the marginalization of women of color and engaging in the pursuit of an intentional antiracist practice is critical for addressing a dismantling of both sexism and White supremacy within institutions of higher education.

WGECs on college and university campuses vary significantly in their structural location and reporting line within the institution (Goettsch et al., 2019). Some centers are

located in student affairs divisions; other centers fall under academic affairs or in equity and diversity units, and some are part of counseling services. The institutional location of WGECs sometimes has a bearing on the professional association with which their employees choose to affiliate. Most student affairs-based organizations do not have significant representation of WGEC staff among their members. A few, such as College Student Educators International (ACPA, formerly known as the American College Personnel Association) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) have small constituencies of WGEC personnel, but because many WGECs are closely connected to academic women's, gender, and sexuality studies (WGSS) programs, the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) has long been the primary professional home for individuals working in campus-based WGECs in the United States.

In 1990, the Women of Color Caucus within the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) staged a walkout of the association's annual conference in Akron, OH in protest of the predominance of White women's voices, concerns, and leadership within NWSA and within the larger feminist movement (Mooney, 1991; DiLapi & Gay, 2002; Hembold, 2002; Evans, 2003; Hobson & Jolna, 2017). Their action nearly resulted in the dissolution of the organization, and forced NWSA to begin to critically examine issues of systemic racism within the association. When I joined NWSA in 2006, strategic efforts were already in place at all levels of NWSA to address racism and White supremacy within the organization. However, even as a newcomer to the organization, it was clear to me that these issues were persisting in harmful ways within NWSA's Women's Centers Committee (WCC). I observed resistance by some of the White "old guard" members of the WCC community to efforts to recenter a commitment to antiracism within the committee. This

created an ideological rift and intensifying power struggle between longtime and newer members of the group. Eventually, some members who had been resisting change withdrew altogether from the association, and others took a step back to decrease their involvement in matters of structure and governance. As membership of the group shifted and settled, those members who remained committed to actively furthering antiracist action within the WCC continued efforts to center the issue within our annual pre-conference and interactions as a group. In the summer of 2021, a small group of White WCC members began to meet bimonthly over Zoom to work in community on intentional antiracist practice, as part of ongoing personal efforts to interrogate our individual internalized racism, and by way of renewed commitment to working towards dismantling racism within our NWSA committee.

In the last decade, racial affinity groups (Abdullah & McCormack, 2008), also known as race-based caucuses, have become a popular process for challenging racism within organizations. Caucusing invites individuals with shared identities to gather in community to discuss a particular topic (Buehler et al., 2021). The practice is widely used in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) trainings (Obear & martinez, 2013), as part of diversity education initiatives offered by academic institutions (Michael & Conger, 2009; Myers et al., 2019), and in classroom settings (Hudson & Mountz, 2016; Walls et al., 2010). In race-based caucuses, individuals meet regularly with other members of their racial group to discuss racism, oppression, and privilege, to critically examine their role in supporting and/or combatting racism, and to strategize ways to advance racial equity (Blitz & Kohl, 2012). Race-based caucusing provides an important tool for creating separate spaces for members to engage in the vastly different antiracism work required of White people and of people from global majority populations (Racial Equity Tools, 2020a). These groups allow

individuals to discuss their experiences and pose questions in a separate space from those who do not share their racial identity. For White-identified individuals, racial affinity groups or caucuses allow for a deeper exploration of White privilege and the role of White people in antiracism work without placing the burden of education on issues of race and racism on people of color. They also create an appropriate space to process the often-intense emotions generated when reckoning with privilege and White supremacy. The separation of participants with different racial identities also avoids further marginalization of people of color within discussions of bias, prejudice, and racism (Hudson & Mountz, 2016) and provides an opportunity for people of color to seek mutual support and connection while challenging the dominant patterns and structures of Whiteness typical of mixed-race spaces (Blackwell, 2018).

For the members of the NWSA WCC's White Accountability Group, it has created space for a small community of White feminists to try and hold ourselves and each other accountable in our efforts to dismantle racism, deepen our own antiracist practice, gain strategies for promoting organizational change within our respective institutions, and further our own personal and professional growth. While several of us had been on this journey for some time, the national epidemic of racist violence against people of color and the ensuing demonstrations and calls for racial justice in 2020 were the tipping point that shook many of us out of our apathy toward racism and police brutality. The WCC White Accountability Group was formed in July 2021 and began meeting in early September of the same year. Prior to its formation, I had been working for almost a year with a WGEC colleague from a large public university in the Pacific Northwest on developing educational opportunities in antiracism work for my institution. We had discussed at length our desire to expand our work

to include other members of the WCC, and decided to try and convene a White affinity group composed of WGEC professionals around the country who also had a strong interest in the intersection of antiracism with gender equity. Given the increasing urgency to center race in gender equity-seeking work, there is a need to better understand how White women working in feminist spaces on college and university campuses perceive individual, institutional, and systemic racism and how they navigate and respond to awareness of their involvement and complicity in upholding racist systems and structures.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study sought to examine how action for racial justice intersects with the feminist praxis of White women who work in campus-based WGECs. I was also interested in learning what individual and/or structural factors encourage or prevent White feminist women from pursuing and demonstrating allyship with people of color. Finally, I hoped to discover how participation in a race-based caucus impacts White feminist women's antiracist allyship development. The study contributes to an understanding of how WGECs at institutions of higher education might create more inclusive spaces for constituents of color, and how race-based caucusing might be used to further antiracism efforts on college and university campuses. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: How does action for racial justice intersect with the feminism of White women?

RQ 2: What are the systemic/structural and intrinsic/individual factors that encourage or prevent White feminist women from pursuing antiracist allyship?

RQ 3: How does participation in a race-based caucus impact White feminist women's perceptions of their antiracist allyship development?

Significance of the Study

As a White feminist practitioner working at a PWI that has been grappling for decades with issues of equity and inclusion for members of global majority populations, I have been feeling an urgency for this work for some time. The extant body of research on antiracist allyship by White feminists is limited, and focuses largely on the experiences of students in higher education, rather than professionals (see Case, 2012; Linder, 2015). Additionally, it is a sensitive and often contentious topic, given the racist history of White feminism and the fact that racial allyship by well-meaning White people, especially White women, has often been performative and self-serving. By exploring how White feminist women engage in activism for racial and gender justice as they examine their Whiteness and work together in community to hold themselves accountable to authentic antiracist practice, this study has important implications for informing professional development opportunities in antiracist activism and growth for higher education professionals. It may also contribute to a dismantling from within of attitudes and practices that continue to present feminism as a sociopolitical identity that is inaccessible or undesirable to women of color. White feminists aspiring to antiracist practice, who are seeking to actively challenge the hegemonic Whiteness of the mainstream feminist movement, may gain insight and strategies from this study to work towards addressing their own internalized White supremacy and to forming both White and cross-racial coalitions to address these issues at the institutional level.

Researcher Identity and Positionality

As further detailed in Chapter 3, this study follows a qualitative line of inquiry.

Qualitative research positions the researcher as the primary research instrument and "strive[s] to make both the researcher's and participants' subjectivity visible" (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). Understanding my social and political identities, positionality, and resultant biases is important for providing the context to and motivation behind my choice of topics for this research project.

I am a White cisgender woman from a primarily European settler-colonial background with ethnic Portuguese (mother) and Macanese (great-grandmother) heritage. I work and study at a PWI located on the ancestral and contemporary homelands of the Nimíipuu (Nez Perce), Palus (Palouse), and Schitsu'umsh (Coeur d'Alene) tribal peoples. Although I have lived in the U.S. for almost 30 years, I grew up mostly in the U.K., emigrating to this country after earning my undergraduate degree. In some ways, I am a community outsider, lacking the social assets and early formative experiences to participate fully in shared meaning-making around U.S.-specific cultural references and frameworks that relate to race and racism, including those present in higher education. My immigrant status, multilingualism, and multicultural identity do not counter or temper the fact, however, that as a light-skinned person living and experiencing the world as White, I have benefitted from multiple forms of privilege, including White privilege, as a consequence of my most salient racial identity. My acknowledgement, and to a certain extent, intellectualization of this dynamic, does not negate the ways in which I have participated in and colluded with systems and structures of racist oppression throughout my life.

I was raised in a middle-class, mostly White family with upper-class aspirations. My father's profession as a career diplomat with the British Foreign Office afforded temporary access throughout my childhood and early adulthood to circles of significant social and

economic privilege that I found both exciting and troubling. My family spent intermittent periods of time living in developing countries with whose governments my father worked ostensibly to sustain positive social, political, and economic relations with the U.K. Early exposures to the dynamics of settler-colonialism and corresponding systems of power and privilege were formative experiences which began to shape my awareness of social and racial hierarchies. My understandings of race were undoubtedly influenced by the benevolent racism and racial paternalism (Esposito & Romano, 2014) and White saviorism (Cole, 2016) inherent in the imperialist, colonial project that life as a civil servant in the British foreign services entailed. Like many liberal progressives in the 1970s and 1980s, my family subscribed to a well-intentioned race neutrality or colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva & Foreman, 2000)—I was encouraged to not "see color" and to treat everyone the same, regardless of race. Nevertheless, racial tropes, stereotypes, and microaggressions proliferated in my environment. The prevailing assumptions, attitudes, and practices of the world I grew up in had a resounding impact on the way in which I viewed race and racism. My journey to antiracism has thus been a constant, ongoing process of, in the words of one of my study participants, Alex, "learning and unlearning and relearning" (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022).

My professional role as a staff member at a campus-based WGEC located at a PWI catalyzed the drive to more critically examine the dynamics of race within a higher education setting. In the early years of working at my WGEC, it had become increasingly apparent that my center was failing to make intentional efforts to outreach to our constituents of color in meaningful, culturally-responsive ways. With the exception of a handful of student employees of color in work-study positions, the students who frequented the Women's

Center during my first 10 years of employment there (and judging by archival photos, pretty much since its founding in 1972) were overwhelmingly White. This dynamic, coupled with the fact that incidents of power-based personal violence on campus were being reported almost exclusively by White students, made it clear that the center was not considered by students of color to be a safe or desirable space to seek connection and support. When the center was integrated—along with many of our university's cultural centers—into a new university division, the Equity & Diversity Unit, developing and establishing culturally responsive outreach, education, and mechanisms for support for diverse communities of students became imperative. In 2014, the year after I was promoted to director, a former colleague and I designed and conducted a data collection project to identify the needs and interests of our colleagues and students of color, and to learn how our WGEC could make more intentional efforts to address them (see Salsbury & MillerMacPhee, 2019). The results of the study yielded critical information with regard to restructuring our services, programming, and outreach to be more inclusive and relevant to our students of color, and we have been intentionally engaged in these efforts for the past decade. However, this work has not been without its challenges. We have faced pushback from White majority students to our efforts to provide education around the realities of racism within the feminist movement and in society at large, as well as intense scrutiny from conservative lobbying groups and our state legislature around the legitimacy of supporting these programs with public funding. In addition, my own unexamined White supremacy and collusion with racist systems and structures at my institution was causing barriers to building authentic and mutually respectful working relationships with some colleagues of color. Concurrently, my experiences of the race dynamics within my professional association, my desire to develop

authentic working relationships with my colleagues of color, and my reactions to the unacceptable rates of violence being experienced by people of color around the nation, encouraged me to seek deeper learning around antiracism in community with other members of my professional field. As I shared my frustrations with other White women working at campus-based WGECs around the country, it became evident that my experiences were far from unique, and that effectively tackling issues of systemic racism at my institution, and within higher education in general, called for an in-depth examination of my own shortcomings in the realm of racial equity, and deeper engagement in some critical self-work.

This research project emerged from my desire to advance my antiracist practice in collaboration with other White feminists. As mentioned, campus-based WGECs—particularly those at PWIs—have long been sites of exclusion and marginalization/ tokenization of women of color. The university where I work has struggled with a significant increase in the last 5 years of racially motivated bias incidents and hate crimes against students and employees of color. The national association within which my work and research are aligned professionally and academically continues to be challenged in resisting and dismantling the hegemonic structures of Whiteness that pervade the academic field of Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies (WGSS). This project is part of an intentional effort to identify tangible ways in which my fellow White feminists and I might contribute to transformative change within ourselves and also within WGECs, institutions, and professional associations.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the background and context to the study, examining the changing demographics of college and

university students in the U.S. and the impact of hegemonic White educational structures on their academic success and sense of belonging. I discuss the problem I wanted to address in this study—examining the exclusionary history of feminist spaces on college and university campuses, and exploring how and why White women who work in campus-based gender equity centers might choose to pursue allyship with racial justice issues—as well as the study's significance and purpose. I conclude this introductory chapter with a reflection on my own positionality and perspectives as a participant-researcher with shared identities and experiences to the other participants in this study. Chapter 2 offers a review of the literature on race and racism, Whiteness, feminism, and allyship development. I include an overview of the two theoretical frameworks that guide this study, Critical Race Feminism (CRF) and Critical White Studies (CWS), and discuss the specific tenets of each theory that are relevant to the study. I briefly explore models of White racial identity development and allyship development, homing in on models that inform the development of racial justice allyship in White feminist women. I also discuss the role of communities of practice, specifically race-based caucusing, in building antiracist allyship. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the research paradigm, outlining the philosophical foundations that ground this qualitative inquiry. I describe my approach and rationale, providing support for the research design I chose for the study, a case study. I detail my participant selection process, data collection methods, data analysis, and criteria for the study's trustworthiness and reliability. Chapters 4 and 5 outline key findings from the stories of the study participants that answer my research questions, discussed relative to the application of relevant literature on the phenomena presented. Chapter 6 offers a summary of the research, providing reflections on the process

and significance of the study, limitations, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In exploring the participation of White feminist women in a race-based caucus aimed at developing their antiracist allyship both within and beyond higher education, this chapter will review the current literature related to the concepts of race and racism, Whiteness, feminism, and allyship development. I will include a brief overview of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which has contributed an important theoretical lens to the examination of racism within the context of higher education. Next, I will provide an explanation of the two primary theoretical frameworks undergirding this study: Critical Race Feminism (CRF), which promotes the development of theories and practices that examine and challenge both sexism and racism, and Critical White Studies (CWS), which provides important historical and social context to the environments in which participants were socialized, and in which the study takes place. Together, CRF and CWS help to illuminate the processes of race consciousness development among the White individuals participating in the study, setting the stage for exploring the development of their antiracist allyship. Finally, I will explore the scholarship that relates to allyship development, with a focus on allyship for racial justice, and examine the literature around communities of practice and race-based caucuses, the mechanism through which the participants in this study are engaged in the pursuit of antiracist allyship development. To provide the reader with clarity on the relationship between these theories and concepts, my conceptual framework is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 1 on p. 20.

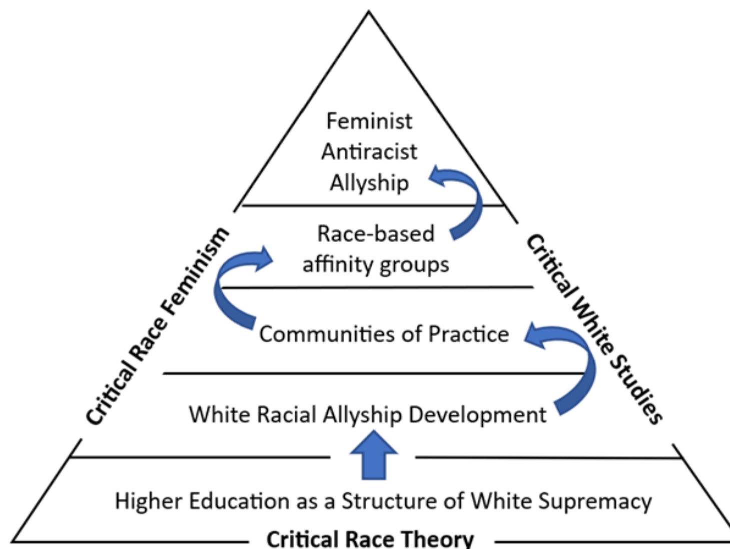

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Study

Institutions of Higher Education as Structures of White Supremacy

White supremacy continues to be a salient force in structuring the academic landscape for students of color in the U.S. Despite their purported equity-seeking goals and social justice-oriented philosophies, women's centers on college and university campuses are by no means immune to its influences. Womanist scholar bell hooks (1984) articulated the notion of a "white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy" (p. 51), urging us to consider how the interlocking systems of oppression of racism, patriarchy, and capitalism differentially impact White people and people (especially women) of color. An awareness of and commitment to challenging the dominant nature of Whiteness in educational spaces designed to serve women is therefore critical for the dismantling of White supremacy within campus-based women's centers.

Higher education in the U.S. is systematically structured to reproduce racism at all levels of the institution (Museus et al., 2015; Cabrera et al., 2017). Understanding the historically racist policies and practices that established colleges and universities as

incubators for White, male leadership (Karabel, 2005; Thelin, 2011) is foundational to examining the ways in which these institutions replicate and perpetuate racial inequality and oppression today. Racial elitism and socioeconomic privilege have exerted strong influences on higher education policy and practice, limiting admission to racially minoritized students and restricting employment and scholarship opportunities for faculty of color. Racism has also established norms and cultures of Whiteness on campuses that have created hostile working and learning environments and persisting inequities in access to academic opportunity for individuals from non-dominant racial identity groups (Cabrera et al., 2017; Gusa, 2010). Even landmark legislation enacted in the 20th century to increase access to higher education for all people, such as the Morrill Act and the G.I. Bill, can be argued to reproduce systems and dynamics of racial inequity and segregation (Museus et al., 2015). The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 provided funding for states to build institutions of higher education on federal land, and to expand existing colleges and universities. Ironically, though many of these institutions were built on land stolen from Indigenous communities (Brayboy & Tachine, 2021), systems of social segregation enforced in several states meant that many students of color were denied access to these institutions (Minor, 2008). The second Morrill Act of 1890, while on the surface appearing to be an attempt to remedy issues of access to higher education for Black and Native American students in particular by funding the establishment of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), reinforced some of the inequitable segregation measures established by the first act (Museus et al., 2015). In addition, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the G.I. Bill, facilitated access to higher education to

mostly White former servicemen. Often, when veterans of color attempted to access their education benefits, they were encouraged to consider vocational training programs or apply to less prestigious academic institutions (Thelin, 2011).

Another policy, both controversial and contentious, that was designed to improve racial equity in higher education, was the application of race-conscious admissions strategies by colleges and universities (Museus et al., 2015). Affirmative action, introduced by President John F. Kennedy's Executive Order 10925, was originally intended to eliminate discrimination on the basis of race in federal contracting (Skrentny, 1996). Deployed by institutions of higher education, the policy aims to increase the enrollment of students from global majority populations at both private and public colleges and universities by using criteria other than test scores and high school GPAs (which typically disadvantage students of color) in admissions decisions (Jencks & Phillips, 2011). However, affirmative action has been subject to a prolonged and ongoing backlash by aggrieved White students claiming reverse discrimination, and by resistance from administrators fearing that the admission of more students from global majority populations could lead to a racial "tipping point" in enrollment, where the number of students of color admitted to an institution might lead to an exodus of majority White students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Thus far, however, these concerns have proven to be unfounded; all educational institutions are required to comply with stringent legal requirements when considering race in educational policy decisions, and challenges to race-conscious admissions policies, such as the landmark case at the University of Michigan Law School in 2003, have been upheld as constitutional. Meanwhile, the practice of legacy admissions for wealthy White students, particularly at prestigious private institutions, continues without challenge.

Racist policies and practices that contribute to the systematic exclusion of students of color from higher education begin even before students apply to college. Residential segregation practices such as redlining force many students from minoritized communities into under-resourced high schools, and students of color are often steered towards remedial and vocational education programs and trade schools (Museus et al., 2015). Standardized aptitude tests, despite being largely discounted as a reliable metric for measuring intelligence (Au, 2009), have further exacerbated racial inequities in college admissions.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and a number of associated conceptual frameworks have emerged as epistemological and methodological tools for examining and critiquing race and racism within the context of society and its institutions, and are foundational to addressing racism and antiracist practices in education. In the section that follows, I will provide a brief outline of CRT, highlighting how it examines the issues of racism and White supremacy embedded within systems and structures of higher education, before zooming in to focus on the two related critical theories that comprise my conceptual framework for this study: Critical Race Feminism (CRF) and Critical White Studies (CWS).

Critical Race Theory

In the last two decades, education scholars and researchers have used CRT to analyze, interrogate, and challenge issues of educational opportunity, campus culture and climate, representation, and pedagogy in both K-12 and higher education settings (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). CRT emerged from the Critical Legal Studies movement (Crenshaw, 2011; Tate 1997). CRT contends that racism is a normal, everyday experience for people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and that the structural systems of racism—at the individual, group, institutional, and societal levels—function to create a matrix of oppression that

maintains the dominance of White people over people of color. The work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) has been foundational to exploring race-based inequities in K-12 education through the theoretical lens of CRT. They proposed that opportunity gaps between poor students of color and White middle-class students were "a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 47) and theorized the use of race as an analytic tool for examining and understanding inequity in K-12 schooling. In the higher education realm, Tatum (1997) has explored the application of racial identity development theory (Helms, 1990) to examine the emotional responses of college students to course content addressing race and racism. Solórzano's (1998) study on race and gender microaggressions among Chicanx scholars was instrumental in applying a CRT framework "that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the subordination of scholars of color" (Solórzano, 1998, p. 123).

CRT has five basic tenets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017):

(1) racism is ordinary—it is the way our society is structured, and the everyday experience of most people of color in the U.S. CRT recognizes that contemporary racism is neither natural nor inevitable, but a result of racist ideas being embedded in social policies, institutions, and practices. The invention in the late seventeenth century of the human racial category of "White" evolved to ensure that wealth (and therefore, power) would remain concentrated in the hands of a specific group of people. The series of laws established in the newly-founded United States of America was used to

impose racial hierarchies and institutionalize Whiteness as a position of power (Battalora, 2013). Thus, racism evolved to support a system of "white-over-color ascendancy" (p. 8), privileging and elevating White people, and disadvantaging and marginalizing people of color;

(2) racism confers significant advantages on White people; the concept of interest convergence or material determinism holds that Whites will not invest in the eradication of racism unless they somehow stand to personally benefit from their actions;

(3) the social construction thesis maintains that race is a social construct based on distributions of and access to power, rather than genetic or biological traits;

(4) the ideas of intersectionality and anti-essentialism—that no individual has a unitary identity, and that each of us comprises a complex combination of identities, sociopolitical locations, affiliations, and experiences; and

(5) the voice-of-color thesis, that contends that people of color are the experts of their own stories.

Three of these tenets—the permanence of racism, interest convergence, and intersectionality—are particularly relevant to this study, and are examined further in the section below.

The Permanence of Racism

A core tenet of CRT is that racism is ubiquitous, deeply embedded into the systems and structures of society and institutions; racism is "ordinary, not aberrational" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 8). Racism is not an anomaly; it shapes the way society is organized (Bell, 1987). The ordinariness of racism makes it challenging to address because it goes

unacknowledged and is largely invisible to those who do not experience it. The idea of the permanence of racism was proposed by legal scholar and critical race theorist Derrick Bell in his 1992 book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*. Bell argues that the elimination of racism can never be possible in a society whose systems and structures have been built around, and are dependent upon, the subordination by White people of people of color. Racism, Bell explains, "is a permanent component of American life" (p. 13). Today, many individuals, especially Whites, believe that racism is on the decline (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), due in part to the decrease over the last half century in overtly violent acts of racism, such as lynchings. This hyperfocus on individual acts of racism detracts from our collective consciousness around the insidious and systemic nature of racism. Racism continues to negatively impact the lives of people of color in every sector of public life, including education. Gusa (2010) describes how the permanence of racism and a culture of Whiteness, which systematically disadvantage and discriminate against people of color, are deeply embedded within the culture, climate, policies, and educational practices of Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). These institutions, she maintains, "do not have to be explicitly racist to create a hostile environment" (p. 465). White cultural ideology saturates the structure, traditions, language, and the value placed on specific knowledge systems in U.S. colleges and universities, infusing those spaces with hegemonic power and disenfranchising and alienating students and employees of color. This premise provides important context to the cultural and social landscape in which the current study takes place. The permanence of racism and its resulting invisibility due to the dominance of Whiteness creates distinct obstacles to navigating and challenging racism within an institutional setting, a fact that all of the participants in this study highlighted in their stories.

Interest Convergence

Also referred to as "material determinism" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9), this concept in CRT supports Bell's thesis that because White people benefit from racism, they are only motivated to challenge it in the pursuit of racial justice when there is a direct benefit to them (Bell, 1980). In examining the Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, Bell argued that the court's ruling could easily be justified as advancing the interests of elite White policymakers, rather than protecting the constitutional rights of Black schoolchildren. "The interests of blacks in achieving racial equality," Bell declared, "will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523). The interest convergence principle typically involves a transactional loss-gain dynamic, wherein one of the parties in the negotiation, usually the dominant member or group, must relinquish something in order for the interests of both parties to converge or align (Bell, 1980). Convergence and resulting social change are "often *purposefully* and *skillfully* slow and at the will and design of those in power" (Milner, 2008, p. 334, author's emphasis). Bell states that while Whites outwardly support the advancement of equity-seeking policies and practices, they may still believe that social injustices can be "remedied effectively without altering the status of whites" (p. 522). Whites are often in favor of policies and practices that provide greater access and inclusion for historically excluded populations as long as they do not personally have to relinquish their own status, power, and privilege (Milner, 2008). Institutions of higher education in the US have long been structured as bastions of White dominance, creating hostile environments and impacting opportunities for students of color (Cabrera et al., 2017; Gusa, 2010). In committing to authentic efforts to advance racial equity, Whites must be willing to engage in reflexive examination and reconceptualization of

their own identity and ways in which they have themselves contributed to sustaining oppressive systems of racial power and privilege. Acknowledging one's own Whiteness and the core benefits attributed by the existence of racism is a critical milepost on the journey of White people towards greater racial consciousness and a genuine commitment to racial justice. The participants in this study acknowledged and examined aspects of interest convergence as they shared their stories of racial allyship; the desire to be and to be seen as a "good White person" was a key theme as they examined their motives for engaging in action for antiracism.

Intersectionality

A key feature of CRT, the term "intersectionality" was coined by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989. Intersectionality is a qualitative analytical framework used by feminist scholars in a variety of academic fields to describe interlocking systems of power and oppression and how they combine to create different experiences of advantage and disadvantage for individuals due to specific sociopolitical identities, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, ability, and sexuality, etc. Crenshaw originally used the term specifically to explain how the convergence of race and gender impact the experiences of Black women in the legal system. The structures of race and gender intersect to create a "matrix of domination" which defines the individual's place and status in the race and gender hierarchy (Collins, 1990). When we disregard the ways in which non-dominant identities intersect with hierarchical systems of oppression, we fail to consider the experiences of women from different historically excluded groups, and focus exclusively on the experiences of women with the most privileged identities, typically White, able-bodied, middle-class, cisgender, heterosexual women (Weldon, 2008). The concept of intersectionality has

expanded to examine the layers of experience created by the intersection of social and cultural identities of members of other historically excluded groups (Nash, 2008), beyond those of Black women. Intersectionality is particularly useful for the examination and critical evaluation of social relationships, and the patterns of domination within those relationships. It is an aspect of social organization that describes how certain experiences and forms of oppression shape people's lives: gender norms shape the experiences of men, women, and nonbinary people, as do those attributed to race and/or ethnicity (Weldon, 2008).

Understanding this concept is critical for this study, given that institutions of higher education in the U.S. were created to cater by default to the needs of wealthy White men (Karabel, 2005; Thelin, 2011). Campus-based women's centers, typically founded on and guided by mainstream feminist values with a complex and long-standing history of racism (Zakaria, 2021; Hamad, 2020; Collins, 1990; Lorde, 1984; hooks, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983), have often focused the majority of their education, outreach, and support efforts on the needs and interests of White women. As will be discussed later in this chapter, intersectionality is also a key tenet of Critical Race Feminism (CRF), one of the theoretical frameworks that informs this study, and has particular relevance as participants examine the ways in which they weave their efforts for antiracism into their feminist praxis.

Critical Race Theory in Education

A key premise of CRT is that dominant systems and structures of power and privilege must be challenged in order to create greater opportunities for equity and access at all levels of society. Applying CRT to education examines the racial inequities present in our educational systems, and provides suggestions for the necessary conditions to imagine such a transformation. Solórzano (1998) proposed five main themes that form the fundamental

perspectives of a critical race theory in education, which are relevant to the study at hand: the permanence of racism—understanding that race and racism are historical, enduring, and central to examining the subordinated experiences of people of color; intersectionality—that racism must also be considered in terms of its interactions with other social and cultural identities, such as class and gender (Crenshaw, 1989); a challenge to dominant ideology—that CRT in education "challenges the traditional claims of the educational system and its institutions to objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Solórzano, 1998, p. 122); a commitment to social justice and the elimination of racism; the centrality of experiential knowledge—that the lived experiences of people of color are critical for understanding and challenging racial inequities in higher education; and interdisciplinarity—that race and racism must be examined, both from a historical and contemporary perspective, across academic disciplines of thought and study. The application of CRT by scholars to examine race-based inequities in education has given rise to other more focused theoretical frameworks that home in on the specific experiences of other communities of color. Prominent CRT scholarship has focused heavily on the lived experiences of and dynamics between Black and White communities and individuals. Other conceptual frameworks began to emerge in the academy in response to the need to develop theories that examined more closely the racialized experiences of Latinx, Native American, and Asian communities. Like CRT, Latino/a/x Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) emerged from the discipline of Critical Legal Studies (Valdes, 2005) and has been deployed as a framework for examining how issues of language, culture, immigration, ethnicity, identity, and nation impact the educational experiences and opportunities of students from Latinx communities (Huber & Malagón, 2007; Yosso et al., 2004). Brayboy

(2005) outlined the tenets of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) to center and examine the educational experiences of Indigenous peoples, “rooted in the multiple, nuanced, and historically- and geographically-located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 427). Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) acknowledges the unique experiences of racism encountered by Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S., and seeks to dismantle stereotypes harmful to these communities, such as the model minority myth, and other racist ideas around achievement and success in educational outcomes (Liu, 2009).

CRT draws its foundations not only from Critical Legal Studies, but also from radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Given that feminist values typically undergird the policies and practices of campus-based women’s centers, mention of the ways in which race has been theorized within feminism is highly relevant to this study. Critical Race Feminism (CRF) is a conceptual framework that has critically illuminated the intersections of Whiteness, gender, and antiracism within legal and academic scholarship, and is one of two theoretical perspectives applied to ground this research study.

A Brief History of U.S. Feminism

The term “feminism,” whose origin in the early-mid 1830s is usually attributed to French utopian socialist philosopher Charles Fourier (Offen, 1988), is challenging to define, as it has a diverse range of meanings for different people. It has been broadly applied to reference social movements for change in the social, political, and economic status of women (Delmar, 2018). My own definition of feminism most closely approximates that of womanist scholar and thinker bell hooks, who wrote that feminism is “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression” (hooks, 2015, p. xii). Feminism, then, according to hooks,

is charged with ending exploitation and oppression, as well as sexism. Depending on the combination of other sociopolitical identities, backgrounds, and experiences that women claim, however, sexism may be just one small part of the exploitation and oppression they face. The paradox of feminism is that a movement that claims to fight for the inclusion of women in all spheres of public and private life has often alienated and marginalized women who do not identify as White and middle class (Delap, 2020). For decades, the women's rights movement in the United States has been criticized by feminist scholars of color for its elitism, exclusion, and focus on the interests of White Western women (Zakaria, 2021; Hamad, 2020; Collins, 1990; Lorde, 1984; hooks, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983).

Often described in terms of "waves," the history of feminism in the United States has largely highlighted the achievements and contributions of White middle class women. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, held to gather support for the social, civil, and religious rights of women, is widely considered to be the formal beginning of the first wave, launching the women's rights movement in the U.S. (Lerner, 1998). Many of the convention's attendees were abolitionists who began putting their energy towards securing women's suffrage, as well as challenging women's limited access to work, education, property rights, family planning, and social agency (Malinowksa, 2020). Racism was endemic in the first wave of feminism, and the bigotry of one of its central figures, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, is well documented. Stanton used overtly racist rhetoric in her speeches and argued strenuously against the enfranchisement of Black men (McDaneld, 2013) and yet it is her name, rather than the names of known suffragists of color such as Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell, whose contributions are typically recorded in history books.

Prescriptive (White) retellings of second wave feminism locate its beginning in the early-mid 1960s, with the publication in 1963 of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, the founding in 1966 of the National Organization for Women (NOW), and the rise of women's consciousness-raising groups (Thompson, 2002). The issues of women's primary concern and protest included challenging traditional gender roles; tackling employment discrimination, including the wage gap; addressing gender-based violence, and promoting access to abortion. White women's singular issue fight to legalize abortion was juxtaposed with the efforts of women of color for broader reproductive justice, including access to abortion, but also demands for adequate maternal health care, access to contraception, and freedom from forced sterilization (Price, 2020). Historical accounts of second wave feminism largely fail to highlight the contributions of feminists of color and antiracist White feminists to the women's liberation movement. In the 1970s, multiracial feminists and their allies were publishing prolifically, engaging their communities in widespread feminist organizing, and creating broad alliances and coalitions with White feminist groups (Thompson, 2002).

The third wave is often demarcated as beginning in 1991, when Anita Hill publicly shared her story of being sexually harassed by Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. Early the following year, author and activist Rebecca Walker penned an article in Ms. Magazine detailing her reaction to the case, famously writing, "I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the third wave" (Walker, 2001, p. 80). Third wave feminism, located in the sociopolitical climate and culture of the late 1980s and early 1990s, emerged as a grassroots-oriented movement, rejecting what many young feminists saw as the rigid conventions of the second wave, and embracing a more amorphous version of feminism, informed by the

personal narratives of its adherents and by the trends and influences of pop culture (Shugart, 2001). Purportedly more inclusive of race issues and queer identities than its predecessor (Malinowska, 2020), the third wave rejected the essentialism of women's experiences, "embracing and utilizing multi-vocality/locality" to take on feminist politics at the individual, personal level (Pinterics, 2001). However, many feminists of color still felt excluded by the third wave, arguing that even the metaphor of waves, as well as the movement itself, ignores the critical history of the race-based movements that served to prime the social and political landscape for successful feminist organizing (Springer, 2002).

The fourth wave, beginning around 2010, marked a revival of feminism defined by technology, through online mobilization via social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, Instagram, and others, as well as the creation of community blog campaigns such as the Everyday Sexism Project, Feministing, and Right To Be (formerly Hollaback!), and the proliferation of hashtag activism, such as #YesAllWomen, #HeForShe, #EverydaySexism (Cochrane, 2013) and in the last decade, #MeToo, #NoMore, #TimesUp, #FreeTheNipple, and #EffYourBeautyStandards. Viral hashtag campaigns highlighting the ongoing concerns of feminists of color to racism in social justice movements and organizing also began to circulate, giving rise to hashtags such as #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, #GirlsLikeUs, and #BlackGirlMagic. Today, feminists of color continue to call out White feminists' exclusionary politics. The hashtag #MeToo, widely attributed in the early days of its viral circulation to White actress Alyssa Milano, was in fact first used years earlier by a Black activist against gender-based violence, Tarana Burke. Feminists of color have also called out the racism of the 2017 Women's March, from the millions of White feminists who gleefully donned pink pussy hats, to the refusal to grant access to Black commentators

critical of the march, to the fact that the march was held on a Sunday, a day on which essential workers in the service industry—many of which are people of color—often have to work and therefore could not participate (Zakaria, 2020).

Challenging White Feminism

> Feminism is… a conversation with many registers. It has taken place under unequal conditions, where some voices are amplified and others are routinely ignored.
>
> (Delap, 2020, p. 20)

While it can be argued that the later waves of U.S. feminism offer a more inclusive framework geared towards the inclusion of women who have typically been relegated to the margins of the movement, it is clear that mainstream feminism has still largely focused on the liberation of White middle-class women, perpetuating the othering and subjugation of women of color and women from developing nations (Liska, 2015). The term "White feminism" refers to the ways in which feminist discourse has been dominated by elitist and racist White, Eurocentric attitudes, to the exclusion and silencing of feminists of color. Saad (2020) defines White feminism as "an epithet used to describe feminist theories that focus on the struggles of white women without addressing distinct forms of oppression faced by ethnic minority women and women lacking other privileges" (p. 174). One of the most insidious ways in which White feminism has perpetuated the oppression of women of color has been by speaking for them, framing their struggles within Western-influenced perspectives and attributing a single voice to summarize the experiences of vast and varied individuals and cultures. One such example of the co-opting of the experiences and voices of women of color and women from outside the U.S. by White feminism can be found in Eve Ensler's celebrated play, *The Vagina Monologues*, where global gender politics are subjected to a paternalistic, homogenizing treatment in search of a common experience of gender-based

violence (Cooper, 2007). Delivered as a series of monologues (a single voice), the play has been widely criticized for both its cultural and gender essentialism. A hugely popular production at U.S. colleges and universities for well over a decade, many campus-based women's centers, including my own, were complicit in promoting the narratives of White dominance and colonization that the play embraced.

Challenges to White-dominant discourses that characterized second-wave feminism emerged in the 1970s, as Black women writers and theorists began to collectively voice a standpoint to express the unique experiences of Black women that had been effectively erased within mainstream feminist theory (Collins, 1990). The emergence of Black feminism/womanist feminism within feminist standpoint theory gave visibility to other women of color feminisms, including Chicana feminism, a movement which aimed to highlight the historical, cultural, spiritual, educational, and economic realities of Chicana women, and help them to establish their own political agenda within both the Chicano and mainstream American feminist movements (Garcia, 1989). Indigenous feminisms, too, challenged the historical White-centeredness and racism of the U.S. feminist movement. Native feminist theory challenges "Whitestream" feminism's focus on dismantling the patriarchy rather than acknowledging the oppressive conditions of colonization (Sabzalian, 2018). The prolific body of work by postcolonial feminist scholars of color such as hooks (1981), Lorde (1984), Minh-ha (1987), and Mohanty (1988) brought into stark relief the ways in which norms of academic discourse within Western feminist scholarship have served to systematically exclude and marginalize women of color.

Operating within a teaching and learning environment that is often defined and shaped by Whiteness, campus-based women's centers must acknowledge that White

feminism, the *de facto* framework for education and outreach at many such centers, "tends to forget that a movement that claims to be for all women has to engage with the obstacles women who are not white face" (Kendall, 2020, p. 2). Many White feminists have failed to recognize their status as both oppressed and oppressor. Acknowledging and committing to challenging the oppressive nature of White feminism is foundational to the work that the participants in this study are engaging in, and contributes to the context in which their pursuit of antiracist allyship is examined.

Theoretical Frameworks for the Study

Critical Race Feminism

Critical Race Feminism (CRF), one of the two theoretical frameworks informing this study, helps to situate this study within larger conversations about the inclusion of women of color in White, historically exclusionary feminist spaces. CRF has foundational ties to Critical Legal Studies, feminist legal theory, and Critical Race Theory (Wing, 2003). Delgado (1995) first used the term "critical race feminism" to articulate the ways in which the patriarchy and racism collude to systematically oppress women of color within the legal system. Feminism, he maintains, has been almost exclusively centered around the interests of White women, while the Civil Rights Movement focused largely on the needs and interests of Black men. Other theoretical frameworks have failed to challenge the essentialism that universalizes and privileges "a white, middle-class, heterosexual conception of womanness and excludes women of colour and women of different classes or sexualities from the political category of woman" (Stoljar, 2000, p. 177). Hilal (1998) emphasizes that CRF is an important lens for analyzing the ways in which women of color have been systematically devalued in order to impose and justify oppressive laws and policies "that exploit the class,

gender, and political powerlessness of such women" (p. 368). She explains CRF has particular value for examining the international rights of women, challenging conventional nondiscrimination ideology, and outlining the structure of a revolutionary legal system that intentionally serves the interests of women of color. Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) suggest that CRF in education "may provide legal and academic stratagem for studying and eradicating race, class, and gender oppression in educational institutions" (p. 19). They purport that CRF in education has value and merit for the exploration of educational issues affecting Black women and girls in particular due to the following key features: CRF maintains that the experiences and perspectives of women of color are different from those of White women and Black men; CRF explores the multiple forms of oppression faced by women of color due to the intersections of race, class, and gender within a system of White male patriarchy and racist oppression; CRF is anti-essentialist, highlighting the multiple identities and consciousness of women of color; CRF is a multidisciplinary framework; and CRF promotes the development of theories and practices that examine and challenge both sexism and racism. By positing that scholars, the legal system, and society as a whole are responsible for understanding and improving the educational experiences and academic outcomes of Black women and girls, Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) contend that CRF offers a multitude of possibilities for addressing and dismantling racism in education.

According to Wing (1999), the main features of Critical Race Feminism (CRF) can be summarized as follows:

(1) CRF embraces narrative as methodology, emphasizing the importance of uplifting the voices and lived experiences of women of color;

(2) CRF embraces a praxis-based approach "to involve ourselves in the development of solutions" (Wing, 1999, p. 17)

(3) CRF constitutes "a race intervention in feminist discourse" (Wing, 1999, p. 17), in that it aligns with the mission of feminism to highlight gender oppression within a system of patriarchy, while exposing the subordination of women of color by White supremacy;

(4) CRF is anti-essentialist, critiquing the Whitestream feminist notion that one voice characterizes the experiences of all women;

(5) CRF embraces a multidisciplinary scholarship, examining the treatment of women from a variety of different standpoints; and

(6) CRF urges the recognition of "multiplicative" identities, examining how the convergence of women's identities "intersect to privilege or lead them to face discrimination" (Wing, 1999, p. 19).

Each of these tenets bears specific relevance to the goals of this study. The study deploys narrative as methodology; participants share their own stories with authenticity and vulnerability, and also describe ways in which they actively seek to highlight the stories and experiences of women of color in their feminist work. With regard to imposing "a race intervention in feminist discourse," CRF supports the commitment by participants in this study to dismantling the harmful structures of White feminism, in order to develop a more inclusive and intersectional feminist practice. Finally, participants reject the idea of essentialism, challenging the mainstream feminist notion that White women's experiences characterize the experiences of all women. While CRF provides a critical framework for exploring the experiences and perspectives of women of color, it also has important

implications for examining the ways in which White women seek to incorporate antiracism in their feminist practice.

Intersectional Feminism. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the idea of intersectionality is a foundational feature of both Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF). Intersectional feminist perspectives emerged as a direct response by women of color to the universalization by mainstream feminist theories of White, middle-class, Western women's realities. Unlike White feminism, intersectional feminism actively encourages the recognition of diversity among women. Categories used to differentiate women's experiences of inequality include dimensions of their social identity, such as gender, sex, class, race, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation, among others (Bilge, 2010). These categories expose the power dynamics in our society at the individual, systemic, and structural levels. At the structural level, intersectional feminists acknowledge how the existence of multiple forms of oppression, such as patriarchy, sexism, racism, capitalism, ableism, and heterosexism, compound the experiences of marginalization of women with non-dominant identities (Damant et al., 2008). In seeking to advance feminist practice through an antiracist lens, intersectionality is a critical framework for attending to the ways in which interlocking oppressions manifest in the life experiences of women with identities and backgrounds that differ from those of White women from Eurowestern backgrounds. The participants in this study described in detail ways that they implemented or aspired to implement an intersectional approach to their work as a critical feature of practicing antiracist feminism.

Antiracist Feminism. "Antiracism," Bourne (1983) wrote, should be "intrinsic to the best principles of feminism" (p. 4). Analyzing the extent to which feminism fails to promote

and enact antiracist principles, she declared, is to uncover the flaws of feminism itself. Seeking to challenge the racism of White feminism, Frankenberg (1993) conducted a comprehensive study examining the impact of race in White women's lives, exploring how the social construction of Whiteness and daily experiences of racial privilege shaped their perceptions of race and racism. In the mid-1980s, she interviewed 30 women "diverse in age, class, region of origin, sexuality, family situation, and political orientation" (p. 23), originally from different parts of the U.S., but all living in California at the time of the interviews. While the women in the study represented a broad range of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives, Frankenberg identified across participants three "discursive repertoires" (p. 189) of progression in thinking about race: *essentialist racism*, *color and power evasiveness*, and *race cognizance*. Essentialist racism, she maintained, posits race "as a marker of ontological, essential, or biological difference" (p. 138), alleging the inferiority of people of color and justifying that as a rationale for racial inequality. Color evasiveness, like color blindness, describes participants' efforts to not see (or not acknowledge) race. While this phenomenon can be understood as a way of distancing oneself from essentialist racism, it reflects power evasiveness, a reluctance to acknowledge the power imbalance inherent in the dominance and privileging of Whiteness in society. The third phase, race cognizance, describes the recognition by participants in Frankenberg's study that "race makes a difference in people's lives" and that "racism makes a difference in U.S. society" (p. 159). Achieving this understanding, Frankenberg explains, necessarily involves a deep exploration of the ways in which we think about race and racism and how it impacts our own experiences and those of others. Frankenberg's framework provides a helpful schema for understanding

the early experiences of race and processes to racial awareness of the participants in this study as they reflected on their journeys to an antiracist feminist praxis.

Despite the best of intentions by individual White feminists seeking to challenge the historical racism of mainstream feminism, however, these efforts are often derailed by the hegemonic Whiteness dominating the culture and climate of organizational, institutional, and societal environments. Sholock (2012) discusses how ingrained systematic ignorance fueled by racial privilege and sociopolitical location creates challenges to developing and sustaining a feminist antiracist theory and praxis. Sholock offers her doubts that those who benefit from the existence of racism can truly liberate themselves from racist indoctrination to bring into existence a feminism that fully rejects the oppression and hegemony of Whiteness. She points to Pratt (1984) and Rich (1986) as notable examples of White feminists who have grappled with issues of Whiteness and systematic ignorance. Both scholars use reflexivity as a tool for critically examining their social locations and their complicity in racist systems and structures, a strategy used with purpose and intentionality by the participants in this study to make meaning of their own internalized experiences of Whiteness and racial superiority, and to reflect on how those impact their relationships with members of racially oppressed communities. Harding (1991) proposed epistemic uncertainty as a critical methodology for challenging the dynamics of racial ignorance within White feminism. Feminists of color have long asserted the importance of exploring and promoting knowledge produced by women of color in order counter the intellectual arrogance and White normativity of mainstream feminism. For White feminists, confronting their ignorance and grappling with the resulting uncertainty is foundational for moving towards an antiracist feminist practice. Participants in this study expressed a strong desire and commitment to centering the voices and work of

feminists of color as part of their efforts to dismantle their own racist assumptions and conditioning.

Critical White Studies

Critical White Studies (CWS), the second theoretical framework grounding this study, comprises an interdisciplinary field of research “whose aim is to reveal the invisible structures that produce and reproduce White supremacy and privilege” (Applebaum, 2016). There is a common assumption within academic scholarship that, like most other critical theory perspectives, CWS has its origins in Critical Race Theory (CRT), due to the existence of one particular race-specific subsection of CRT, WhiteCrit. However, Cabrera et al. (2017) maintain that CWS is its own field of critical inquiry, separate from CRT. CWS analyzes what it means to be White, examines social power through the norming of Whiteness, and explores how White privilege functions to sustain complicity in racist systems and structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997). Cabrera et al. (2017) maintain that the core theoretical components of CWS include the following five themes:

(1) Whiteness as color-blindness: in a “color-blind” ideology, social inequalities based on race are justified as being caused by anything other than racism, and are used to defend the racial status quo (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000);

(2) Whiteness as epistemologies of ignorance: that racial ignorance allows White people to ignore or overlook systemic racism and White supremacy, and thereby deny their complicity in structures of racial oppression (Mills, 1997);

(3) Whiteness as ontological expansiveness: the idea that White people feel entitled to and expect access to and control of both physical and metaphorical spaces (Sullivan, 2006);

(4) Whiteness as property: meaning that Whiteness as a commodity is used and enjoyed by those who own it, and that those who don't possess it may be excluded from its benefits (Harris, 1993); and

(5) Whiteness as assumed racial comfort (or racial "safety"): White privilege means that White people can avoid discomfort with the creation of "safe spaces" where they are unlikely to be challenged on their racial microaggressions (Cabrera et al., 2017).

White ignorance, White comfort, and the ontological expansiveness of Whiteness have specific applications to this study, as key themes that emerged in the data as participants shared their stories of institutional and personal barriers to a comprehensive antiracist feminist praxis.

Any analysis of race-based inequities and racism in education must necessarily include a critical examination of White privilege and White supremacy in order to dismantle the hegemonic structures of Whiteness within systems of education that have long been presumed "neutral and normal" (Applebaum, 2016). In the sections that follow, I will provide a brief overview of four key topics explored by scholars of CWS that relate specifically to the study at hand: White normativity, the notion that Whiteness is ordinary and the standard that defines what is "normal" in society; White privilege, the sum of social, political, and economic benefits afforded White people by virtue of their skin color; White supremacy, the idea of the deserved superiority of White people over people of color, and White hegemony, the dominance of Whiteness in social systems and structures, including education.

White Normativity. López (1996) examined the legal construction of White racial identity in the United States, describing how Whiteness came to be privileged over other

racial categories, underscoring its centrality and default status in U.S. society. Whiteness became the standard against which all aspects of public and private life were measured, serving "a normative function by defining the expected or 'neutral' range of human attributes and behavior" (Morris, 2016, p. 952). By elevating the status of Whiteness, all other racial and ethnic categories are presented as deviations from this norm, undermining their protections under the law and within civil society. By ascribing the quality of "normalness" to White people, the descriptor "person" becomes synonymous with White, meaning that people who are not White are only normal to the extent to which they emulate the behaviors and characteristics of Whites. López (1996) explains that while White normativity makes White racial identity the blueprint for what is considered to be "standard" and "typical," it does not necessarily ascribe a status of superiority. The "demonization of non-Whites so that by comparison Whites are deified" (p. 130) assigns negative characteristics to racial identities other than White, thus attributing positive characteristics to Whiteness. Thus, Whiteness becomes not just the default measure of personhood, but the embodiment of desirable personal qualities and attributes. These norms are reflected in every aspect of our society, including systems of governance, business and industry, healthcare, the media, popular culture, and education.

Institutions of higher education in the U.S are often structured in such a way as to perpetuate norms and cultures of Whiteness at every level. Validation and cultivation of these norms by White majority populations at PWIs have created hostile working and learning environments for administrators, faculty, staff, and students of color (Cabrera et al., 2016). In order to create safe, inclusive environments for all constituents who wish to access their spaces and engage with their programming, campus-based women's centers must not only

challenge the racism and exclusionary politics of the mainstream feminist movement, but also actively resist the ways in which White normativity creates additional challenges for people of color to find a sense of comfort and belonging on college and university campuses.

White Privilege. In her foundational essay on White privilege and male privilege, McIntosh (1988) provides an extensive list of social benefits afforded her by virtue of the color of her skin. Describing these supposedly invisible advantages, she elucidates, “I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious” (p. 30). McIntosh’s intention is to make these benefits of racism visible, with the goal of engaging White people in a deeper analysis of advantage based on skin phenotype. Several CWS scholars problematize the concept of White privilege, arguing that it presents a distraction from a deeper analysis of White supremacy and the pursuit of racial justice. Leonardo (2004) criticizes the concept of White privilege for focusing on individual traits rather than addressing the broader systemic realities of racism. Collins and Jun (2017) discuss what they call the epidemiology of privilege, likening White privilege to a virus— “Whitefluenza”— wherein for some White people, “privilege may be visible and leveraged on a daily basis; for others, the manifestations appear to be acute and temporary and then eventually pass” (p. 34). Regardless of an individual’s level of awareness to their privilege, they maintain, the virus spreads insidiously throughout communities and societies, changing social rules and individual perspectives, whereby privilege becomes an integral and expected part of White existence. Johnson (2005) discusses how privilege, rather than being an inherent personality trait or quality, is a function of the way in which society is structured. Addressing the issue of privilege, therefore, is more about changing the way that society categorizes racial groups

and facilitates access for White people, than a matter of examining individual rankings within the social hierarchy.

The term "White privilege" has often complicated discussions of race and racism, sparking denial and defensiveness from White people who claim exemption from White privilege due to personal experiences of marginalization and struggle, such as classism and poverty. Collins (2018) explains that "the two-word term packs a double whammy that inspires pushback" (p. 39) because of the unease that the term "White" causes among people who have never had to think about themselves in terms of their race, and the associations of wealth and comfort attributed to the term "privilege" to which socioeconomically disadvantaged Whites cannot relate. Cabrera (2017) offers the term "White immunity" as an alternative for framing conversations around racial privilege. "White immunity," he contends, "means that People of Color have not historically, and are not contemporarily, guaranteed their rights, justice, and equitable social treatment; however, White people are because they have protection from this disparate treatment" (p. 82). Other contemporary CWS scholars call for abandoning the rhetoric of White privilege, emphasizing that the divisive mis/interpretation of the term by White people can hinder rather than encourage antiracist action (Lensmire et al., 2013). Nevertheless, White racial identity models (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1990) discuss in detail the recognition of White privilege as an important step in progressing towards the development of a healthy White racial identity. Participants in this study provided concrete examples of awakening to and examining their own White privilege, describing how it has helped to set the stage for deepening their commitment to allyship for racial justice.

White Supremacy. Broadly understood as an ideology of race-based discrimination and violence typically attributed to extremist hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Patriot Front, and the Proud Boys, White supremacy is the notion that White people and their opinions, contributions, knowledge, and actions are superior to those of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) communities (Okun, 2021), and that White people should therefore occupy a position of dominance over people of color (Saad, 2020). White supremacy shapes our institutional and cultural assumptions, which often assign value, morality, goodness, and humanity to Whites while undermining the worth of BIPOC folks, as well as portraying them as immoral and “undeserving” (Sue, 2006). The term “White supremacy” also refers to the ways in which our political and socioeconomic systems are structured to allow White people access and advantage to opportunities and resources, and to deny them to members of other racial and ethnic groups (Ansley, 1997). Historically, White supremacy may have been devised as a way to justify the enslavement of African people in the U.S. by creating a “scientifically cloaked theory of white superiority and black inferiority” (Boggs, 1970, p. 4) to suggest that Black people were biologically and intellectually lower in rank, status, ability, and value to Whites. The notion of the racial superiority of Whites created conditions for the exploitation of people of color in the service of capitalist and colonialist expansion in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, and laid the foundations for the enduring mistreatment of people of color.

White supremacy culture irrevocably shapes the beliefs, values, standards, and norms of our society, communities, organizations, and institutions, upholding Whiteness as the valuable default, and presenting Blackness and other racial identities as dangerous and threatening (Okun, 2021). We are conditioned by White supremacy culture to internalize and

replicate these harmful standards in multiple ways. Building on the work of many antiracist educators, scholars, and practitioners, Okun (2021) offers a list of fifteen characteristics of White supremacy culture that are often present in organizations where Whiteness and its associated norms are dominant. The attitudes and behaviors detailed in the list are harmful to communities because they are often deployed automatically as the "acceptable" way of interacting and working with individuals and groups without ever having been identified or agreed upon through discussion and consensus. The characteristics she lists are as follows: *perfectionism*—the social conditioning that leads us to believe we can be "perfect" based on an arbitrary set of rules, and that we feel will prove our own worth and that of others; *one right way*—that there is only one right way to do things and that there is something wrong with people who try to do things differently; *paternalism*—that those who have access to power get to make the decisions without input from those who don't; *objectivity*—that objectivity and neutrality are preferable, and that emotion should not play a role in processes or decision-making; *either/or and the binary*—presenting options and issues to be decided upon with one of only two choices; *progress is bigger/more*—that success is mostly judged in terms of growth or increase; *quantity over quality*—that quantitatively measurable goals are more important than those that cannot be counted; *worship of the written word*—valuing what is written (and to a very narrow standard) over other forms of communication; *individualism*—valuing competition over cooperation, denying interdependence; *I'm the only one*—the inability to delegate or accept others' contributions; *defensiveness and denial*—viewing criticism as threatening and refusing to acknowledge one's role in perpetuating oppressive systems and structures; *right to comfort*—believing that those in power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort; *fear of (open) conflict*—ignoring or retreating

from situations where conflict may arise; *power hoarding*—where power is seen as limited and accessible to a select few; and *a sense of urgency*—reinforcing the need to be bound by arbitrary schedules and deadlines that bear little relevance to how long things actually take. These characteristics are undeniably present in institutions of higher education, creating an environment that not only values these ways of thinking and doing, but also judges constituents' competence and level of acceptance by the extent to which they adopt and promote them. In their stories, participants shared tangible examples in their stories of occasions on which they had observed these characteristics at play both at their institutions and within themselves.

White Hegemony. Hegemonic Whiteness (Hughey, 2009) is a feature of most institutions of higher education in the U.S., creating and preserving a dominant White culture that clings to systemic power, revealed through policies and practices that advantage White people and disadvantage people of color. White dominance is established and sustained through institutional systems and practices that frame Whiteness as normal and natural, and other racial categories as abnormal and unnatural (Ash et al., 2020). In higher education, White hegemony is used as a tool of socialization and acculturation, for example, by the assumption that faculty are "unbiased conveyors of knowledge, unaffected or influenced by their own or students' social identities or the larger structure of race" (Charbeneau, 2015, p. 669). Other examples of White hegemony within academic spaces in higher education include the promotion and acceptance of primarily Western-produced scholarship throughout disciplines and the marginalization of "fringe" disciplines such as Africana Studies or American Indian Studies; adherence to the use of standard English vernacular and grammar in academic production, and a requirement for rigid and formulaic presentations of

knowledge acquisition; the funding disparity between “traditional” fraternity and sorority chapters and multicultural Greek organizations; and the use of racially and culturally insensitive or inappropriate school mascots (Cabrera et al., 2016), to name but a few.

An analysis of the ways in which hegemonic Whiteness shows up in women’s center spaces is important to the context in which this study takes place. Hegemonic Whiteness can and has shown up in campus-based women’s centers in a myriad of ways, including the adherence to and promotion of ideological frameworks that subscribe largely to principles of mainstream (White) feminism; the predominance of artwork in common areas that features images of and quotes by mostly White, Western feminists; programming that largely features White speakers presenting on topics more likely to appeal to the White majority student body than students of color; and racially homogenous (i.e. White) professional and student staff (Salsbury & MillerMacPhee, 2019).

In addition to acknowledging the oppressive systems and structures created by hegemonic Whiteness, CWS scholarship also promotes the development of a positive White racial identity, encouraging White people become more attuned to and aware of the racialized environments in which they move and work. Foundational to building strong racial allyship is an understanding of the pervasiveness of White hegemony and one’s own sociopolitical location within it. CWS provides a critical starting point for Whites to examine not only the ways in which racism has shaped the places and spaces they access from day to day, but also to what extent internalized superiority plays a role in perpetuating racist values and beliefs (Cabrera et al., 2017).

Cabrera et al. (2017) provide an important critique of CWS, asserting that it centers White people in critical conversations about racism. Nevertheless, a thorough exploration of

Whiteness is key to bringing to the surface and making visible the often unseen and unexamined conditions or “habits” that allow racism to persist. Ahmed (2007) stresses the importance of bringing to the forefront that which is taken for granted and typically goes unseen. An examination of Whiteness is necessary to dismantle racism in meaningful, enduring ways. “It is by showing us how we are stuck, by attending to what is habitual and routine in ‘the what’ of the world,” she says, “that we can keep open the possibility of habit changes, without using that possibility to displace our attention to the present, and without simply wishing for new tricks” (p. 165).

When deployed together with Critical Race Feminism (CRF), Critical White Studies (CWS) offers a comprehensive foundational grounding for examining the ways in which White feminist women explore and reconcile their own oppressive identities and the hegemony of Whiteness within both higher education and feminism to pursue allyship with members of racially oppressed communities. According to Case (2012), relatively few studies on White antiracism provide anecdotal data on the processes through which White people are socialized into racism, or the processes they go through to unlearn privilege and internalized dominance. This study specifically addresses the challenges and obstacles faced by White feminist women as they identify their complicity in racist systems and structures and develop strategies for personal and institutional change.

Developing Racial Consciousness

The calls to action outlined by CRF and CWS emphasize a need to study processes of both individual and group change. In an effort to address racist systems and structures in higher education, researchers have discussed the need for racial justice allies to challenge and transform dominant discourse and frameworks of Whiteness within the academy (Cabrera et

al., 2017). Allyship is not limited to antiracist action, as individuals can be allies to any number of oppressed groups. Central to allyship of marginalized groups is an understanding of one's own sociopolitical location. Therefore, an exploration of White racial identity development is helpful for mapping the ways in which White people develop racial consciousness and subsequently pursue allyship for racial justice.

White Racial Identity Development

In the last four decades, several models of White racial identity development have emerged from the fields of education and counseling psychology, including early models outlined by Hardiman (1982) and Helms (1984/1990), and subsequent models developed by Sabnani, Ponterotto, and Borodovsky (1991); Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994); and Sue and Sue (2003). These models have explored the potential for the transformation of Whiteness by proposing the development of a healthy White identity defined in part by nonracist attitudes and actions. For the purposes of this study, I will only describe the first two models mentioned; Hardiman's (1982) model, as the foundational example of this type of model, and Helms' (1990) model, which contributed to the development of the Ladder of Empowerment (Okun, 2006), used extensively by participants in the White Accountability Group to examine our own perceptions and experiences of antiracist allyship development.

The first such examples of process-oriented models developed to examine the formation of racial identity in White people, Hardiman's and Helms' work emerged in the decade following the Civil Rights and the Black power movements in the 1960s and 1970s (Hardiman, 2001). Hardiman's (1982) model outlines five stages that White people progress through in the development of a White racial identity: (1) *Lack of social consciousness* or *Naïveté*, characteristic of the experiences of young children, wherein White people

completely lack an awareness of race and racism; (2) *Acceptance*, in which White people have learned and accepted dominant social codes of behavior and stereotypes about their own and other groups. Typically, having an experience that challenges the beliefs adopted in the second stage will lead them to the third stage; (3) *Resistance*, in which White people begin to unlearn the prejudices and assumptions of their racist conditioning. This stage is usually accompanied by feelings of guilt and shame, which often causes White people to reject their Whiteness and other White people; in (4) *Redefinition*, Whites begin to recognize their White privilege and their role in perpetuating racist systems and structures, while seeking to build generative relationships with other White people and people of color; and finally, (5) *Internalization* is when White people internalize their new White identity in a healthy manner and commit to antiracist solidarity and action.

Helms' (1990) model describes six stages that White people experience as they develop racial awareness. It's important to note that this model has been critiqued, however, for failing to attend to the intersectionality of other identities, such as gender, with race. Helms' model can be divided into two phases: the first phase, consisting of the first three stages of the model, is characterized by a lack of consciousness and understanding of race, racism, and White privilege; in the second phase, the individual becomes aware of their racial identity and the privileges of being White, begins to see and understand the structural and systemic nature of racism, and moves towards the adoption of a non-racist White identity. The six stages in the journey to racial consciousness include: (1) *Contact*, characterized by an individual's first contact with and an emerging awareness of people from different racial identity groups; (2) *Disintegration*, where a White individual becomes aware of race and racism, and experiences guilt and shame at being White; (3) the *Reintegration* stage occurs if

an individual experiences a "backlash" reaction to their racial awakening, and adopts a belief of White superiority; if in the previous stage, a person channels their energies into positively addressing and moving beyond their guilt and shame, they may bypass the third stage and move into (4) *Pseudo-Independence*, characterized by curiosity and interest in other racial identity groups, and a deeper understanding of race-based bias and prejudice; (5) in the *Immersion/Emersion* stage, White people reconcile with their racial identity and make an effort to connect with other Whites in the pursuit of antiracist action; and finally (6) *Autonomy*, in which an individual actively seeks opportunities to engage in cross-racial collaborations, and approaches these interactions with curiosity and respect.

Cabrera (2012) maintains that research into White racial identity development can be problematic because it focuses on individualistic efforts that often do not address broader systems of oppression, and can result in White people re-centering themselves. Cabrera also suggests that the lack of focus on praxis in identity development research can be counterproductive to racial justice efforts—individuals seeking to develop nonracist identities must engage in tangible action in order to transform oppressive conditions for members of non-dominant groups. The focus of this study was not specifically on the development of participants' White racial identity, although examples of emerging race cognizance were provided by participants when sharing their stories of their journey to racial allyship.

Allyship Development

Broadly speaking, an ally is someone who acknowledges the benefits they receive from membership in a dominant group and takes action to challenge systems of injustice that privilege certain sociocultural groups over others (Bishop, 2002). A number of conceptual

models exploring allyship development emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s, including Bishop's (2002) model of allyship, which proposed a six-step process for becoming an ally: (1) understanding the origins and applications of oppression; (2) understanding different types of oppression and how they are connected; (3) developing consciousness and seeking healing; (4) working towards one's own liberation; (5) becoming an ally; and (6) maintaining hope. Broido's (2000) study examined social justice allyship development among college students. She found that critical factors in the development of social justice allyship included having an attitudinal disposition to embracing egalitarian values; the acquisition of information related to diversity and social justice issues; engaging in meaning-making strategies to transform information into knowledge; developing confidence in their positions on social justice issues; and being presented with opportunities for action.

Racial Justice Allyship

Scholarship on racial justice allyship is situated within the broader body of literature on social justice allyship development. Reason et al. (2005) define racial justice allies as "Whites who are actively working to end racism and racial oppression" (p. 530). In their study on White students' engagement in racial justice movements, they proposed an exploratory model of racial justice ally development. Their process model reveals that the most salient influences on students' development as racial justice allies include: intentional reflection on the nature and expression of Whiteness; direct experiences with members of socially marginalized groups, including friendships with individuals of diverse identities; academic coursework related to race and racism; intentionally diverse living arrangements; and support and encouragement from White racial justice role models (Reason et al., 2005).

In her study examining the development of White college women's racial consciousness, Linder (2015) proposed a model of antiracist identity development which provides a useful schema for understanding the complicated process of racial allyship among White feminist women. She uses the metaphor of a machine with cogs (Figure 2) to describe the process her White feminist participants went through to progress from learning about the realities of racism and White privilege, to engaging in antiracist action. Working through feelings of resistance, anger, and defensiveness to accepting the realities of racism and White privilege is illustrated on the left side of the model as a linear and sequential process. Once participants acknowledged the existence of racism and White privilege, they would become trapped in a continual cycle of guilt and shame, fear of appearing racist, and distance from Whiteness, illustrated by the diagram on the right of the model, preventing them from engaging in antiracist activism. By confronting and examining these emotions, participants were eventually able to reconcile their identity as a White person and its inherent privileges, and through this emerging self-awareness, work consciously to change their own behaviors.

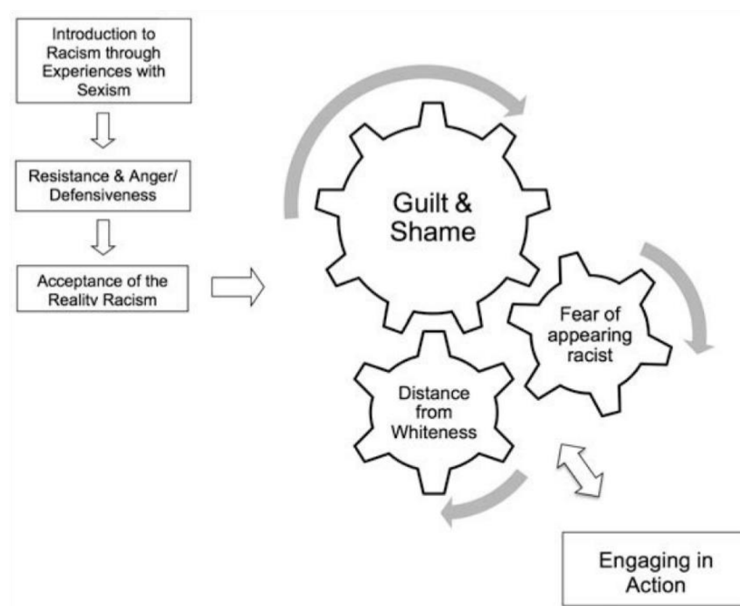

Figure 2. Model of Antiracist White Feminist Activism (Linder, 2015)

Cabrera et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of White racial justice allies developing community and connection with like-minded individuals to examine their White identity in a way that helps them understand how Whiteness contributes to and maintains structural systems of racism. It must be noted that the notion of White allyship, particularly in the current sociopolitical climate, can be a complicated and controversial concept, given that it centers the experiences of White people (Thompson, 2003) and can used in a performative manner by White people to acquire social justice credibility without the necessary level of personal investment and risk (Patton & Bondi, 2015). It is not enough to simply be "not racist." Kendi (2019) vigorously argues that the claim of being "not racist" signals neutrality, but that "there is no neutrality in the racism struggle" (p. 9). The claim of "not racist" neutrality," he says, "is a mask for racism" (p. 9).

Communities of Practice

The White Accountability Group through which participants in this study engage in a process of racial allyship development is an example of a community of practice. Communities of practice are learning groups formed by people committing to a process of collective learning on a topic of mutual interest (Wenger, 2011). Three essential features characterize communities of practice: the *domain*, meaning that the identity of the group is defined by a domain of interest shared by its members; the *community*, in which members of the group participate in discussions and activities together, assist one another, and share knowledge; and the *practice*, wherein group members engage in the development and honing of a specific practice together. Wenger (1998) proposed the concept of "communities of practice" as a framework for examining the process of learning as a social activity. He identified four main components of learning: (1) *Meaning*—how we experience the world

and find meaning in those experiences; (2) *Practice*—how we talk about shared resources, frameworks, and perspectives to create a sense of engagement and action; (3) *Community*—how we view the social arrangements in which we define our endeavor and gauge our participation in terms of competence; and (4) *Identity*—how learning changes our sense of self. Wenger's theory is based on four main ideas: that a central aspect of learning is that people are social beings; that knowledge is about competence with respect to "valued enterprises;" that knowing is about active engagement with the world; and that learning ultimately produces meaning (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). A key outcome of this process, he emphasizes, is learning. Learning is inevitable, since in failing to learn something, those who are pursuing knowledge by default end up learning something different. Wenger emphasizes the central role that reflection plays at all stages of the group's evolution in increasing participants' capacity for learning and growth.

Wenger (1998) describes five stages in the evolution of a community of practice. In the first stage, *Potential*, individuals are having similar experiences around a particular phenomenon, but have no community in which to share their challenges and successes. In the second stage, *Coalescing*, individuals find other like-minded people with whom to share a learning journey and start to explore their vision and goals for learning together. In the third stage, *Active*, members are actively engaged in group practice, building relationships, sharing knowledge, and growing in their learning together. The fourth stage, *Dispersed*, is characterized by a decrease in the intensity of engagement, but the group still functions as an important source of knowledge and support. In the final stage, *Memorable*, the community no longer plays a central role in the lives of its former members, but the learning that occurred in the group still has significant resonance for individuals.

Race-based caucuses. The community of practice formed by the participants in this study is a race-based caucus, also known as a racial affinity group. In recent years, racial affinity groups or race-based caucuses have become an increasingly popular tool for addressing racism within organizations and groups. Members of race-based caucuses meet on a regular basis with other members of their racial group to engage in shared learning and to strategize ways to advance racial equity (Blitz & Kohl, 2012). Caucusing provides an important opportunity for members to deepen their own antiracist practice in community with like-minded individuals and promote organizational change, as well as furthering their own personal growth. Institutionalized racism often renders invisible hegemonic Whiteness and the oppressive cultures of White privilege and White supremacy, creating challenges for individuals and groups to confront these dynamics within organizations (Blitz & Kohl, 2012). Generating opportunities for people to engage in meaningful processes that aim to disrupt normative patterns of Whiteness, that explore opportunities for community learning and growth, and that openly discuss the contentious topics of racial identity and privilege, has the potential to lead to more equitable and socially just working and learning environments. Caucuses create circles of connection and support for individuals engaged in racial justice work, foster a sense of community, and can generate collective power for strategy and action around race equity issues. Figure 3 on the following page illustrates a conceptual model of an antiracism caucus or affinity group.

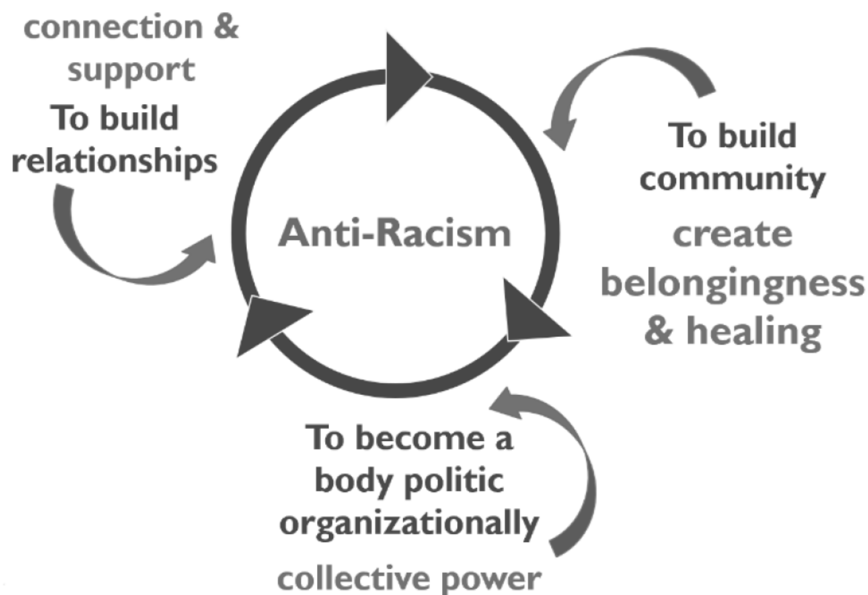

Figure 3. Conceptual Model of an Antiracism Caucus (JustLead Washington, 2019)

Michael and Conger (2009) discuss the importance of White affinity groups in providing a space for White people to discuss race in the absence of people of color. White people, socialized into a world that presents their racial identity as the standard by which all other races are measured and judged, often struggle with inexperience and ignorance when participating in interracial dialogues on race and racism. In contrast, people of color come to these conversations with extensive personal experience of and exposure to the complexities and dynamics of racial difference. The emotional processing and learning that most White people have to go through to arrive at a similar level of understanding can be frustrating and painful for people of color engaged in racial equity work. In addition, dynamics of hegemonic Whiteness will inevitably creep into interracial group conversation. Thus, creating racially homogenous groups for talking honestly, openly, and productively about ways to work towards racial justice can be an important way for White people to develop allyship to people of color (Kivel, 2017).

Chapter Summary

I began my literature review with a brief discussion of how institutions of higher education in the U.S. can be viewed as structures of White supremacy, providing historical and situational context to the study. Next, I provided an outline of Critical Race Theory (CRT) which maintains that dominant systems and structures of power and privilege must be challenged in order to create greater opportunities for equity and access at all levels of society. I delved into the three tenets of CRT which bear specific relevance to this study: (1) the permanence of racism, the theory that racism is a permanent feature of U.S. society and life; (2) interest convergence, or the idea that White people will only challenge racism when it directly benefits them; and (3) intersectionality, or the ways in which sociopolitical identities function to create discrete experiences in the world for individuals of different racial backgrounds. A brief discussion of CRT as it relates to the field of education was included to set the stage for exploring the racial inequities present in our educational systems, and to offer suggestions for the conditions necessary to imagine such a transformation. Following a brief history of U.S. feminism, I presented Critical Race Feminism (CRF) as one of the conceptual frameworks offering a theoretical grounding for the work being done by participants in the study, all of whom identify as White and feminist. I outlined critiques of mainstream White feminism as it has largely dominated discussions of feminism in U.S. institutions of higher education, and proposed intersectional feminism and antiracist feminism as a strategy for challenging dominant and oppressive narratives of gender justice. I then provided an overview of Critical White Studies (CWS), which serves as the second theoretical framework to my study, examining how White normativity, White privilege, White supremacy, and White hegemony have functioned to shape the environment and

structure of colleges and universities in the U.S. Outlining how the development of a positive White identity can help White people challenge the norms of the racialized environments in which they work, I explored how White people develop racial consciousness. I reviewed the literature on White racial identity development, discussing Helms' (1990) model, examining how it informs White allies' progress towards racial justice allyship. I then briefly examined the literature on allyship development, and racial justice allyship, concluding with a brief discussion of race-based caucuses, a type of community of practice deployed by White people seeking to increase their skills in service of action for racial justice.

In the chapter that follows, I detail the philosophical underpinnings of the research paradigm selected for the study, as well as the methodology, methods, data collection, and data analysis.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how White feminist-identified women working in campus-based women's and gender equity centers (WGECs) at institutions of higher education across the United States perceive individual, institutional, and systemic racism and how they navigate and respond to awareness of their involvement and complicity in perpetuating racist systems and structures. Using the lenses of Critical Race Feminism (CRF) and Critical White Studies (CWS) and phenomenological reflection on the data collected, I examined how participation in a race-based caucus impacts White feminist women's perceptions of antiracist allyship and acts of support for people of color; the individual or structural factors that encourage or prevent White feminist women from pursuing antiracist allyship; and how action for racial justice intersects with the feminism of White women. This chapter provides an overview of the research paradigm and design, a brief summary of the theoretical frameworks that guide the study, a description of the participants and the data collection methods, an outline of the data analysis procedures, and criteria for validity of the study.

Qualitative Research

Although its earliest origins have been traced back as far as the eighteenth century, qualitative inquiry began to emerge in earnest in the 1960s, as researchers struggled to reconcile their evolving ideas about the nature of knowledge and social realities with the structure and limitations of the quantitative research paradigm (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Creswell (2018) describes qualitative research as "an approach for exploring and

understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). As researchers began to distance themselves from the goal of discovering an objective "truth" or "reality" to pursuing a deeper understanding of human experiences and the creation of knowledge, alternatives emerged to quantitative research paradigms. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) contend that social research is about the exploration of "wicked problems" (p. 5) that lack a single correct answer or solution, and as such, researchers needed new ways to investigate them. While quantitative research quantifies the collection and analysis of data in a numerical format, qualitative inquiry "uses words as data… collected and analyzed in all sorts of ways" (Braun & Clark, 2013, pp. 3-4). Quantitative research uses a deductive approach, wherein existing theories and hypotheses are tested; qualitative studies typically deploy inductive reasoning, whereby a conclusion is reached based on analysis of the data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) outline four primary characteristics that are typical of qualitative research: (1) the goal of qualitative inquiry is to understand the ways in which individuals experience the world and derive meaning and understanding; (2) the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; (3) the data is analyzed inductively, meaning that concepts, hypotheses, and theories to explain the phenomenon under investigation are generated directly from the data; and (4) sources such as documents, field notes, focus groups, and interviews yield rich, thick description for the presentation of data (Geertz, 1977).

I used a qualitative research approach to this study, with the goal of understanding how White feminist women develop and practice antiracist allyship through their interactions in a specific community of practice. As the primary research instrument, I collected data via individual interviews, a focus group, and written reflection prompts from participants, in order to uncover their perceptions, attitudes, and feelings regarding their development and growth

as antiracist allies. The interviews, focus group gathering, and written reflections yielded rich, thick description which was analyzed inductively to determine emergent themes which contributed to the study's findings.

Research Paradigm

Lincoln and Guba (1994) describe the term "paradigm" as "the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator" (p. 105). These perspectives influence the researcher not only in their choice of method for their research study, but frame the inquiry within a specific set of ontological and epistemological beliefs. This study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, specifically phenomenology. Interpretivist research "is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). Interpretivists believe that meaning is socially constructed and accept multiple forms of knowledge production, acknowledging that "objective reality can never be captured… [we] only know it through representations" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). Research methodologies that align with an interpretivist paradigm emphasize that social phenomena must be understood "through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 21). The goal of interpretive methodology is to understand social phenomena in their context. Angen (2000) explains that "interpretive approaches rely heavily on naturalistic methods (interviewing and observation)" and that "these methods ensure an adequate dialog between the researchers and those with whom they interact in order to construct a meaningful reality" (p.105). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) suggest that qualitative researchers often ascribe different meanings to the term "interpretivism." Given that the researcher is an "interpreter" of social phenomena, they contend, some scholars consider all qualitative research to be interpretivist research. Others

regard interpretivism as a specific set of philosophies that include pragmatism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and post-critical/poststructuralism. This study is strongly influenced by a phenomenological paradigm, an interpretive philosophy that emerged at the turn of the century from the work of German philosophers Edmund Husserl (1907/1964) and Martin Heidegger (1927/1962). Phenomenology "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76, author's emphasis). The intent is the reduction of experiences and the suspension of prior assumptions, with the goal of developing a description of a common "essence" or "nature" of the phenomenon being explored (Owen, 1994).

Phenomenologists typically believe that the researcher's experience cannot be separated from the experience of the participants in a study. In order to clearly view and understand the phenomena under study, Husserl maintained that the researcher must "bracket" off the influence of prior experiences (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In contrast, Heidegger argued that bracketing is an impossible endeavor, given that people cannot be removed or separated from their personal experiences. Building on Husserl's and Heidegger's work, Gadamer (1960) advocated for an examination of the specific conditions in which an understanding of human experiences takes place. Merleau-Ponty (1964/1998) promoted a phenomenology of the body, arguing that being "embodied" was a critical way of understanding the world, a perspective which is integrally connected to the body-centered experiences of the participants in this study. Phenomenologists view humans and their experiences as undetachable from the world, meaning that objectivity cannot ever be truly achieved.

Stutey et al. (2020) suggest that bridling is a useful alternative technique to bracketing. Bridling is “an innovative reflective practice where the researcher intentionally reflects on preconceived ideas of the phenomenon being studied” (Stutey et al., 2020, p.145). Unlike bracketing, bridling does not aim to separate or distance the researcher from the phenomenon being studied, but rather, highlights the researcher’s interaction with and relationship to the phenomenon (Vagle, 2009). The practice of bridling can be deployed before, during, and/or after the data collection process, and serves two primary purposes: the uncovering of presuppositions in order to expand the researcher’s receptiveness to meanings derived from the phenomenon under study; and an evolving understanding of the phenomenon as a whole throughout the research process (Stutey et al., 2020). Researchers using bridling as a way of reflecting on their understanding of the phenomenon being studied typically use journaling in order to dwell with the phenomenon in a frequent and ongoing manner. Bridling involves three main steps: (1) the drafting of an initial bridling statement in the researcher’s reflexivity journal, in order to document their assumptions and preunderstandings prior to beginning the study; (2) the recording of reflective notes on the research process, including interactions with participants; and (3) summaries of the researcher’s first impressions of the data being analyzed, as well as passages or phrases that contain preliminary meanings (Vagel, 2010). In this study, I used bridling as a mechanism to examine and reflect on my own assumptions and experiences regarding the phenomenon under study, and to create greater openness in my interpretations of meaning derived from the data.

Ontology

My ontological perspective is most closely aligned with relativism, which contends that reality is a subjective experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) influenced by our interactions

with the world around us. Ontology, or “the study of being” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10) “raises basic questions about the nature of reality and the nature of the human being in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 183). Different people experience different realities, and those realities are subject to multiple interpretations based in part on social and political identity. My perspectives of reality are filtered through the way I experience the world, as are those of the participants in this study. The purpose of a relativist ontology is to acknowledge and gain understanding of the subjective nature of reality and multiple truths.

Epistemology

In keeping with a relativist ontology and interpretivist framework, my epistemology as a researcher, defined as “the nature and forms [of knowledge], how it can be acquired and communicated to other human beings” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 7) is grounded in a constructivist approach, which contends that “meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), constructivists believe that people construct reality based on the meaning they assign to their own experiences and perspectives. The essence of knowledge and that which we regard as truth are created by individuals, rather than uncovered by researchers. Constructivists typically do not initiate the research endeavor to prove or disprove a particular hypothesis or theory, but rather “generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning” (Creswell, 2018, p. 8) as the research progresses. Thus, the knowledge that we generate and the way we analyze that knowledge takes place within our own unique ways of viewing and interpreting the world (Schwandt, 2000). I believe that the study participants and I generate knowledge in different ways, influenced by our multiple and varied experiences and cultural backgrounds, and that these are subject to interpretation based on the way that we interact with the world around us.

The research paradigm for the study, interpretive phenomenology, and the researcher's corresponding ontology and epistemology are aligned with the purpose of the research, and provide a grounding framework for the study. By examining the ways in which White feminist women seek to understand and process their Whiteness and feminist identity in community with other White feminists, the study may help to suggest ways of understanding and challenging systemic racism and developing an antiracist feminist praxis within institutions of higher education.

Theoretical Frameworks

Anfara and Mertz (2015) describe theoretical frameworks as "any empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social and/or psychological processes, at a variety of levels… that can be applied to the understanding of phenomena" (p. 15). A study's theoretical framework is directly derived from the orientation or stance that a researcher brings to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this interpretive phenomenological study, I used two theoretical frameworks to inform key aspects of the study: Critical Race Feminism (CRF), which seeks to understand how power and privilege function across intersections of race, gender, class, and other forms of social identity (Wing, 2003); and Critical White Studies (CWS), which examines how White privilege, specifically, sustains complicity in racist systems and structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997). These two theoretical frameworks are described in detail in Chapter 2.

Research Design: Case Study

The term "case study" has been subject to a variety of definitions in the literature on qualitative research (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Some researchers argue that the term "case study" refers to the way a case is delimited (Stake, 1994). Others define the term as a specific

approach to research (see Creswell, 2013). A third perspective maintains that a case study is simply a way of reporting the results of a qualitative study. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) maintain that a case study is all of these at once. They describe a case study as an approach to research that focuses on a specific "case," using methods that draw on other research approaches. In describing the unique characteristics of case studies, Merriam (1988) and Yin (2009) explain that a case study is "bounded," meaning that it is focused, intensive, narrow in scope, and has clear boundaries or limiters. Within the proposed project, there will be a finite number of people interviewed and observed, and documents analyzed. The following additional characteristics make a case study appropriate for this research project: case studies are *holistic*, meaning that they describe the entire phenomenon under investigation as well as the relationship of different parts to the case; they are *particularlistic*, meaning that they focus on specifics rather than generalities; they are *contextual*, in that a history of the particular historical, social, political, and/or cultural context(s) for the case study must be provided in order to derive a comprehensive understanding of the case; and they are *concrete* in their descriptions, in order to convey meaning about the case to readers (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

When conducting a case study, researchers must identify the study's purpose, disciplinary tradition, and appropriate research approach. This study has an explanatory purpose, which "aims to make explicit a problem or pattern of difficulties that is recurrent and in the main relates to a given context" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 156). The study draws from the disciplinary norms of sociology, and adopts a phenomenological research approach. A phenomenological case study "seeks to gather information through a process of considering researcher and participant perceptions" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 159). A case study is

ideal for this research project in that there is flexibility in deploying different research approaches. It allows for depth of investigation, providing a detailed contextual analysis of the event or condition and its relationships. A key strength of case studies involves the use of multiple data collection strategies, and for presentation of the data using rich, thick description (Geertz, 1977). Case studies are also responsive to evolving circumstances, and are not time-dependent, allowing for the researcher to observe and record the process of change as it unfolds.

This study examined the experiences of a group of White feminists employed at campus-based WGECs around the continental United States who are participating in virtual bimonthly White affinity group meetings in the pursuit of self-education and advancing their allyship around racial justice issues. At the time that the research project began, the group had already been meeting for almost a year, and fulfilled all of the criteria outlined above for the exploration of group dynamics as a case study. In addition to examining the participation of group members, I engaged in self-reflexive study, using bridling techniques such as journaling to explore my own experiences and learning throughout the group process.

Context for the Study

In order to better support students from historically excluded communities, and to support White people in not perpetuating racist ideas and actions, there is increasing urgency for White professionals in higher education to engage in learning about and work towards actively dismantling policies and practices within their institutions that sustain White supremacy. Cabrera et al. (2017) suggest that White privilege pedagogy can be a promising entry point for educating White people about racist systems and structures on college campuses. McIntosh's (1988) foundational article on White privilege, which detailed the ways

in which Whiteness functions to privilege identity and status in subtle and invisible ways, laid the foundation for extensive scholarship on the topic. Critiques of White privilege pedagogy, however, illuminate that White people's awareness of their privilege does not necessarily lead to actions to disrupt, transform, and destroy systemic racism. Margolin (2015) argues that by focusing on personal identity, White privilege pedagogy rewards Whites for confessing and renouncing their privileges while ignoring the structural racism that surrounds them and declining antiracist action. Similarly, DiAngelo's (2018) work around White fragility centers the experiences of White people and in many instances, has exacerbated and compounded White people's defensiveness around acknowledging personal culpability for racism.

In the last decade, scholarship has emerged examining the effectiveness of White racial affinity groups as a strategy for interrogating Whiteness in community with other White people, and moving toward antiracist action within organizations. Racial affinity groups, or race-based caucuses, "are processes where people of the same racial group meet on a regular basis to discuss dynamics of institutional racism, oppression, and privilege within their organization" (Blitz & Kohl, 2012, p. 481). The genesis of this work is arguably Tatum's (1997) landmark book on racial identity development, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*, which outlined the importance of a sense of safety and belonging for processing a growing awareness of race, emphasizing that while people of color are invariably exposed to issues of race and racial identity as children, White people typically don't have to think about the role that race plays in their lives until they reach adulthood. For people of color, racial affinity groups can serve as critical spaces for community healing from trauma and oppression by providing the opportunity to make connections, seek support, and develop a shared understanding of racist

experiences (Warren-Grice, 2021). Other antiracism scholars and educators have written about the ways in which affinity groups can advance White action towards antiracism. Michael et al. (2009) explored the formation of a White affinity student group at the University of Pennsylvania to reflect on the benefits of racially homogenous spaces for discussing racism and hegemonic Whiteness, and to increase competency around racial issues. Many social justice trainers like becky martinez, Kathy Obear, and Tema Okun promote race-based caucusing as an important way to challenge White supremacy, creating spaces where White people can be held accountable to practice, model, improve, and seek and provide support for their antiracist practice.

Participants in the White Accountability Group have used Okun's (2006) Ladder of Empowerment model to periodically examine our progression towards antiracist allyship, and I used the model extensively in the analysis of my findings, detailed in chapters 4 and 5. The model, developed by academic scholars and racial justice consultants and trainers involved in the Dismantling Racism initiative and the change*work* project, draws heavily on the racial identity development work of Helms (1990), as discussed on pp. 54-55, and the work of Tatum (1997), which I will elaborate on below. The Ladder of Empowerment describes the different stages experienced by White people as they develop growing awareness of racism (Okun, 2006). Okun explains that the model is intended "to help white people understand our identity as white people within a racist system which assumes our superiority while at the same time challenging that assumption and replacing it with a positive, antiracist identity" (Okun, 2006, p. 1). The Ladder consists of 9 "rungs" or stages in the development of White individuals' antiracist identity: (1) in the beginning *I'm Normal* stage, also known as the *Innocence/Ignorance* stage, White individuals fail to understand

their race privilege and the significance of racial difference; (2) in the *What Are You?* Stage, also known as *First Contact*, White people have their first interactions with people of color; (3) the *Be Like Me* stage, also referred to as the *We're All the Same, You're the Problem* stage, is where an awareness of racial difference and tensions begins to emerge; (4) in the *Denial and Defensiveness* stage, also called the *I Am Not the Problem* stage, White people are forced to see themselves as part of the dominant group and look for evidence to challenge their internalized superiority; (5) the *Guilt, Shame, and Blame* stage, also known as the *White is Not Right, I'm Bad* stage, is characterized by a growing understanding among White people of their own complicity in racist systems and structures; (6) in the *Opening Up/Acknowledgement* stage, also called the *Houston, We've Got a Problem* stage, White people begin to acknowledge that they are part of a dominant and oppressive group, and that racism and White privilege are endemic problems; (7) the *Taking Responsibility/Self-righteousness* stage (*White Can Do Right, Especially Me*) is where White people start to think about engaging in intentional, tangible actions to challenging racism; (8) the *Collective Action* stage involves the realization that anti-racism work must be done in coalition and partnership with other antiracist individuals and groups, especially people of color; and finally, (9) the *Community of Love and Resistance* stage represents the aspirational culmination of the White antiracist journey, where individuals are consistently working in cooperation with others to organize and build strong antiracist organizations and communities.

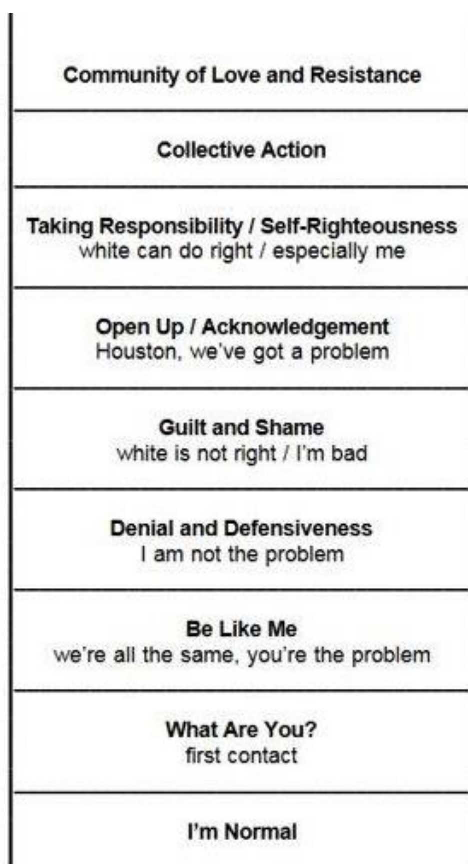

Figure 4. The Ladder of Empowerment (Okun, 2006)

Much in the same way that Tatum (1997) describes the process of racial identity development as “not so much linear as circular” (p. 76), Okun explains that the ladder is only linear in that a White person must move through each of the stages in turn to progress up the ladder to the higher stages of racial consciousness and allyship. However, people can also fall back down the ladder to lower stages or rungs when they have an interaction in which they slip back into old habits and thought patterns. Okun clarifies that in contrast to moving up the ladder, it is possible to skip stages when moving down. Tatum describes the process of moving through racial identity development thus: “It’s like moving up a spiral staircase: As you proceed up each level, you have a sense that you have passed this way before, but you are not exactly in the same spot.” (p. 76). White people, Okun explains, can move up and

down the ladder multiple times "in a lifetime, in a year, in a week, in a day, in an hour" (Okun, 2006, p. 3). The lower the rungs we occupy on the ladder, the more we cooperate with racist systems and structures. The goal, as we grow in our awareness and progress in our antiracist journeys, is to spend less time on the lower rungs, and more time close to the top of the ladder.

Members of the White Accountability Group who participated in this study have been gathering with one another over Zoom for the past 18 months. The group's co-conveners—me and another WGEC professional colleague—are employed at two different public four-year state universities in the Pacific Northwest. Both universities are built on the unceded ancestral and contemporary territories of Indigenous tribal peoples. In early summer 2021, we sent two invitations to join a White racial affinity group to WRAC-L, an email distribution list largely composed of individuals who work at campus-based WGECs in the United States. We also posted the invitation on the NWSA Women's Centers Committee (WCC)'s Facebook page, and extended the invitation to attendees at the mid-year WCC Summit held online in June. A total of 16 individuals expressed interest in joining the group, and 9 individuals (including me) have been attending consistently since the group began. The group meets every other week over Zoom for an hour and a half. Thus far, my co-convener and I have mostly led the structure of each group session, inviting others to contribute as they feel comfortable. A planning meeting for each group session, which is open to all affinity group members, convenes for an hour on alternating weeks to the group session to discuss themes and to share suggestions for readings, opening and closing words, music, journaling prompts, and discussion questions. We compile an outline together for the session in a shared Google Docs folder, and each member present assumes an organizational task congruent with their comfort

level and interest in the chosen topic. The outline is completed no later than the following Tuesday, and a freeform "agenda" (see Appendix A) is distributed to participants by email one week in advance of each group session.

Meetings typically start with music chosen by a member who participated in the planning meeting the week before. A brief individual check-in follows, to allow participants to share any thoughts, anecdotes, and feelings that they want to express and then put aside for the duration of the session (these are typically not related to racialized experiences, but are more the daily frustrations and burdens of personal and professional life). After the check-in, a member shares opening words chosen to reflect the theme selected for the session; it might be a poem, a short piece of prose, or an excerpt from a book or website. The opening words are followed by a grounding reading and embodied grounding activity. The reading and activity are heavily influenced by Menakem's (2017) work on somatic abolitionism to combat what he terms White-body supremacy. Menakem emphasizes that White supremacy is a trauma response, and that that trauma exists not just within our psyches, but deep within our bodies. He posits that White bodies are elevated above all other bodies, and that White bodies have long been held as the supreme standard by which all other bodies are measured. In order to counter White-body supremacy, Menakem explains, individuals engaged in antiracism work must first begin to heal the trauma that resides in their bodies. Thus, the grounding reading and activities selected for the group are focused on body-centered healing. Typically, someone in the group offers a reading that speaks to an embodied antiracist practice. The grounding activity usually involves a short physical exercise that includes meditation, visualization, stretching, tapping, self-massage, or deep breathing. The grounding activity is followed by discussion and reflection on the articles, book excerpts, podcasts, or videos

assigned for completion the week before. Members are strongly encouraged to journal while they review the materials, approaching the exercise and their reflections with a somatic perspective, and to reflect on the physical sensations that the exercise produces. During the open discussion, participants are encouraged to share examples of how the readings or other materials connect to specific experiences in their own lives. After the discussion, there is a brief closing reading selected to provide a sense of hope and energy for continuing the work. The meeting adjourns with a reminder to join the next planning meeting on Friday, and the playing of music selected by a member of the group.

Participants

The participants in this study comprised individuals consistently engaged in the bimonthly White Accountability Group meetings discussed earlier, which at the time of initiating the research, consisted of nine individuals, including me. One participant (my co-convener) is a colleague whom I've known since 2016, and with whom I had already been engaged in conversations around antiracism. We had connected at several NWSA (National Women's Studies Association) and NCORE (National Conference on Race and Ethnicity) conferences and worked together in the fall of 2020 to create opportunities for professional development in antiracist learning for White employees at my institution. Creswell (2013) suggests that an ideal sample size for phenomenological research may vary from 3-4 participants, up to a maximum of 10-15. All of the participants identify as White and feminist, and all but one identify as women (one participant identifies as genderqueer). All are—or were, at the time of being invited to participate in the study—working in women's and gender equity centers (WGECs) at institutions of higher education (all PWIs) around the United States. A number of other divergent demographic factors exist among participants, including

sociogeographical location, age, academic background, length of engagement with feminism and antiracist activism, marital and parental status, etc. A table outlining brief personal demographics of each participant is detailed in the table below:

Pseudonym	Years in higher ed	Years of racial justice activism	Identities/life circumstances
Alex	17	Not stated	Genderqueer, early 40s, married, 2 children
Anne	16	11	Cisgender woman, late 30s, married, 2 children
Claire	14	5	Cisgender woman, early 30s, married, step-parent
Emily	12	Unsure	Woman, late 40s, married, 1 child
Martina	6	2	Woman, mid 40s, married, parent
Olivia	10	14	Cisgender woman, mid 30s, single, no children
Rebecca	5	7	Cisgender woman, early 30s, multi-partnered, no children
Susan	27	15+	Woman, mid 50s, single, no children

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Invitation to Collaborate. As mentioned, participants' experiences in the White Accountability Group were examined as a case study, eliciting the need for nonprobability or purposive sampling of research participants. In purposive sampling, participants who meet particular criteria for the research study are selected with a specific purpose in mind (Trochim et al., 2016). Researchers conducting phenomenological research studies should purposely select participants who are able to provide rich, detailed descriptions of their lived experiences of the phenomenon under investigation (van Manen, 2014). I proposed the study to members of the group during our first full meeting of the year, in January 2022. In an effort to honor and safeguard the relationships that had been nurtured in the year of the group's existence, I assured members that participation in the study was completely optional and that declining the invitation to participate in my study would in no way impact members' participation in the

White Accountability Group. I followed up my initial invitation to participate in the study with an email to group members (see Appendix B). All eight members of the group accepted my invitation to participate in the study. I asked each group member to participate in one recorded Zoom interview with me. Initially, I considered asking participants to share with me, as they felt comfortable, their journal reflections from the pre-work we did before each gathering, but decided against it, fearing that my positionality as one of the group's co-conveners could place undue influence or pressure on participants to share personal information beyond their level of comfort. Similarly, I decided against asking to record our group gatherings, out of concern that recording the conversations might interfere with the authenticity, spontaneity, and vulnerability of the group. In order to preserve the spontaneity and privacy of the gatherings, I also decided not to record my bridling reflections during the meetings, but chose instead to write them immediately following our gatherings. In order to ensure maximum comfort for participants, I chose to focus my notes on my own reactions and experiences, rather than on observations of group dynamics. I analyzed these post-gathering reflections in conjunction with my reflexive journal entries and pre-gathering reflections as part of the bridling process to examine and note my own reactions to the phenomenon under investigation.

The desire to build and sustain positive, nurturing relationships with the participants in my study was central to every decision I made around how to structure the data collection process. Through my exposure to Critical Indigenous Research Methodologies (CIRM) and culturally responsive pedagogy in my doctoral coursework, I have become more aware of and attuned to the harm caused by the deficit models through which the issue of racial inequities in education have typically been approached. These approaches to research and scholarship,

particularly as they relate to the fostering of relationships and community building, significantly impacted the way in which I considered and structured my research endeavor. Indigenous scholars present a compelling case for antiracist research practices by promoting critical research methodologies grounded in the "4 Rs": Relationality, which contends that "research must be a *process* of fostering relationships between researchers, communities, and the topic of inquiry (Brayboy et al., 2012, p. 437, authors' emphasis); Respect, which speaks to the expectations of building relationships and conducting research in an ethical manner by disrupting the balance of power inherent in research practices; Responsibility, meaning the researcher holds themselves accountable to maintaining relationships that undergird the research endeavor; and Reciprocity, which promotes a "pay it forward" notion of conducting research that will benefit others (Brayboy et al., 2012). The goal of these scholars is to challenge the power inequities and contexts of colonial domination within traditional Eurowestern standards of scholarship that marginalize and exclude the voices of Indigenous peoples and communities of color. Their approaches have important implications for infusing research practice with an antiracist, anticolonial framework. Research endeavors that are intentionally grounded in the nurturing of relationships, a culture of mutual respect, an understanding of personal responsibility, and the desire for reciprocity, have the potential to interrogate and disrupt the power imbalances present in the current academic landscape. Other educators and researchers have also written about ways in which the cultivation of relationships, in particular, is foundational to antiracism work. Tema Okun, an antiracism scholar and educator whose work has guided much of my own antiracism self-education and practice, describes relationships as "the fabric of antiracism" (Okun, n/d). The concept of grounding antiracism work in relationships—with ourselves, with one another, with other

White people, and with our friends and colleagues of color—is foundational to the way in which the White Accountability Group operates, and to how I tried to shape my research process.

Data Collection. As mentioned, the study uses a phenomenological approach, which "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Typical data collection strategies for phenomenological research methods include the use of ethnographic and autoethnographic tools such as participant observation, fieldnotes, interviews, focus groups, and reflexive journaling. Interviews were used as the primary method of data collection, "to gain focused insight into individuals' lived experiences" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 126). In qualitative research, exploring individuals' experiences and relating them to other participants' experiences helps the researcher to understand a broader scope of perspectives relating to the phenomenon under study. Interviews are a relational endeavor, involving mutual trust and reciprocity between the researcher and the participant. At its core, this research project is about exploring how White feminist-identified women build relationships with one another to develop an intentional community of practice to challenge racism, both at the personal and institutional level. As such, interviews comprised the ideal data collection strategy for the intended purpose of the study.

Interviews. Most of the data collected for this study came from one-on-one interviews that I conducted with participants over Zoom in June 2022. At the time of the interviews, I had been co-convening the White Accountability Group with a WGEC colleague at another institution for almost a year. The eight participants in the study had been attending the group regularly, and I had already developed the foundations of a trusting relationship with them. I

had not met four of the participants prior to the group starting, and still have not met two of them in person. Prior to scheduling individual interviews with participants, I asked them to complete a brief demographics form (Appendix C) and an informed consent form (Appendix D), providing information about the number of years they had been working in higher education, the number of years in which they had been engaging in racial justice work, the way they described their feminism, their gender, racial identity, age, marital status and status as a parent, and their level of educational attainment. Interviews were scheduled for an hour and a half—the shortest interview lasted one hour and 6 minutes, and the longest interview lasted one hour and 31 minutes. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview format (see Appendix E) with ten open-ended questions that provided opportunity for natural discussion. Phenomenological research aims to develop “a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76), thus, absolute consistency across interviews is not a necessity. The interview questions were formulated with the intention of providing conversation starting points to allow participants to share more fully of their own personal experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Given that prior engagement between members of the group around these topics had been highly relational and thoughtfully designed to foster trust and encourage authenticity, the individual interviews admittedly felt strangely formal at first. Even though the participants and I already had an established relationship and a history of engaging together in deep reflection on difficult topics, the interview space felt different and somewhat awkward. For example, Claire, the second person I interviewed, commented to me, “I’m a little nervous. I feel like it’s a job interview!” (Claire, individual interview, June 13, 2022). We laughed and I reassured her that I would do my best to try and move away from the artificiality and stiffness that an academic

research protocol can impose in an interview space. The interviews became less anxious and more relaxed as they progressed, as the participants and I settled into the space that we usually found together during our White Accountability Group gatherings. The interviews began with general questions about participants' definitions and perceptions of feminism and racism, in order to situate their personal experiences within a broader context of their understanding of each concept. I then asked participants follow-up questions about their direct experiences with racism, actions they have personally taken to reduce it, and their definition and expressions of antiracist allyship.

I conducted and recorded the interviews via the Zoom videoconferencing platform, and transcribed them using the online audio management software, Otter.ai. Otter provided a raw text transcript which I edited using a playback of the interview recordings for clarity and accuracy, including my observations in note form in the margins. To maintain confidentiality, I used the pseudonyms selected by each of the participants in lieu of their real names, and removed personally identifiable information from interview transcripts and analyses. All data collected, including interview recordings, recording transcriptions, and my personal notes, were stored in folders saved in a password-protected web-based file storage system (Google Docs), accessed on an electronic device available only to me. Once I had a clear, workable transcript for each interview, I emailed the text to participants to request their feedback on accuracy, and to remove any part of the data they felt uncomfortable including in the study. Upon receiving the revised transcript back from each participant, I began a preliminary analysis of the transcripts using narrative analysis and inductive coding to mine the data for codes, categories, and themes.

Initially, I had planned to use participant observation to gather data on group dynamics

and interactions between group members. Participant observation comprises the researcher's active involvement in the culture or context being observed for the purpose of recording fieldnotes on observable behaviors and exchanges (Trochim et al., 2016). When using participant observation as a data collection strategy, it is important for the researcher to consider and include personal reflections on their participant-observer role and how that may have impacted the dynamics within the group. In order to preserve participants' comfort, avoid creating distractions that could have potentially detracted from the purpose of the meetings, and to be able to actively participate in the meetings myself, I wrote up my personal reflections on the group gathering immediately following each meeting. As mentioned, my notes focused on exploring my own reactions to and reflections of the conversation, rather than an observation of group dynamics, as part of the bridling process described on p. 68. To further safeguard participants' comfort, I decided against requesting copies of group members' journal entries, relying instead on my own notes and reflexive memos to detect patterns and themes that corroborated or supported interview data.

Focus Group. Following the individual interviews with participants and preliminary readings of the interview transcripts, I decided to invite participants to share conversation with one another in a group reflection on the experience of participating in a race-based caucus. In December 2022, we convened for a focus group meeting—all of the participants except for Rebecca were able to attend—and we expanded discussion of the topics I had asked them about in their one-on-one interviews. My intention was to create an opportunity for collaborative conversations between participants, an important feature of interpretive phenomenology (van Manen, 2016). Prior to the focus group, I had conducted line-by-line readings of each transcript and noted emerging insights, themes, and additional questions. I

also began a preliminary coding process of the interview transcripts using MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. The coding process is described in the next section. I did not share my initial code list with my participants; however, this process helped me to identify gaps in the data corresponding to specific research questions, and to craft discussion prompts for the focus group that would encourage participants to share their experiences in greater detail.

Written Reflections. Following the interviews and focus group, and an initial coding of the respective transcripts, I realized that a more nuanced understanding of participants' individual journeys to feminism and antiracism would be important to document to provide a more complete background and context to the work we've been doing together in the White Accountability Group. The demographics form I asked participants to complete prior to conducting the individual interviews lacked some depth to be able to fully explore relevance to the themes beginning to emerge from the data. I invited participants to provide an optional written reflection (See Appendix F) on the racial and other sociopolitical identities they felt were relevant to share in the context of our work, their early awareness of race and racial dynamics, and a brief history of their journey to claiming a feminist identity. Six of the eight participants chose to provide a written reflection, sharing their personal stories and experiences with honesty and vulnerability. I used the written reflections and the information provided in participants' demographics forms to re-story their individual experiences of feminist identity and racial allyship.

Data Analysis. The transcripts from the interviews and focus group were analyzed using narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is a data analysis approach that highlights the power of storytelling as a tool for eliciting people's knowledge and understandings of social

phenomena (Creswell, 2013) and for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences and actions. Narrative analysis is well suited to inquiry such as identity development (Saldaña, 2016) and often uses case studies and individual stories to identify patterns across interviews and interviewees. My analysis of the data collected in this project comprised a generative process between my own experiences, documented through self-reflexive journaling and personal memos, and the experiences of the study participants, documented through interviews, one focus group meeting, and an optional written reflection.

Preliminary data analysis took place as I recorded my observations and reflections immediately following each of the White Accountability Group meetings, and through notetaking while conducting the interviews. Once I had assembled the transcripts from all of the interviews, I formatted the text using verbatim transcription to create a clean, print-ready transcript edited to correct grammatical errors, but without removing pauses and filler words (such as “um,” “uh,” “you know,” “like,” etc.), incomplete sentences, or repetitions. Actively interpreting how a participant creates their narrative, in addition to analyzing the narrative itself, is an important feature of narrative analysis (Riessmann, 1993). I then immersed myself in reading the text. First, I conducted an unstructured reading of all of the data to orient myself to the participants as storytellers. I refrained from taking notes during this initial process, focusing instead on engaging holistically with the data. I then engaged in several more re-readings to begin to familiarize myself with specific details of each of the participants’ stories. The process of conducting multiple immersive readings of a text to familiarize oneself with its content is called “indwelling” (Smith, 2016). During the second reading, I began to identify the unique stories told by participants in “narrative blocks,” which were coded with narrative blocks from other participants characterized by similar “life events.” I then used inductive or

in vivo coding to identify subthemes within each participant's narrative, using a descriptive word or short phrase. Inductive/in vivo coding is a method of coding qualitative data that involves using words or phrases from the actual language found in the data record. Inductive coding is useful for studies that prioritize and honor the voices of participants (Saldaña, 2016). My initial coding process yielded 56 individuals codes that related to participants' own racial identity awareness and feminist identity development, to their direct and indirect experiences with racism, and to both external and intrinsic factors that contributed to or inhibited antiracist action.

Reading through all the examples of block quotes for each code, I then distilled codes down to overarching themes, designating each block quote according to which of the major themes it fell into. This process—"selecting and presenting in fine detail some part of an embedded unit or feature to stand for the whole"—is known as *interpretive synecdoche* (Richards, 2011). Coded data was sorted and filtered using the qualitative analysis software program, MAXQDA. I used my reflection notes and personal journal entries to examine my own experiences and perspectives of the phenomenon under study, and to triangulate findings and themes generated from the interviews.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

Scholars offer a number of strategies for engaging in sound, ethical research practice that have the potential to reduce participant-researcher bias. My researcher positionality statement is included to help readers determine the extent to which researcher bias may have influenced the study findings. As a researcher-participant in this study, I must acknowledge the bias attached to investigator self-experimentation and the potential conflict of interest that this presents to the external validity of the study. The process of "bracketing" (Gearing, 2004),

in which researchers consciously set aside their everyday assumptions and previous experiences to be able to see and describe the phenomenon under study, seemed untenable given the duality of my role in this study. While I acknowledge that the participants in this study and I generate knowledge in different ways, influenced by our varied experiences and cultural backgrounds, and that these are subject to interpretation based on how we interact with the world around us, I do not believe that research can ever be a truly objective endeavor, particularly when the research focuses on the gathering and analysis of personal stories. In order to identify and understand my own perceptions of the phenomenon and ways in which my interpretation of the data might be influenced by those perspectives, I engaged in the practice of bridling (Vagle, 2009) throughout the research process, exploring my own assumptions and beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation and recording my reflections through self-reflexive journaling and voice memos (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process provided insight to my intentions and motivations for the study, as well as a way to analyze the collaborative co-creation of knowledge with my study participants. Maintaining an "audit trail" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by keeping detailed notes of the entire research process from its inception to writing the final report has also been helpful in tracking and providing justification for why certain decisions were made. This took the form of writing personal memos as I analyzed data, to track the story of my own thought processes as I examine the words of others, in addition to recording my own experiences of participating in the White Accountability Group. I also asked a colleague to interview me to tease out potential biases and preconceptions prior to analyzing the transcripts from my interviews with study participants. Data analysis triangulation—using more than one type of analysis to examine multiple sources of data—assists in providing a more rigorous and nuanced

understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Finally, I engaged in repeated member checking, an important practice for scholars working with a more collaborative approach to research. Asking participants for feedback at multiple points in the research process, including the opportunity to review interview transcripts and examine the findings of a study and the researcher's interpretation of the data (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), provides accountability to the integrity of the researcher and ensures that the stories that emerge from the research are presented both ethically and authentically. These strategies helped to ensure the credibility and dependability of my project's methods and data collection procedures.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided a description of the research paradigm and methodology, interpretive phenomenology, and my corresponding ontological and epistemological perspectives as they relate to the study. Interpretive phenomenology explores the details of individuals' lived experiences of a particular phenomenon and examines the meaning that individuals attribute to those experiences. I referenced the two theoretical frameworks detailed in chapter 2, Critical Race Feminism (CRF) and Critical White Studies (CWS), which informed the study of a group of White feminist educator-practitioners engaging in a community of practice in pursuit of antiracist learning and growth. I provided an overview of the participants, the context for the study and the methods used to collect and analyze data. I conducted individual interviews with each of the 8 study participants, led one focus group, and invited participants to submit optional written reflections to specific prompts. I deployed narrative analysis to analyze the data, using the qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA. In addition, I engaged my own experiences as a study participant through autoethnographic

data collection via journaling and voice memos, providing an extensive reflexivity statement to orient readers to my own location and perspectives within the study. My findings around the ways in which White feminist women develop an antiracist practice through engagement in a race-based caucus are presented in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: WHITE FEMINISTS AND ANTIRACISM

This study explores the stories and experiences of White professional feminist women working at women's and gender equity centers (WGECs) at institutions of higher education in the U.S. Participants in the study have been pursuing racial justice allyship development for the past two years through ongoing engagement in a virtual White affinity group with other members of their professional community. The purpose of the study was to identify some of the systemic/structural and intrinsic/individual factors that participants felt either motivate(d) them in or prevent(ed) them from pursuing antiracist allyship. I also examined participants' narratives to learn how involvement in a race-based affinity group has impacted their perceptions of their own antiracist allyship development. In this chapter, to provide background to and context for the findings related to the goals detailed above, I describe how participants in the study articulated their development and practice of antiracist allyship to date, and the ways in which they currently incorporate those strategies into their feminist practice. The findings detailed in this chapter answer the research question:

> **RQ1:** How does action for racial justice intersect with the feminism of White women?

Over the almost two years the White Accountability Group has been meeting, participants have formed a close bond of kinship and trust, allowing us to share our experiences with one another with courage and vulnerability. In order to maintain the integrity and safety of our co-created space, it was very important to me and to other members of our group that the data collection process for my study remain separate from the group's regular activities. Participants were invited to share their stories with me via one

individual interview, a focus group with all participants in attendance, and an optional written reflection. The data revealed three primary themes related to the intersection of participants' racial allyship with their feminist practice:

(1) intersectionality;

(2) the importance and influence of women of color feminisms; and

(3) decentering Whiteness.

These themes are illustrated conceptually in the graphic below:

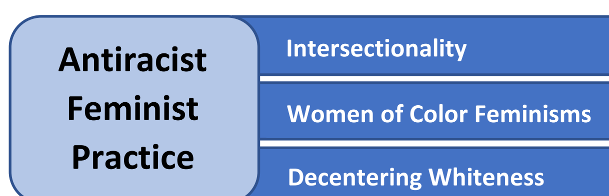

Figure 5. Characteristics of Participants' Antiracist Feminist Praxis

All of the themes described in this chapter emerged across several of the participants' narratives, although not all of the ideas expressed were articulated by all participants. During the member checking process, I gave participants the opportunity to remove sections of data from our conversations that felt to them too sensitive or uncomfortable for me to include. In a private conversation with Alex some weeks ago, while reflecting on the process of writing up my findings, I had expressed my anxiety over ensuring that I handled participants' narratives with respect and care. They assured me I had their trust and confidence, and as I write this chapter, it is my fervent hope that I have been able to honor that.

White Feminist Women and Antiracism

As detailed in Chapter 2, White feminism in the U.S. has struggled since its origins in the mid-nineteenth century to include and address the concerns of women of color. Examining the ways in which campus-based women's and gender equity centers (WGECs) are engaged in antiracism efforts, DiLapi and Gay (2002) explained that the racist roots of

the modern women's movement continue to have serious repercussions in institutions of higher education today, where WGECs are frequently regarded as spaces for White women only. The participants in this study, all White women working in campus-based WGECs, have been actively engaged for some time in efforts to decenter Whiteness and address issues of racism in their centers. From the perspective of participants, the White Accountability Group has served as a tool where they feel they have learned to commit to a deeper exploration of their own internalized White dominance and to develop strategies for more effectively challenging racism in the feminist spaces over which they have responsibility.

In the section that follows, I provide a biographical sketch of each participant, including details of their salient social identities and experiences as they relate to this project. These biosketches provide important background information and context for exploration of the themes that emerged from the data around the ways in which participants' feminism intersects with their growth and development as antiracist allies.

Alex

Alex (they/she) is a White genderqueer person in their early 40s. They are married and have two young children. Alex has two master's degrees and is currently working on a Ph.D. They have worked in higher education for 17 years, and currently work in a WGEC at a large public university in the Pacific Northwest. Alex and I have known and worked with one another since 2016, when we connected at the NWSA annual conference in Montréal, Canada. The conference that year, coming right on the heels of the 2016 presidential election (the first day of the conference was the day after the election results were released), provided a critical space for thousands of feminist scholars and practitioners to gather and process the implications for women and members of other oppressed groups of Donald Trump's election

to the U.S. presidency. Alex and I deepened our work on antiracism together when we both attended the National Conference on Race & Ethnicity (NCORE) in 2018, and I first learned about Whites Partnering to Dismantle Racism, the White caucus that Alex was co-chairing within this organization. In 2020, Alex and I worked together with two colleagues at their institution to offer a series of antiracism workshops for White allies at my university. Following this collaboration, we began to talk about ways to invite our WGEC colleagues into our work.

In describing their feminism, Alex stated they prefer to avoid using specific qualifiers, but emphasized they try to make conscious efforts to ground their work in women of color, Indigenous, and trans feminist approaches. Alex described feminism as “the lens through which I make meaning of the world, in trying to work for more a just and equitable world” (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022). They explained they’ve identified as feminist for a long time, from even before they fully understood the term and had the language to describe their worldview. Alex grew up with two sisters, and says their father always encouraged them to pursue every opportunity available to them. Alex attended a women’s college and their academic journey to date has included a strong emphasis on Women’s, Gender & Sexuality Studies (WGSS). Sharing memories of early feminist influences in their life, Alex talked at length about their grandmother who, strong-willed and spirited, despite being born at a time when women encountered extensive limitations to their agency based on gender, had moved by herself from the southcentral region of the U.S. to the northwest to pursue her adult life. Alex’s grandmother remained a strong influence in their life, and they shared several anecdotes and fond memories of her throughout our interview.

Alex remembered having experiences as a child that conveyed coded messages about race, such as being told to lock their car door when driving through predominantly Black neighborhoods, and conversations about which schools in their community were "better," an admission which I will examine in more detail in Chapter 5. Alex did not quantify the length of time in which they'd been engaging in racial justice activism, but shared that their antiracism practice really emerged in tandem with their journey in feminism. Most of their academic coursework in WGSS has been grounded in women of color and Indigenous feminisms, so for them, racial justice work feels "intimately connected." Alex described what they called a "knot of interlocking systems of oppression" complicating their interaction with and understanding of the intersections of sexism, racism, and other forms of identity-based oppression:

> the more I try and pull at the threads of it, the tighter that knot becomes, right? In my understanding where it's like, I kind of pull one piece of it and it's like no, it's actually this really intense knot and, like, the deeper those fibers are wrapped around each other…
>
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

In articulating the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) of their antiracist feminist practice, Alex stressed the importance of attending to the ways that all identities are enmeshed and interrelated in challenging systems of oppression. They described their feminism and racial justice journey as continually evolving, a process of "learning and unlearning and relearning" (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022), a process which Okun describes in detail in her influential article *From White Racist to White Anti-Racist*, and which she refers to as "the life-long journey" (Okun, 2006, p. 1). Membership in our White Accountability Group has been critical, Alex shared, in providing them with opportunities for growing in relationship with

other White colleagues doing antiracist feminist work, and in holding them accountable to a depth and breadth of self-work facilitated by engaging in a community of practice.

Anne

Anne (she/her) described herself as a White cisgender woman in her late 30s. She identifies as bisexual and is married to a cisgender man with whom she has two young children. Anne has a master's degree and has worked in higher education for 16 years. She currently works in a WGEC at a midsized public university in the Midwest. I did not know Anne prior to starting the White Accountability Group. She had not been attending the NWSA annual conference, and had not engaged much with the Women's Centers Committee. Anne responded to the invitation to join the White Accountability Group that Alex and I sent out the WRAC-L listserv (an email distribution list for employees of campus-based WGECs), and was one of four participants I came to know through our bimonthly meetings. I met Anne in person for the first time at the NWSA conference in Minneapolis in November 2022, after a year and a half of sharing space together in the White Accountability Group.

When I asked Anne about her journey to feminism, she admitted that, prior to graduate school, she did not identify as a feminist and was in fact "very turned off" by the idea due to family attitudes and her own perceptions of gender equity. During her undergraduate degree program, Anne recalled having to read *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, and being "furious":

> I was so angry that this idea, that the way that I was raised with a stay-at-home mom who's working her butt off, she was running a business out of our home, but there was this idea that somehow, she was oppressed…
> (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022)

Anne's attitude towards feminism as a young college student is fairly typical of the

"postfeminist" attitudes of young women in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, which saw a backlash to feminism "evident in a decline in grassroots mobilization and negative public discourse by antifeminist organizations and media figures" (Aronson, 2003, p. 905). Anne recounted being asked if she was a feminist when applying to work in the women's center at the institution where she earned her master's degree, and said it wasn't until she participated in a production of *The Vagina Monologues* and started taking classes for her master's program that feminism "clicked" for her. Anne remembered doing a comparative book analysis of bell hooks' *Feminism is for Everybody* and *Feminist Pedagogy* that she said sealed her identity as a feminist:

> …feminism to me is the way the bell hooks defined it in *Feminism is for Everybody*, in that feminism's goal is to end sexism because sexist oppression impacts everyone. Whether it's oppressing the actual human rights of women, or it's staunching the emotional capacity of men, or it's creating this binary in which we force people to make a choice about who they are, and how they appear to the world.
>
> (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022)

Anne explained that, following her awakening as a feminist, she began to more intentionally develop her awareness of women's and LGBT issues, but said that, even though her introduction to feminism was through the work of a Black feminist scholar, it took several more years for her to start deepening her understanding of Whiteness and antiracism. Anne declared that she had been on an intentional antiracist journey for about 11 years. She emphasized that her understanding and the implications of being a White woman in a racist society has grown over time and gives more weight now to racial justice than it did when she first started considering feminism. Anne shared that she tries to be thoughtful about the ways she talks about feminism and women's rights, "so that it is a truly inclusive definition, recognizing that even holding the title of feminist can send up White supremacist flags to

women of color" (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022). However, she went on to say that the word "feminist" most closely approximates her own understanding of the way that she feels about gender inequity, and that she feels it is an apt label for her, considering that she always will view gender justice through the lens of a White woman.

Anne shared that she vaguely remembers becoming aware of her race as a child when she was exposed to racist comments about people of color by members of her family. This emerging awareness is characteristic of *Contact*, the first stage of Helms' (1990) White racial identity development model, in which (usually) young children first become aware of racial difference. As a new post-undergraduate professional, Anne said she remembers telling a White student staff member to "just push through required diversity training to check the box so we can get to other topics" (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022). When she enrolled in graduate school, Anne recalls that the history of higher education and identity development theory classes she took "blew my mind open to my awareness of my Whiteness and the privilege it gave me, and the way I wielded it as a weapon" (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022). In their racial justice allyship process model, Reason et al. (2005) emphasize that one of the most important influences on students' development as racial justice allies includes academic coursework related to race and racism, and that this is where many White allies begin their racial justice journeys. Anne also admitted to beginning to see the ways that she didn't have to work hard to achieve opportunity, but rather, simply had access to opportunity by virtue of the ways in which White supremacy has privileged her. Anne reflected that since she began her antiracism journey, she has often been checked in her Whiteness and has had many opportunities for purposeful growth and learning. Anne credited her work with the White Accountability Group in helping her better understand that she needs to foster genuine

relationships with colleagues of color, and that she has to do more to confront racism and White supremacy when the opportunity presents itself, both with professional colleagues and with family and friends.

Claire

Claire (she/her) identifies as a White cisgender woman. She is in her mid-30s, married, and a step-parent. Claire has a master's degree and has worked in higher education for 14 years. I had met Claire in person once at the NWSA annual conference, through a longer-term friendship with her immediate supervisor at the time. Prior to her joining the White Accountability Group, we did not have an established relationship. When Claire joined the group, she was working at a WGEC at a large public university in the southeast region of the United States. When I interviewed her, she had moved out of WGEC work into a different student support role at a small private university in the northeast. Claire shared that she first became aware of feminism during her undergraduate degree, when she took her first WGSS course. She said of the class, "It showed me what privilege was and gave me language to describe things I felt and experienced" (Claire, written reflection, January 31, 2023). Like Anne, Claire's first introduction to important concepts relating to identity-based oppression came through her academic coursework as an undergraduate student. Claire described feminism as promoting "equity across genders," clarifying:

> I don't think that it's necessarily people having equality to a man or a White man, or anything like that. But I think that it is about equitable access to whatever it is without gender being a barrier. And feminism is the way that we would get there.
>
> (Claire, individual interview, June 13, 2022)

Claire described how, throughout her WGSS classes, the concept of intersectionality was discussed, but she emphasized that, "I failed to study *myself* and how *I* contribute to a White

supremacist culture" (Claire, written reflection, January 31, 2023). This experience is typical of individuals in the early stages of White identity development (Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1997) and also reflective of the *Be Like Me* stage in Okun's (2006) ladder model, where White individuals begin to have an understanding of racism but do not yet feel personally implicated in it. Claires said it wasn't until she began her professional career and connected more with social media content by activists of color that she became aware of the issues of White feminism. Now, she shared, "my feminism has a whole new approach that is centered in me unlearning assumptions and harmful practices" (Claire, written reflection, January 31, 2023). Claire said that she has been consciously working on developing an antiracist practice for about 5 years. She mentioned that her socioeconomic status, in addition to the intersections of her gender and race, also feel more central to the lens through which she views her antiracist work:

> I think that I have recently learned more about how socioeconomic status impacts inequities and how economic inequities are a true problem and contribute to many other systemic issues, including racism and sexism. (Claire, written reflection, January 31, 2023)

Claire stated she now has a more nuanced understanding of her privilege as a White cisgender woman, and makes a conscious effort to challenge that privilege and its associated power dynamics in her feminist practice, making an effort to attend to other identities in the pursuit of gender justice.

Claire shared that she doesn't remember when she first became aware of her race. She said she does recall when she was young consciously noticing physical differences like skin color, but says that it wasn't until she learned about privilege that she committed to examining her own identities. Reflecting on that experience, she noted:

> At first I thought it was "enough" to notice the differences and comment on them, but I did not engage with how I was contributing to inequity, nor did I ever think to examine myself until I had heard of the problematic nature of White supremacy via colleagues and social media.
> (Claire, written reflection, January 31, 2023)

Claire expressed that the White Accountability Group had been instrumental in helping her to develop a consistent, ongoing antiracism practice with the dual goal of improving her own skills and competence and taking concrete actions to support her communities. She said that a particularly valuable part of the gatherings has been the accountability offered by other participants in the group to reflect more deeply on ways in which her Whiteness has operated in potentially harmful ways.

Emily

Emily (she/her) is a White woman in her late 40s. She is married and the mother of a teenager. Emily has a Ph.D. and works in a WGEC at a large public university in the southeastern United States. She has worked in higher education for 12 years. Emily has been part of the professional WGSS scholars and women's centers communities at NWSA for a number of years, and I had met her there on several occasions. We had begun to develop a friendly and mutually supportive professional relationship, although at the time of joining the White Accountability Group together, had not yet engaged meaningfully on the topic of race and racism.

As the primary caregiver for neurodiverse and disabled family members, Emily emphasized that her experiences of advocating for and supporting her loved ones has dramatically impacted her understanding of the ways in which systems can inflict harm on individuals with oppressed identities. Emily described herself largely through her interests and

different roles and interactions with others, listing her race last, which she noted is significant, particularly in discussions about antiracism:

> [I'm] White, of Irish, Polish, German, and Slovakian descent. I do realize it's a particular way of moving through the world, being able to list race/ethnicity last. Although it conveys privilege, I'm not sure it's a gift.
> (Emily, written reflection, February 7, 2023)

Talking about her feminist identity, Emily reflected that in subscribing to a particular philosophy or ideology on which she bases the decisions and interactions in her life, one "that holds the full human dignity and flourishing of everyone at its core" (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022) is what resonates most strongly for her. Emily expressed that for her, feminism and her feminist practice must be radically inclusive. She described her feminist journey as developing alongside her journey in antiracism, but indicated she was unsure of exactly what moment to mark as the beginning of her antiracist journey. Emily thinks she began to embark on intentional exploration around race during her undergraduate degree, which she said progressed somewhat during her career as a middle school teacher. Her learning further coalesced during her doctoral studies, when she started studying different critical race theories.

Emily said her early awareness of race as an identity marker began in elementary school. She attended a small, private Catholic elementary school whose students were largely White, and her reflections around race at that time are typical of individuals in the early stages of White identity development (Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1997): "I did not think of it [race] as something I had, just something some other people had" (Emily, written reflection, February 7, 2023). There were very few children of color at her school; she says most of the Black children in her community attended the public schools in town. Emily was friends with two of the only children of color at her school, who were brother and sister, and recalls that race was

a topic “that wasn't anything we [meaning her family, friends, classmates and community] ever talked about” (Emily, written reflection, February 7, 2023). In high school, Emily remembered her mother expressing concern, but never really elaborating on the reason behind her concern, about her sister having a biracial boyfriend. Around the same time, Emily participated in her high school marching band’s unofficial tradition of older students pairing up with younger students as “parents” and “children”; she and a younger Black boy connected as “Mommy” and “Son,” a pairing that, to her surprise, drew no comment at all. Reflecting back on these two events in her adolescence that happened concurrently, Emily remarked, “It’s so curious looking back at which interracial relationships were accepted without comment and which ones were questioned” (Emily, written reflection, February 7, 2023).

Emily shared that her first teaching job was in a post-industrial town that had fallen into economic decline after the closing of a large mill. In that community, she was able to see “the ways that income level and opportunity mapped onto neighborhoods, and then the ways that the neighborhoods were or were not racialized” (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022). The town was adjacent to two large cities, and the wealth disparity between the longtime residents of the town and the mostly White commuter families who lived in the town, but worked in the city, was evident—neighborhoods were clearly segregated by income level, which meant they were also segregated by race and ethnicity. Emily attributed this experience to the beginning of what she described as “a couple decades-long learning and growing experience about how other people's opportunities and upbringings were impacted by the intersection of their racial and ethnic identities and their socioeconomic status” (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022). Her emerging awareness of these disparities allowed her

to begin to see and understand the different factors that contribute to social inequities, particularly the ways in which women of color are disadvantaged by what King (1988) terms the "double jeopardy" of race and gender. Emily expressed frustration at the way she feels conversations around social inequities often ignore the plight of women. Before moving to her current institution, Emily says her feminism was informed by broader dimensions of identity. When she started working at an institution with a strong racial history, being mindful of and attentive to the dynamics of race became a much more intentional part of her work. Emily also outlined in detail ways in which she has tried to keep race at the forefront of conversations and outreach within her personal spheres of influence, such as local volunteer efforts, her women's book club, and within her faith community.

Emily shared that one of the ways she's found value in her participation in our White Accountability Group is through accessing peer support to help her develop greater intentionality and care around conversations about race:

> knowing that every 14 days, I was gonna see your beautiful faces and have the support of our work together, has helped me sit in those difficult conversations and let other people talk it all out and not feel like I have to rush in and fix it all.
>
> (Emily, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Emily's self-confessed latent tendency to "rush in and fix" things is illustrative of two characteristics of White supremacy culture (Okun, 2021): *sense of urgency*, which makes it challenging to create time and space to encourage thoughtful decision-making; and *only one right way*, the idea that there is only one correct way of doing things, and that people need to be shown how to do things that way. Emily also expressed appreciation for gaining greater understanding of how the ways in which her institution addresses race issues intersect with race issues at other institutions, and nationally:

> a benefit for me of doing this work is that racial issues at my institution are very, very historically contextualized, and probably they are everywhere. So, for me, there's this added benefit of hearing reflections from people in the other institutions with different histories, and so that helps me parse out what is a [name of institution] thing, versus what is a U.S. thing, or a race thing…
> (Emily, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Emily's reflection on time and place underscores the importance of the "both and" in racial justice work—the need to focus on prioritizing broader conversations around how to dismantle systemic racism while also attending to specific, local issues of inequality.

Martina

Martina (she/her) described herself as a White bisexual cisgender woman in her mid-40s. She is married and a parent. Martina has a master's degree and has worked in higher education for 6 years. She currently works in a WGEC at a large public university in the Mountain region of the United States. I did not know Martina prior to her joining the White Accountability Group, as she was fairly new to her role as a WGEC director and had not been extensively engaged with the NWSA community. I met Martina in person for the first time at NWSA in November 2022.

Describing her feminist identity, Martina explained she was socialized as a Third Wave feminist, but strives to be intersectional in her approach to feminism, although she acknowledged that that isn't a label she feels she can own or name for herself. Martina's reluctance to identify as an intersectional feminist, even though she clearly described in our interview ways in which she is practicing intersectionality in her feminist work, reflects the fear of making mistakes that many White people developing an emerging antiracist practice experience when examining their relationship to racism (Hardiman, 1982; Okun, 2006). It is also characteristic of *perfectionism*, a common feature of White supremacy culture (Okun, 2021). Martina said she did not grow up with feminism, but through her work, came to

understand feminism as a lens through which she views the world. When she was growing up, Martina's father was seriously injured in a car accident and was left unable to work, and she shared that her mother, who subsequently became the sole provider for her family, had been a strong feminist role model for her, teaching her the importance of being financially independent and having access to reproductive healthcare. Martina's early exposure to feminist writings were, she admitted, "very White-centric," and she said she recalls embracing feminism long before she was even thinking about issues relating to race:

> I would say I was deeply invested in feminism before I saw or noticed the intersection of racial justice, but I will say a lot of feminists that inspired me were women of color speaking to their lived experiences of not being fully seen in the feminist movement.
>
> (Martina, written reflection, January 29, 2023)

In trying to advance an aspirational vision of intersectional feminism at her WGEC, Martina emphasized her intentional efforts to reach a broad range of diverse student populations, encouraging her staff to critically examine how Whiteness influences their space and institution, and actively pursuing ways to name and challenge it. She shared that she regards the work of antiracist feminism as "more long haul, less one-off marches and issues" (Martina, written reflection, January 29, 2023) and feels invested in deepening her role as an ally in showing up to help advance tangible, meaningful change.

Martina grew up in an almost exclusively White rural community in the Midwest. Raised on a farm, she explained that she and her siblings were the first in four generations to move away from the land. Consistent with individuals in *Contact*, the first stage of Helms' (1990) White racial identity model, Martina's said she first became aware of race in elementary school when a few families of color moved into the area, and their children became part of her school community. Martina did not remember race ever being discussed

throughout her grade school experience, with the exception of learning about slavery and the civil rights movement in her history classes. Limiting teaching about race to highly specific historical events in U.S. history is very common in K-12 schools (see King, 2020; Muhammad, 2020; King, 2023; Stanley & Schroeder, 2023). Martina said her first impactful exposure to issues of race came during her undergraduate degree, when she had the opportunity to work with immigrant and refugee communities, and spent a semester studying abroad in Mexico and Central America. In their study, Reason et al. (2005) found that having direct experiences with members of socially marginalized groups is critical to students' racial allyship development. Martina described that experience as foundational to later seeking out opportunities to work with organizations that are led by and center the experiences of global majority populations. She spent 6 years working for groups that were leading legal and gender advocacy efforts for migrant communities, during which time she said she grew increasingly aware of her socioeconomic and racial privilege. Martina stated she was conscious of the critiques and pitfalls of being a White person working with oppressed communities and tried hard to avoid falling into them:

> Essentially, privilege was very real to me. As someone who spent a lot of time educating other Americans about the social justice issues along the border, my proximity to marginalized communities also sometimes felt like I was given a pass, that I maybe didn't realize at the time. While the work was never about White saviorism, I do know that that is too often the critique of educational programs along the border and elsewhere.
>
> (Martina, written reflection, January 29, 2023)

Martina related several stories of dehumanizing encounters she had witnessed when facilitating cultural exchanges with a cross-border educational program. She said that while the experience had presented her with an important opportunity to provide critical education to groups of largely White people working with U.S.-based social justice-oriented

organizations, she felt deeply frustrated by her inability to challenge the power dynamics of the deeply racist systems and structures she had to work within. Martina pinpointed the escalating violence against Black people in the U.S. in 2020 as pivotal in spurring her to action around racial justice. Like several of the other participants, Martina shared that the White Accountability Group had provided an important community with which to process some of the more challenging aspects of her feminist racial equity work, as well as offering support and accountability, and a sense of not being alone in messing up and wanting to do better.

Olivia

Olivia (she/her) is a White, single, child-free, heterosexual, cisgender woman in her mid-30s. She has a Ph.D. and at the time of her interview, had worked in higher education for 10 years and was employed in a WGEC at a mid-sized public university in the Midwest. Olivia has since left higher education to work in the public sector. I did not have a significant relationship with Olivia prior to her joining the White Accountability Group. She had been attending NWSA, but had not been deeply involved with the Women's Centers Committee. Our relationship has developed and grown during the last 18 months of work together.

Olivia described her feminism as "intersectional and action-oriented." Olivia came of age during the '90s Girl Power era, and explained that the pop culture influences of the decade first exposed her to the concepts of female empowerment and independence. She said that the feminism she embraced at a young age was already highlighting the interconnectedness of sexism and racism in a way that made it impossible for her consider feminism without intersectionality. "Gender justice and feminism," she maintained, "can't happen without racial justice or other forms of justice" (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022).

Olivia shared that she grew up in a very conservative home, and that her political views and views on social justice differ dramatically from those of her family. She described having a challenging relationship with several family members because of their racist views, specifically her grandfather, who has since passed away, and her brother, with whom she is now no longer on speaking terms. Olivia shared stories of distressing exchanges with these family members that led her, as she continued to grow in her antiracist practice, to withdraw from having a relationship with them:

> I know that these things happen, and that these are my family members, but it just feels so distant from where I'm at. And it's not that I'm better than them, but I've fought really hard to unlearn that, 'cause obviously that's part of my past. I grew up in the same environment as my older brother and I do think, especially when I was in high school, I was not the antiracist, or aspiring anti-racist person I am now. But I've come a long way and certainly a lot further than some of my family members.
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Olivia's emerging race cognizance and the ensuing conflict it caused with some of her family members is consistent with individuals progressing through the *Resistance* stage of Hardiman's (1982) White racial identity model and the *Denial and Defensiveness* stage of Okun's (2006) ladder model. White people who start to become aware of their racial privilege and ways in which they've participated in racial oppression often begin to distance themselves from other White people whose attitudes around racial difference no longer correspond with their own.

Olivia said she was socialized during her K-12 school experience to think of racism as an individual act or experience, but that her continued studies and growth in feminism had helped her to be more aware of the structural and systemic nature of racism. She explained the importance of sustained efforts to dismantle systemic racism, rather than focusing solely on individual acts of bias and hate:

> you know, like the public health metaphor of the river, and instead of just pulling people or things out of the river one by one, and asking why, or just asking, how can you help people? Like, thinking about going up the river, and why are these people in the river, or these things in the river, and thinking about how do we meaningfully change our systems and structures so that they're more just, and there aren't people that are experiencing that individual level.
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

For Olivia, successful antiracism involves a "both and"—recognizing that efforts that are concentrated in eliminating individual acts of racism won't impact the far-reaching inequalities embedded in our systems, and focusing only on the structural aspects of racism fails to yield adequate buy-in from stakeholders who are immediately and personally impacted by the effects of racism. Olivia expressed that one of the main motivators for her in joining the White Accountability Group was to work on antiracist practice with members of her professional community who were equally committed to advancing transformative change, as well as "just like not having to explain and being in a space where there's that shared understanding and separate from our, like, day-to-day peers" (Olivia, focus group, December 8, 2022). Olivia expressed relief at having developed a depth of trust with other group members for processing her experiences with vulnerability and authenticity.

Rebecca

Rebecca (she/her) described herself as a White, Jewish, queer, polyamorous, cisgender woman in her mid-30s. She is in multiple intimate partnerships and has no children. Rebecca has a master's degree and works in a WGEC at a mid-sized public university in the Mountain region of the United States. She has worked in higher education for 5 years. I did not know Rebecca prior to her joining the White Accountability Group. She had attended the NWSA annual conference, but was not deeply involved with the Women's Centers Committee. Rebecca learned about the formation of the White Accountability Group during the Women's

Centers Committee business meeting at one of the NWSA conferences. I met Rebecca in person for the first time at the NWSA conference in Minneapolis in November 2022.

When asked about her feminism, Rebecca described it as "complex." She noted how different her students' exposure to and experiences with feminism are compared to her own experience growing up:

> they've been very aware from a very young age… about inequality and how it impacts them and how it impacts the people around them, and that wasn't necessarily my experience growing up. I just internalized everything I experienced that was inequitable or part of the oppressive systems that existed. (Rebecca, individual interview, June 9, 2022)

During her early adulthood, Rebecca said she didn't really have any level of feminist consciousness, and it wasn't until she moved abroad to work for a period of time and lacked immediate access to family and social support networks that she began to see and understand how sexism was impacting and had impacted her life. Her learning around the interconnectedness of feminism and racial justice deepened when she went to graduate school and was exposed to critical race theories and women of color feminisms. Consistent with other participants' experiences, and the participants in the study conducted by Reason et al. (2005), academic coursework was a strong catalyst for kick-starting Rebecca's racial justice journey. Rebecca described the idea of freedom as being central to feminism, particularly when considering how race impacts one's freedom "spiritually, emotionally, and financially" (Rebecca, individual interview, June 9, 2022). Quoting the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous line, "no one is free until we are all free," Rebecca emphasized that she feels feminism is meant to be rooted in the liberation of all people.

Like several other study participants in the first stages of White racial identity development, Rebecca said she first became aware of her race in elementary school when the

school district expanded its zoning to include part of a nearby predominantly Black neighborhood, and a number of Black students joined the school. She recalls they were very much regarded and treated as a racial minority, and usually played separately from the other children. Rebecca remembered enjoyed crafting God's Eyes weavings with yarn and popsicle sticks and dancing with the Black students at recess, and that although she didn't fully understand the racial dynamics at play, or know what God's Eyes were or why they made them, she was aware of the cultural differences between her and these students, and knew that it was tied to skin color. In sharing what led her to start working towards antiracist action in her life, Rebecca elaborated that it was in her mid-20s that she finally started to realize how she was being negatively impacted by the same kinds of oppressive systems, such as sexism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism. She also credits the emotional labor of a number of Black people throughout her life who gently checked her on her language and assumptions, and helped to further her education around critical race theories, as the catalyst for engaging more proactively with antiracism work.

As she has deepened in her commitment to antiracist action, Rebecca shared with me that her relationship to racism has been complicated by her Ashkenazi Jewish heritage and culture:

> I have complicated feelings about that, because anti-Semitism is really prevalent, and there's… it's… uh, yeah. And there's a lot of anti… there's a lot of racism within the Jewish community, even though there are Jews of many colors.
>
> (Rebecca, individual interview, June 9, 2022)

For this reason, she admitted, relating stories about racist incidents within her own community and directly challenging incidents of racism by other Jewish people, including members of her family, often felt difficult and painful. Rebecca declared that to a certain extent, she feels

responsible for antiracism work within Jewish communities, and that this had encouraged her to be proactive about direct interventions with particular family members. She questioned, however, whether focusing on doing antiracism work within her own community was really helping to tackle racism on a broader scale.

Rebecca emphasized that the White Accountability Group has significantly impacted the ways in which she incorporates racial justice into her feminist activism. Prior to joining the group, she said she could see how her antiracist practice was teering on the edge of White saviorism (Cole, 2016). Now, Rebecca shared that she's trying to move towards spending more time on self-work, unlearning the values of White supremacy that she's internalized, recognizing that her approach to the work will likely continue to shift and change as she grows as an antiracist ally.

Susan

Susan (she/her) identifies as a White middle-class pansexual cisgender woman in her mid-50s. She is single and has no children. Susan has been working in higher education for 27 years and runs a WGEC at a large public university in the northeastern United States. Susan is a longtime member of the NWSA Women's Centers Committee and one of the main leaders of antiracism initiatives in that group for close to two decades. She has served as a key mentor and guide for me in my own antiracist feminist journey for many years. I met Susan at my first NWSA conference in 2006, and have deepened in relationship with her through attendance at multiple subsequent conferences, and annually since 2018 at the National Conference on Race & Ethnicity (NCORE).

Susan attributed the beginning of her feminist journey to receiving the *Free to Be You and Me* album from her mother when she was in grade school. She said her father encouraged

her to pursue activities that weren't typically things that girls did, such as fishing, science, and car maintenance, and encouraged her to work outside the home. Susan said that when she was a child, she remembers writing papers on the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and was strongly influenced by the political and social climate of the 1970s that was expanding roles for women in U.S. society.

Susan described the foundations of her feminism as rooted in the belief that "folks should have autonomy over their bodies and their access to resources, and that gender should not be a factor that is a barrier or causes some sort of disparate impact" (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022). She stated that she had been engaging in activism for racial justice for over 15 years, reflecting that her feminism had evolved significantly over the course of her professional practice. Her early feminist work was centered around addressing gender-based violence, on which she worked with predominantly women of color. Doing feminist work in a multiracial environment was instrumental, Susan said, in starting to connect her feminism to racial justice, although she admitted that even now, it is sometimes less seamless in practice, more aspirational than firmly established. Nevertheless, in our interview, Susan described a clear synthesis between her feminism and antiracism, and detailed the ways in which she critically examines racial power and privilege in her work. She shared that in her WGEC, she and her colleagues try to use "an antiracist feminist praxis lens" for the work that they do:

> it's about looking at the intersections of identity and how that results in disparate impacts, looking at how race has a particular salience in the cultural context in which we're working from, and the foregrounding, the connections between all of the different forms of oppression
>
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

Susan emphasized that in working with women of color, her feminism had evolved from a deficit model of focusing on the trauma and oppression of communities of color, to

celebrating and uplifting their experiences and contributions. Susan's reflections are consistent with the tenets of Critical Race Feminism (CRF), which emphasizes the importance of uplifting the voices and lived experiences of women of color (Wing, 1999).

Like many of the other participants, Susan remembered first becoming aware of race in elementary school. There were few children of color at her school, and one of her friends was an African American boy. Susan lived in a predominantly White neighborhood that had one Black family and one Portuguese family. She described having two negative interactions with some of the members of the Black family that she said likely reinforced negative racial stereotypes around Blackness and violence, and recalls her grandparents and other family using racial epithets (in Italian) to refer to Black people. Susan did not remember having any relationships with people of color in middle and high school. In her first job after college, Susan's co-workers were mostly women of color, and she remarked that this was pivotal for her in building relationships with and learning from people of color. Susan also referenced her involvement—at the invitation of a Latina colleague— with two organizations led by People of Color as significant in advancing her awareness of racial justice issues. Susan emphasized that part of her motivation for participating in the White Accountability Group was to pursue mechanisms for accountability in her antiracist work, both from within the group and in interactions outside of it.

Each of the participants' biosketches provided above offer insight into their individual journeys to a feminist identity and what Frankenberg (1993) calls race cognizance, or "the ideas that race makes a difference in people's lives and that racism makes a difference in U.S. society" (p. 159). In the section that follows, I will examine the themes that emerged

from participants' stories regarding the ways in which feminism connects to their efforts for antiracism, and how they are actively engaged in developing an antiracist feminist practice.

Themes From the Data

In their interviews and written reflections, participants shared several examples of ways in which they're working towards infusing their feminist practice with an antiracist agenda. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, three primary themes emerged from their stories:

(1) Intersectionality—participants described the importance of tending to the intersections of multiple identities in racial justice work beyond just gender and race;

(2) The influence of women of color feminisms on antiracist practice—participants shared how critical theories and the work of feminist scholars of color had influenced or was influencing their feminism; and

(3) Decentering Whiteness—participants described efforts to decenter Whiteness within their professional environments.

In the section that follows, I will address each of these themes in turn.

Theme 1: Intersectionality

The participants in this study all had a keen awareness of how White feminism and its associated norms and values has historically alienated and excluded populations of color from feminist spaces on college campuses. Most of them described the development of their WGEC's outreach and engagement efforts—at least during their tenure—through the lens of intersectionality, in addition to purposefully seeking an intersectional framework through which to develop and practice their own antiracist feminism. Patricia Hill Collins describes

intersectionality as a form of "critical praxis that informs social justice projects" (Collins, 2015, p. 1). University support staff (which includes WGEC professionals), she maintains, "are often frontline actors for solving social problems that are clearly linked to complex social inequalities, a social location that predisposes them to respond to intersectionality as critical praxis" (Collins, 2015, p. 15).

All of the participants in this study were engaged in deep and intentional efforts to center racial justice efforts as a critical dimension of their feminist praxis, to the extent that many of them expressed how they weren't really able to conceptualize their practice of feminism without incorporating antiracism. However, they were also attentive to the ways in which other types of identity-based oppression impact their constituencies. Olivia and Alex specifically mentioned the importance of acknowledging the interconnectedness of gender justice with other types of identity-based advocacy. Emily, Anne, Alex, and Susan all talked about the impact of class and socioeconomic status at the intersection of race and gender, and described how they were trying to challenge that dynamic at their own institutions.

As mentioned, several of the participants described their understanding and practice of feminism as inextricable from their efforts for racial justice. Alex, a longtime antiracist practitioner and professional feminist for over 17 years, emphasized how, for them, feminism and antiracism are integrally connected: "I feel like it's hard to dislocate racial justice from my understanding of feminism…racial justice feels intimately connected. The feminist work is racial justice work. And if it's not, I would argue it's not feminist" (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022). Alex cited several early influences, including the independence of their grandmother, who was a strong family matriarch; the ways in which their father fought for them and their two sisters to have access to a variety of opportunities; and the fact that

they had attended two women-only colleges, as foundational to their feminist development, although they emphasized that it wasn't until they went to college that they found the language to define that for themselves. As Alex learned more about the theoretical frameworks undergirding feminist thought, and were exposed to women of color feminisms, their understanding of the relationship between feminism and racism began to evolve. And as their grasp of the intersectional nature of anti-oppression work has coalesced, so too has their focus on trying to ensure the inclusion of other marginalized identities in feminist work:

> I think the more I've developed my critical consciousness of antiracist work is, yes, how we keep race central, but like, keeping race central actually requires us to bring all identities and interlocking systems together. Right? And so how do we get to, like, deepen and see that as actually a deepening in the work and not a deflecting from work… by having those other conversations.
>
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

Feminist work, Alex posits, cannot be limited to allyship for antiracism efforts, but must instead embrace action to challenge all forms of identity-based oppression.

Claire, one of the younger participants in the group, explained that her formal education in feminism had begun during the Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies (WGSS) courses she took during her undergraduate experience, where she was introduced to the concept of intersectionality. However, she said that it wasn't until she began her professional career in a WGEC, and started engaging with content creators of color on social media, that she became more aware of the issues of White feminism. "Now," she shared, "my feminism has a whole new approach that is centered in me unlearning assumptions and harmful practices" (Claire, written reflection, January 31, 2023). Claire discussed ways in which she tries to be attentive to ensuring that her feminism embraces and promotes both antiracism and intersectionality:

> our identities are entwined and are a complex mesh of privileged and marginalized identities, I feel. And so, I need to make sure that my feminist practice is constantly challenging the power and privilege that I hold in my White identity, because I need to make sure that I am not oppressing other folks in this journey toward equity and justice. So, for me, racial justice is a huge part of it, is a huge part of my feminism. …when I have conversations about feminism, I always try to loop in other identities, other than gender.
> (Claire, individual interview, June 13, 2022)

Susan, the oldest participant in the group, has been leading a WGEC for over two decades, and has been actively engaging an antiracist focus in her feminist work for more than 15 years. She attributed the beginnings of her feminist journey to her early exposure to the women's liberation movement during her childhood in the 1970s, and shared that she began to center racial justice in her work as a professional feminist when she started doing education and advocacy around gender-based violence at an agency where the majority of her co-workers were women of color. Susan shared how her WGEC had been using an "antiracist feminist praxis lens" in the development of programs for the campus community, and to critically examine levels of access by different populations to their services:

> It's about privileging… or looking at the intersections of identity and how that results in disparate impacts, it's about looking at how race has a particular salience in the cultural context in which we're working from, and the foregrounding, the connections between all of the different forms of oppression in terms of the work that we're doing…
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

Susan explained that her WGEC had developed a statement of aspirational antiracist feminism that they had posted on their website, in part as a measure of accountability to the communities they serve:

> We sort of put that out there to make it visible, that's what we're aspiring to. In day-to-day work, it's… being critical about our feminist practice, right? And thinking about where some of our blind spots… where are the spots that maybe we are not going to be as cognizant of, where our… how are we thinking about how folks have access to the conversation, and you know, power dynamics and all of that. (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

Several participants mentioned the influence of capitalism in compounding sociopolitical inequalities based on race and gender. Emily, a former middle school teacher and WGSS program director, has been working at a WGEC for the past 6 years. While she did not provide much detail as to the starting point of her feminist journey, Emily described a growing awareness of the disparate economic advantages experienced by many people at the intersections of race and class, expressing that she had been on “a couple decades-long learning and growing experience about how other people's opportunities and upbringings were impacted by the intersection of their racial and ethnic identities and their socioeconomic status” (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022). This exposure, she went on, had helped to solidify a resolve to bring this focus for action into her gender equity work:

> And so, when I look at inequities across our country now, I see the different factors that sort of feed into them. And I really want to find ways to prioritize addressing those wrongs, bringing about more justice. And I am particularly struck—this might be where I’m located right now—but I’m particularly struck by the ways that the conversations I hear around me for racial justice still keep forgetting women.
>
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Reiterating the criticality of attending to both race and gender, in addition to other oppressed identities, Emily went on to share two powerful examples of the ways in which she felt conversations around racial justice often neglect to address the experiences of women of color. While attending a racial equity training with a number of other colleagues at her institution, she was struck by two examples of structural racism hidden in discussions that were offered without apparent regard for the fact that the experiences of Black women in both situations were being either understated or completely ignored:

> There was one moment where we were at a particular public marker that had been erected to honor people who had been enslaved, and we’re a group of like 30 people there and the guide asked us to call out who we would like to remember in that moment. And the only woman’s name who was mentioned

> was Breonna Taylor. And there were, I think, a dozen either individuals or groups named. So, they were either genderless or gendered male or specifically men, and one woman. We also had an hour-long talk given about eugenics and the history of eugenics and racism, and… pain studies that erroneously and racistly argue that African Americans feel less pain than White people were cited. Other elements of that horrific history were cited, but not specifically calling out J. Marion Sims and his work on enslaved women to develop the field of gynecology. So those are two immediate examples from that seminar that are springing to mind, where we're again forgetting Black women.
>
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

For Emily, the desire to center the experiences of women of color, and specifically Black women, carries into the programming and outreach she promotes at her WGEC:

> And so, when I think about racial justice, specifically about how it figures into my professional work, I'm constantly going back to, and let's not forget the women. So, my center participates in the university's community Martin Luther King celebration, and we make sure every year, we are bringing a woman speaker who is addressing specifically the experiences and centering the experiences that Black women have related to whatever the theme is of that year's celebration.
>
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Dedicating WGEC resources to a campus-wide MLK, Jr. Day celebration and pushing for the selection of a speaker who can address the intersection of race and gender provides an example of how Emily makes intentional efforts to center race in her feminist work.

A WGEC practitioner for the last 6 years, Martina shared that her "journey to feminism runs concurrently along with [her] understandings of race" (Martina, written reflection, January 29, 2023). Like Alex, Martina's first introduction to feminism came through the influence of a family member, specifically her mother, who became the breadwinner for her family following an accident her father suffered that left him unable to work. Martina's early professional years were spent working with social justice organizations along the U.S.-Mexico border, during which time she said she became acutely aware of issues of systemic racism. Martina explained that enacting her feminism and antiracism

together in a professional setting meant that she understood the importance of being mindful and supportive of the needs of students from a variety of diverse communities:

> I have to prioritize being asked to show up for the women's resource center and sometimes, then, that means showing up at the Black Cultural Center or showing up at an event during Indigenous Peoples Month, or… but it's not front and center necessarily for the women's center itself. But if we go back-to-back to the definition of, kind of, one of the questions you asked earlier of just, like, is racial justice in the feminism we do, then it means, of course, we're going to show up at events and spaces and even areas of protests around these issues that affect, you know, all of our students in different ways.
> (Martina, individual interview, June 23, 2022)

Being the spokesperson for gender equity at her university, Martina clarified, means being present in all spaces where issues of equity and access continue to persist, not just in the campus space specifically dedicated to gender equity, or at events organized by her center.

Echoing sentiments expressed by many of the other participants, Olivia shared that she "really can't see feminism without intersectionality." She attributed the evolution of her feminist practice in helping her to identify the existence and impact of racism:

> my growth in feminism, that has really helped me to see more of the structural racism. And see why it's so important to focus on addressing structural racism rather than just always responding to individual racism. I think for me, it has to be a "both and…" (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

There was a clear generational difference in how participants perceived their growth as feminists, and how/when their feminism shifted to incorporate intentional efforts for racial justice. As one of the younger participants in the group, Olivia's experience of growing as a feminist is notably different to that of older feminists. Olivia shared that she had come to feminism at a time when discussions of the interconnectedness of sexism and racism were being readily discussed in the pop culture influences of the decade (the 1990s). In contrast, older participants like Susan shared how their feminism had evolved more gradually, from a firmly White-centric practice to a more intersectional one.

Theme 2: The Influence of Women of Color Feminisms on Antiracist Practice

All of the participants in this study shared the conviction that an authentically intersectional, antiracist feminist practice demands the centering of women of color feminisms. Women of color feminisms, which articulate the perspectives and highlight the work of Black feminist scholars and practitioners, Latina/Chicana writers and theorists, and Indigenous, transnational, and global feminists, emerged in response to "Whitestream" feminism—that is, "a feminist discourse that is not only dominated by white women but also principally structured on the basis of white, middle-class experience" (Grande, 2003). Several participants shared that their awakening to the shortcomings of White feminism had come through their exposure to feminist thinkers and writers of color, specifically mentioning Black feminist authors and scholars bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and the Combahee River Collective. Two of the participants, Anne and Olivia, explained that their entrée to feminism as both an intellectual discipline and a worldview had been through the work of feminists of color, and one—Alex—described how both their undergraduate and graduate college experiences had been so focused on women of color feminisms that they felt they almost lacked a counterpoint for comparison. For all of the participants, both the evolution of their feminist practice and the deepening of their commitment to racial justice has been heavily influenced by reading and reflecting on the work of feminists and other social justice activists and organizers of color.

Several participants commented on how their exposure to the work of antiracist feminist scholars and practitioners of color had strongly influenced their own antiracist feminist perspectives. Olivia said she felt her feminism had evolved alongside a strong racial

justice focus due in large part to the influence on the field, as she was exposed to it, of key feminist scholars and thinkers of color:

> when I was interviewing for the position at [current institution], I talked about intersectionality and how I felt like it wasn't an accident that Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term around the same time that I was born. And I feel like that, you know, like that is what I grew up in, and it's kind of what I really ascribe to, is that intersectional feminism, and seeing everything is interconnected, is a natural way that I think, to see those interconnections. So, I think for me, like, gender justice and feminism can't happen without racial justice or other forms of justice.
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

As mentioned in the prior section, as one of the younger participants in the group, Olivia's age may be part of the reason why her journey into her feminist identity was influenced by intersectionality and the work of critical race theorists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw at an earlier stage than some of the other participants in the group. Alex shared how their undergraduate education, and more directly, their graduate experience in a WGSS program, had shaped their understanding of feminism and influenced the ways in which they practice it:

> really digging in more theoretically through my undergrad experiences, but more in graduate school, having theoretical framings for feminism and, like, the programs that I've been a part of really anchor and center women of color feminisms, Indigenous feminisms and so, even at points from like, they talk about like we're doing un-canoned sort of work, and, like, what would the canon even be, right? Like, they're not even giving me a counterpoint in some of the stuff that we've engaged with.
>
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

Anne shared that her academic experiences, and in particular, reading the work of womanist scholar bell hooks, had strongly influenced the ways in which her feminism had evolved, and with it, her antiracism:

> it was kind of in between the identity development theory class, the history of higher education, and then the social justice course that… where I had to do a book review, where I was reading *Feminism is for Everybody* and *Feminist*

> *Pedagogy* as a comparison. And so, because bell hooks was kind of my guide into feminism, racial justice was just like, marched along with it. My understanding and implication as a White woman in a racist society has grown over time and given more weight to racial justice than it did when I first started considering feminism.
>
> (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022)

Emily also cited academic influences as foundational to her awareness of race and racism, and how she connected that to her feminism:

> I keep a bumper sticker on my desk at work that I bought at NWSA probably a decade ago and it says, "Feminism is the radical notion that women are people, too." If I'm going to ascribe to a philosophy or an ideology and try to make decisions based on that, one that holds the full human dignity and flourishing of everyone at its core is the one that resonates most deeply for me. And so, when I think about racial justice and how that figures into it, I would say, for nearly two decades now, I've been on a learning journey of what other people's experiences growing up in the U.S. was like compared to mine, and I date that from the start of my doctoral program when I was formally studying different critical race theories.
>
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

While many participants credited their formal education in feminism and critical race theory as a catalyst for their learning and growth in antiracist feminist thinking, Susan detailed how the focus of her WGEC's activities and her own feminist journey had evolved through intentional engagement with antiracist feminist mentors and feminists of color in her professional and personal, rather than academic, environments:

> [that is] one of the things that I think in the past couple years has really been a growth place for me, and I think it's also the difference between doing antiracist feminist work primarily with White folks, versus doing antiracist feminist work in a more diverse environment... that really has come from working with, particularly, women of color.
>
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

Susan's emphasis on the importance of "doing antiracist feminist work in a more diverse environment" leads into the final theme describing how action for racial justice impacts the ways in which the participants practice their feminism.

Theme 3: Decentering Whiteness

A key concept explored within the interdisciplinary field of research that constitutes Critical White Studies (CWS) is the idea of Whiteness as ontological expansiveness (Sullivan, 2006); that is, the notion that "white people tend to act and think as if all spaces—whether geographical, psychical, linguistic, economic, or otherwise—are or should be available to them to move in and out as they wish" (p. 10). Whiteness as ontological expansiveness provides a way to understand how White people enact their race privilege in how they think about and interact with the space around them. When considering physical spaces within educational institutions, White people "tend to think that all educational space should be open to them and center their needs" (Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2021). Campus-based WGECs have long been considered by students of color to be sites of hegemonic Whiteness, and thus, "it is critical that white leadership in women's centers, where it exists, be an important force for institutional change and development of an antiracist women's agenda" (DiLapi & Gay, 2002, p. 207). A conscious and integrated effort to decenter Whiteness in WGEC spaces is imperative for creating supportive environments in which women of color can find safety and connection. In their stories, participants described their attempts to reframe and refocus the outreach, programming, and support offered by their WGEC, as well as their own efforts to move away from a privileging of Whiteness in their space and in their professional relationships. Susan talked about deepening in her relationships with her colleagues of color, and following their lead with regard to the stories and experiences being shared at her WGEC. Rebecca described how she had been trying to critically examine and temper her passion for feminist racial equity work by retreating to more of a supporting role for her colleagues of color, instead of jumping to lead those efforts.

Anne talked about more intentional partnering with her colleagues of color to develop programming that genuinely piques the interest of students of color, rather than organizing token efforts by herself at her WGEC just to “check a box.” Several of the participants shared the dilemma of being White women trying to decenter Whiteness in feminist spaces at White-dominant institutions. Olivia directly reflected on the challenge, wondering if her efforts to decenter Whiteness in her WGEC would be more effective if she were to step down to make way for a WGEC director of color:

> something that I really struggle with professionally, of like…. Am I the right person to be in the seat that I have? Do I need to give up that seat? How do I navigate doing the work professionally as a very privileged person, even with… it's not like I've experienced no oppression, but the privilege that I have is pretty big privilege, you know. We have had women of color directors. But I think at this moment, it would be really powerful for our campus to have a woman of color in that leadership role. But I also… the other part that I struggle with is, I'm not confident that if I were to leave, that I would be replaced by a woman of color. But then it's like… but if I don't leave, there's not even a chance.
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

In her individual interview with me, Olivia and I shared our thoughts around whether we were appropriately positioned to lead these types of efforts at our respective institutions. While on the one hand, stepping down from a leadership role in a feminist space to make way for the vision of a woman of color might be regarded as one way to decenter Whiteness, this kind of “either/or” binary style of thinking is also characteristic of White supremacy culture (Okun, 2021) and colonial thinking. As individuals with dominant racial identities, Olivia and I have the freedom to withdraw at will from efforts to cultivate relationships and build coalitions to work for social change. Abandoning the difficult work of pursuing gender equity along racial lines is clearly a privilege that would not be available to a WGEC director of color.

As participants worked to improve their competence and skills in antiracist feminism, they described their efforts to activate a culturally-responsive, antiracist approach to the development of programmatic offerings and services provided by their WGEC. Susan specifically outlined her growing consciousness of the limitations of White feminism, sharing that as her feminist practice had developed and shifted, she had found herself moving away from traditional White feminist approaches to the education and support historically offered by many WGECs:

> a lot of the racial justice work in the feminist context had really been still reinforcing Whiteness and kind of privileging, you know, the learning of White folks and often very much like a deficit model for folks of color, right? So, it was all about power and privilege and like, here’s all the ways in which White people are privileged and here’s all the terrible things that happened to folks of color. So yeah, so all that is to say, I feel like that has been something that has shifted for me within the past couple of years, as I think about the connection between the antiracist and the feminist work. And while that’s true, it also really doesn't center all of the assets and, you know, celebratory aspects of folks of color and their communities and their experiences, and that really has come from working with, particularly, women of color. And even seeing how they approach it in their own work.
>
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

Rejecting what she sees as White feminism’s attachment to exploiting and commodifying the trauma of people of color, Susan expressed a desire to uplift and highlight the positive contributions of communities of color in her work. A longtime activist for racial justice, Susan described clear efforts to embrace and practice the tenets of Critical Race Feminism (CRF) in her feminist outreach and activism. Echoing some of the same sentiments, Rebecca also cautioned against falling into the trap of White saviorism (Cole, 2016), providing an important reminder of the need for White people to step up, but not in—to support, but not take over. Recalling a time that a colleague of color had challenged her on her eagerness to demonstrate her racial allyship, she reflected:

> I also don't need to be in every space, and I'm not going to solve racism… There's lots of powerful, brilliant people of color doing this work all the time. And me showing up in a space isn't going to solve the issue, because I'm not that important. Yes, I definitely… There's room to grow and like, kind of, decenter myself in that conversation.
>
> (Rebecca, individual interview, June 9, 2022)

Decentering one's own Whiteness, Rebecca explained, is a critical part of practicing antiracist feminism, in addition to decentering Whiteness in the spaces over which we have responsibility. Anne shared Rebecca's sentiments about the performativity that she felt had crept into her own well-meaning efforts to diversify her WGEC's programming and outreach to serve the needs of different student populations:

> as I think about the ways that the center, you know…. I was checking boxes, like, okay, we've done something for Black women in the center, we've done something for Asian women in the center, we've done… You know, kind of all of this… which is its own kind of White supremacy, racism, of I've checked these boxes, so we've met this expectation. Now it's much more, how are you doing? What can I do to support what you're doing? How can I show up for the women that you're serving, versus me needing to be the center. Doing the decentering piece in that community…
>
> (Anne, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Echoing the need to decenter Whiteness in WGEC spaces, Martina explained how her feminism had evolved to be more race-conscious, particularly in thinking about how campus-based gender equity work was well-positioned for a more conscious inclusion of antiracism:

> what I came to understand for myself, it was a very White-centric feminism and for me, it was the readings and experiences I had that introduced the lens of racial justice, and now it feels like it's a bigger part of my feminism. Or feminism doesn't feel like it has the teeth it needs if it doesn't include racial justice. And you know, I think there's many opportunities to include racial justice in our work, especially with gender equity centers.
>
> (Martina, individual interview, June 23, 2022)

Women's and gender equity centers, particularly at PWIs, often lack racial diversity in their staff (DiLapi & Gay, 2002), a fact that several of the participants acknowledged and lamented. Expressing this sentiment, Olivia questioned the value of being a White person

leading a feminist-focused space, stressing that efforts to decenter Whiteness in gender equity work should necessarily involve the intentional hiring of women of color in leadership positions in WGECs:

> Am I the right person to be in the seat that I have? Do I need to give up that seat? How do I navigate doing the work professionally as a very privileged person, even with… it's not like I've experienced no oppression, but the privilege that I have is pretty big privilege, you know. We have had women of color directors. But I think at this moment, it would be really powerful for our campus to have a woman of color in that leadership role. But I also… the other part that I struggle with is, I'm not confident that if I were to leave, that I would be replaced by a woman of color. But then it's like… if I don't leave, there's not even a chance.
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Many of the participants acknowledged the conundrum of being White while also trying to decenter Whiteness in their centers, and several expressed that working in settings structured by patriarchal top-down hierarchies also complicated their ability to center voices of color while in a leadership role that demands accountability to the very White priorities of their respective institutions. Rebecca shared that for her, that decentering had often been more successful in the activities she engaged in outside of her work environment:

> I think a lot of times I incorporate antiracist work, racial justice work into my feminist activism in my personal life. So, if I go to a march… or I'm talking about a conversation with friends, trying to think about it in an intersectional way, and I could... I think there's definitely room for me to do way more stuff that's just focused and supportive of folks of color. And I think that typically for capacity reasons, I end up focusing it on feminism.
>
> (Rebecca, individual interview, June 9, 2022)

Chapter Summary

While participants' stories included other examples of ways in which they practice antiracist feminism, including seeking a diverse range of experiences to inform their worldviews, and directly advocating for change by challenging the status quo, the themes that dominated their narratives and were most salient across the majority of stories were

described in this chapter: acknowledging the importance of and practicing intersectionality; learning from feminist scholars, educators, and activists of color; and making intentional efforts to decenter Whiteness in their professional spaces. These themes are strongly reflective of key features of both Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF). Intersectionality, a tenet of both CRT and CRF, refers to the idea that sociopolitical identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, ability, etc. do not operate as individual dimensions of one's identity, but rather, as "reciprocally constructing phenomena" (Collins, 2015, p. 1) and thus, must be attended to equally. Most of the participants in the study gave concrete examples of their attention to intersectionality when designing their WGEC's outreach and education programming, as well as ways in which they sought to practice their own antiracist feminism. In purposefully cultivating intersectional perspectives within their work, participants demonstrated the importance of decentering Whiteness and uplifting the voices and lived experiences of women of color, through engaging with scholarship by feminists of color, and nurturing professional relationships with women of color.

In the next chapter, I explore the themes that emerged from participants' stories to explain the intrinsic/individual and systemic/structural factors that they felt either motivate(d) them in or prevent(ed) them from pursuing antiracist allyship, and how participation in a race-based affinity group has impacted their perceptions of their own antiracism journey.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

BARRIERS, INCENTIVES, AND THE JOURNEY TO ANTIRACISM

In this chapter, I explore the common themes that emerged from participants' stories to identify some of the systemic/structural and intrinsic/individual factors that they felt either motivate(d) them in or prevent(ed) them from pursuing antiracist allyship. I also illustrate how participants expressed the ways in which participation in a race-based affinity group has impacted their perceptions of their own antiracist allyship. The findings in this chapter answer the following research questions:

RQ2: What are the systemic/structural and intrinsic/individual factors that encourage (Incentives) or prevent (Barriers) White feminist women from pursuing antiracist allyship?

RQ3: How does participation in a race-based caucus impact White feminist women's perceptions of antiracist allyship?

Barriers and Incentives to Antiracist Allyship

Participants described a variety of factors that they felt either created obstacles to being able to directly intervene in racist situations or challenge racist dynamics, or that provided support for intervention. I have separated these examples into two main categories: (1) systemic/structural factors, which relate specifically to social, political, and economic systems, practices, and attitudes that inhibited participants' actions for antiracist allyship; and (2) individual/intrinsic factors, which describe personal situations, locations, and choices that influenced participants' decision to practice (or not) antiracist allyship.

Systemic/Structural Barriers

Participants described distinctive features of systemic/structural racism which adversely impacted their action for antiracist allyship. The primary overarching theme that emerged from participants' stories, as they recalled moments of silence or inaction (either their own, or that they witnessed in others) when faced with racist incidents and dynamics, relates to White dominance or White hegemony (Hughey, 2009). White dominance/White hegemony is a key topic explored by scholars of Critical White Studies (CWS). A strong subtheme to the dominance of Whiteness in experiences shared by participants was the invisibility or "permanence" of racism. Legal scholar Derrick Bell (1992) described racism as a "permanent component of American life" (p. 13), a sentiment echoed by many race scholars, including Delgado and Stefancic (2017), who highlighted the ordinariness of racism in White-dominant U.S. society. Several participants in the study described having experiences where racism was present, but stated they were unaware of it at the time, and that it was only after reflecting on and processing the exchange sometime later that they were able to identify the racialized dynamics of the encounter. Participants also shared stories of witnessing occasions where other White people were actively engaging in racist behavior, but were oblivious to it. The overarching theme that describes the systemic/structural barriers to participants' antiracist action is illustrated in the graphic below:

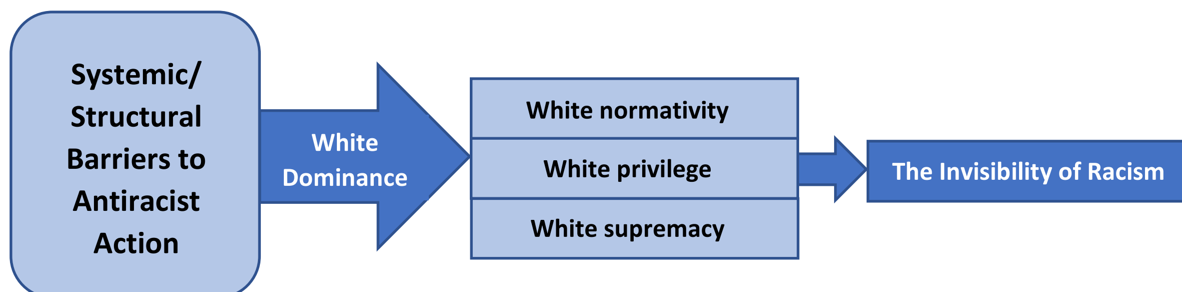

Figure 6. Systemic/Structural Barriers to Participants' Antiracist Action

White Dominance and the Invisibility of Racism. Participants provided several examples of how the dominance of Whiteness and the resulting invisibility of racism in social systems and structures had inhibited their action for antiracism. Participants shared stories of childhood socializations around Whiteness, anecdotes of times that they and others conformed to societal norms of Whiteness, and gave multiple examples of encounters with institutional Whiteness, all of which reveal the presence of White normativity, White privilege, and White supremacy at various levels of their experience. For ease of reading, and to show the chronology of White socialization and its compounding effects on the inviziblization of racism, I have organized participants' stories in the following temporally specific blocks: early experiences, societal norms, and institutional moments.

Early Experiences. In sharing stories of their childhood and elaborating on some of the background context to their emerging awareness and understanding of racism, several participants referenced a tacit acceptance, growing up, of racism as normal and part of their everyday environment. Reflecting on how they were able to ignore their racial privilege, participants observed how steeped they were in a culture that allowed racism to proliferate in invisible, or commonly accepted, ways. To this point, Alex described the messaging they received as a child around racism, explaining the ways in which racism was often unspoken and yet its implications were clearly understood:

> It's like the subtle messages of locking doors driving into the city as a kid that feel rooted in anti-Blackness and racism—unspoken—that shaped my childhood. You know, conversations around which schools are better, even as a kid, rooted in racism. So, I think those things... Like I feel like I witness that everywhere I look… the most insidious ways that racism shows up is in the more subtle instances, right? The things that as a kid, no one said, like, we're driving through a Black neighborhood, or this is an unsafe neighborhood because there's more people of color here, right? Like, that was socializing me to think about my safety… versus just making an overt or stupid comment about people of color. (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

The racially coded language that Alex heard often as a child was also experienced by Anne growing up. Relating how her socialization as a White person had impacted her relationships in middle school and college, Anne described how unconscious racist conditioning had influenced her behavior towards some of her classmates of color:

> …[in] middle school, telling a young girl in my class she should speak English because she's in America… well, she's American-born and I only know one language, like… I've created a lot of racist situations. I had a roommate in undergrad that I was just awful to. I didn't understand Black hair culture at all. And was awful about… I think we'd had a papier mâché fight and got her braids full of papier mâché, you know, just these awful micro… like, they're not even microaggressions, these comments that are... just create an unsettled space and make someone feel like they don't belong.
>
> (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022)

The underlying racist socialization driving these two experiences was not overtly expressed; it was, in essence, invisible. And yet, clear messages about worth and value were being covertly communicated in both situations. As Alex astutely points out, being told as a child to lock their car door while driving through a predominantly Black neighborhood was conveying racist stereotypes to them in their early formative years about Black people and their "propensity" for criminality and violence. Later in their individual interview with me, Alex shared an anecdote illustrating other stereotypes about people of color that had played a significant role in an interaction with White colleagues at their institution. Anne's childhood socialization in a monolingual environment reinforced xenophobic attitudes around the linguistic dominance of English, leading her to believe as a child that English was the "correct" language of the United States—a prevailing attitude that resurfaced in a slightly different but similar iteration in a story that Emily later shared about interviewing an applicant of color for a position at her WGEC.

Racially coded rhetoric has long been weaponized in U.S. politics to signal racist

views without expressing overt bias (Bennett & Walker, 2018). However, in most of the instances shared by the study participants, covert racism concealed within language likely did not reflect a conscious intent on the part of the speaker to be racist. The socialization of White people into a belief of racial superiority often renders many types of race-based microaggressions invisible. These language-based examples illustrate what Sleeter (1996) calls White racial bonding—"interactions that have the purpose of affirming a common stance on race-related issues, legitimating particular interpretations of oppressed groups, and drawing we-they boundaries" (p. 261). Sleeter explains that racial bonding exchanges often use codewords or phrases for race-related issues, such as in the anecdote Alex shared about being told to lock their car door while driving through a predominantly Black neighborhood, or conversations about which schools were "better" (code for mostly White). In the section that follows, Emily shares an experience of being told by a family member's doctor that he had no problem increasing the patient's dosage of pain medication because he knew they weren't just trying to "get more drugs." Both of these interactions clearly illustrate the speakers drawing on racial stereotypes of Black people and people of color as dangerous or addicted to drugs, but because the racial implications of the message weren't overtly expressed, they remained invisible to both study participants in the moment.

Every participant pointed to education as a key factor that had facilitated both their own antiracist intervention and served as an effective tool for encouraging antiracist behaviors in others. I will provide examples of this in a later section. However, participants also described a notable lack of education around race and racism during grade school, except for cursory mentions of slavery and the civil rights movement in history and social studies classes. As mentioned in Chapter 4, this is a common phenomenon in the U.S.

educational system, particularly regarding the teaching of Black history, as described by numerous scholars and educators (see King, 2020; Muhammad, 2020; King, 2023; Stanley & Schroeder, 2023). For most of the participants, it wasn't until they went to college that a critical awareness of race and racism beyond skin phenotype emerged and expanded as they met and interacted with domestic students from multicultural communities, international students, and students from immigrant and refugee populations, and also took courses where they learned about the sociological constructs of race and race-based oppression. For some, their awakening to the realities of race and racism through education became a point of contention with their families. Olivia described how, in her family, conversations around antiracism were often stymied due to her relatives' perceptions of her assumed superiority due to her advanced education:

> I am a first-generation student, and… I was the only one to go to college. So, when I try to have these conversations about structural racism, you know, I get the comment that I think I'm better than them because I have an education, so that kind of gets thrown in my face because they see it as more academic to talk about structural racism. Because it can feel less tangible even when I give tangible examples. And so, I think that is a challenge with trying to help other people understand structural racism, especially family members. Because there's that layer of that first-generation student status.
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

The reactions of Olivia's family members to her attempts to share her understandings of race and racism are common among White people in the initial stages of White identity development (Helms, 1990). At the time of their interviews, all of the participants in the study had been engaged in intentional learning efforts around antiracism for a minimum of two years, and thus were at more mindful and self-aware stages of their White identity development process. Most of them described their direct experiences of racism as part of a larger system of oppression and subjugation, rather than isolated acts by individual people.

Rebecca related this idea as she reflected on how the omnipresence and normalization of racism had made it challenging for her identify and parse out incidents of racism in her past:

> when I think of racism, I think of systems of power as opposed to individual experiences when people act out racism… sometimes when I'm talking about racism, I'm trying to figure out what, you know, it's a really big subject. And I think it's something that's so normalized that we're seeing and interacting with it constantly.
>
> (Rebecca, individual interview June 9, 2022)

As mentioned, the ubiquity and insidiousness of racism can create considerable challenge for White people in recognizing and responding to it. Several of the participants in the study identified a lack of self-awareness around incidents of racialized oppression when they were happening in the moment:

> for me, my bigger failure is not witnessing 'X' and consciously failing to do something, it's more failing to consciously recognize what's happening…
>
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

The pervasiveness of racism in U.S. society and our collective socialization in a racist world has resulted in a level of complicity that is often difficult for White people, even antiracist allies, to identify and name (Applebaum, 2010).

Societal Norms. The ways in which Whiteness operates at the societal level to reinforce assumptions about race that often go unquestioned was illustrated in several of the participants' stories. As mentioned in the prior section, Emily shared an experience about failing to process and react in the moment to what she later felt was a racist comment by a physician when discussing increasing the dosing of a loved one's pain medications to help them better manage a chronic health condition:

> I am ashamed to say I did not push the doctor on what he meant in this moment, but he said something like.... we were talking about maybe increasing that dosage a bit and he just sort of waved his hands at the two of us and said, "I know you are not abusing this, you're clearly not just seeking more drugs." And he kept going. And I'm like, wait a minute. Like, it took a

> few moments for my brain to switch from advocate for my [family member], who I am the caregiver for, to "What the fuck did you just say to us? Did you just say if we weren't educated or we weren't White, you wouldn't manage his pain the same way, because you'd be afraid he was trying to get addicted, or he was addicted?" And that was like… later on, when it hit me what he was saying, or what I think he was saying… whoa.
>
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Emily describes not only neglecting to fully catch on to the underlying racism in the doctor's statement, but also the challenge she experienced in switching roles from health care advocate for her family member, to racial justice advocate, which several participants described as feeling more connected to their professional work than their personal lives. Emily went on to give several concrete examples of ways in which society has normed its standards and practices to accommodate the needs and comfort of White people. Using the analogy of how her academic regalia fits (or rather, does not fit) her body to describe a growing awareness of the fact that her physical environment has been constructed with primarily White people in mind, Emily reflected:

> I feel like so much of the built environment, I think, has been built and created… I'm using that really broadly, like buildings, technology, things like that… built and created, normed to people like me. So, for example, when I put my doctoral gown on, I get this immediate reminder that it was not actually intended for a body like mine, because there are no pockets. There is one slit. If you put your hand in that slit, your hand is then directly in front of your crotch. So, if you are a guy wearing it, you can pee wearing that gown. If you are a woman attempting to find the pockets that may or may not even exist in the clothes you have underneath, you cannot get to them easily from that slit.
>
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

For Emily, the realization that her comfort and convenience is secondary to that of the men for whom her doctoral gown was designed led her to reflect more deeply on the ways in which society is structured to prioritize and privilege White people over people of color:

> how many dermatologists get proper training in what skin disease looks like on non-White skin? How many cameras can take a good photo of a Black face

> and a White face together, versus how many are just technologically set to take pictures of the White skin well? So, I do not move through a world where little things ping up on a routine frequent basis, reminding me that the world was designed for someone else other than me.
>
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Rebecca also expressed frustration over the privileging of White people over people of color, reflecting on the ways in which cultural appropriation and racial stereotyping are an ingrained part of entertainment culture in the U.S. Sharing a recent example of covert racism in the film industry that had been on her mind, where a popular non-Jewish actor had been cast to play renowned conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein in a biopic about his life, she explained:

> I feel like I see so much racism on a daily basis…. In the media that we produce, the ways that we appropriate imagery. I was reading about Bradley Cooper's prosthetic that he's using to mimic Leonard Bernstein's image in his upcoming film about Leonard Bernstein, and yeah, I don't know, anti-Semitism fitting into racism, what that means is a very complicated subject. But whenever I see stuff like that, I think of all the movies where we've done similar things… you know, we've got these systems that condone that sort of thing…
>
> (Rebecca, individual interview, June 9, 2022)

Aligning with Rebecca's comment about "systems that condone" racism and White privilege, Claire and Martina gave tangible examples of ways in which they've experienced White privilege at the societal level. Claire shared a story illustrating the automatic assumption of reliability and trustworthiness conferred on her when looking for an apartment in a new city. As she observed, her Whiteness engendered a level of confidence from potential landlords that she suspects would likely not have been extended to a person of color:

> I think that my White privilege makes me seem like a better applicant, a better tenant, a better general human than, let's say, someone of my exact same situation, but who was Black or [a person] of color. That is definitely something I was thinking about as I was applying for these apartments like, wow, I pretty much can have access to a lot of apartments… although the housing market is very tight and hard in general, I have so much privilege in

> my class, in my ability, in my race, like all of these different things. And I was looking at apartments in the city, and there's lots of diverse folks living in a city, and I feel like I was given just automatic trust that I would be a good tenant.
>
> (Claire, individual interview, June 13, 2022)

Martina also shared a revelation she had had about her unobstructed access to places and spaces due to her Whiteness:

> I don't get stopped in airports, and if I do it's, like, everybody's really friendly, I mean, there's just not much suspicion with me, right? And yeah, I feel like I can kind of travel around and also get a lot of privilege just based on how I look… I feel like I never get questioned in spaces of why I'm there and I feel that happens a lot of times, like even subtle things of maybe nobody questions why somebody's there, but they might be wondering why they're there, you know, in spaces. And that can be here at the university or out in the community. Like, I don't have to prove anything to show up to spaces.
>
> (Martina, individual interview, June 23, 2022)

Institutional Moments. The ways in which Whiteness dominates social interactions and renders racism invisible also plays out in numerous institutional experiences described by participants. Sharing another story around how her access to spaces goes largely unchallenged, Martina gave a concrete example of how the privileging of her Whiteness had allowed her to move with ease throughout the physical spaces at her institution:

> we're in the student union, and I can go down to the front desk and say, can you… I left my key card, could you open the women's resource center for me? And those student workers might not know me, and I don't trust that they would treat… I'm not saying that they wouldn't… but I think there's a policy that says, like, you need to basically vet everybody who needs to get into an office, or you shouldn't let them in if they don't have their card. But I can just go down there and say, I left my key, can you let me in? Or when I used to be housed in our veterans' support center, I went down there and said, I'm locked out of the veterans' support center, and they just let me in. And I don't think everybody would have that seamless of an experience.
>
> (Martina, individual interview, June 23, 2022)

Despite lacking her university ID to prove she was who she said she was, Martina was

quickly given access to the space, and it was easy and straightforward for her, as a White person, to obtain. McIntosh's (1988) conceptualization of White privilege as a package (or knapsack) of unearned social benefits due to skin color implies that White privilege is a collection of individual attributes and qualities. More accurately, however, as illustrated by Martina's experience, it represents a disparate access to power, which is sanctioned and enforced by society (Johnson, 2005). Martina acknowledges that her Whiteness affords her a level of simplicity and convenience that makes it easy for her to forget about the ways in which other colleagues might experience that space very differently. Alex also gave an example of this dynamic in a story they shared about being temporarily houseless, and the lack of scrutiny they experienced when using the bathroom at a local McDonald's to clean up every morning:

> There's things that I've not had to experience, right, like in a rougher time in undergrad when I'd failed out and was dealing with my sexuality and not in a supportive house with roommates, I was living in my car for a while, really, I think I didn't have the same fears if I was a person of color living in my car, right? If I needed to go and brush my teeth at McDonald's, I probably wasn't surveilled in the same way, right? Like I could…. there was a Teflon in my White skin that wouldn't have existed, or would have existed with different levels of judgment.
>
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

The ease with which Alex was able to regularly use the restroom in a restaurant where they were not purchasing a meal, and the fact that Martina was readily ushered into campus spaces with controlled access, illustrates White privilege in terms of what Collins (2018) calls "power of the benefit of the doubt" (p. 40). Alex and Martina's White privilege shields them from the suspicion and doubt they might otherwise inspire in the situations they described if they were people of color.

Participants provided several examples of how the dominance of Whiteness, both in

society at large and within their institutions, had negatively impacted their ability to challenge systemic racism. For example, when asked if they considered themselves to be antiracist, most participants stopped short of claiming that label for themselves, choosing instead to frame their antiracist action as "aspiring," "a journey," or "sometimes yes, sometimes no." Claire specifically referenced White norms and standards as factors inhibiting her ability to call herself antiracist:

> I have a hard time saying that I am antiracist. Well, I don't know, as I say that… I do try to, like, operate from that perspective. But I think in my Whiteness and my perfectionism, which I'm constantly trying to get over, I'm like, I can't call myself that unless I'm 100% that thing!
> (Claire, individual interview, June 13, 2022)

Okun (2021) names *perfectionism* as one of the characteristics of White supremacy culture that often show up in organizations (see p. 48 for a complete list of the fifteen characteristics). Largely invisible and almost unilaterally enforced, these norms are difficult to challenge because while they are rarely named, they are usually accepted without question. Several participants gave examples of ways in which White supremacy had shown up in their lives or in the culture of their institutions. White supremacy, or the idea of the deserved superiority of White people over people of color, is a function of White dominance. It is maintained and operationalized by the policies and practices of institutions of higher education, and manifests in the attitudes and behaviors of administrators and employees alike.

When asked what would encourage her to act in situations where she might hesitate to interrupt an act of racism, Anne had shared that she felt it was important for her to challenge her *right to comfort*, one of the characteristics of White supremacy culture. Echoing Okun's (2021) assertion that "discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning" (p. 25), Anne

acknowledged that being pushed out of one's comfort zone to embrace a learning edge was critical to progressing in one's antiracism journey:

> I think there's this politeness… And I think, trying to be comfortable in conflict or… not comfortable, but like, recognizing the importance of conflict, like the role that it plays. So this White supremacy book that I'm reading now talks about, like, you have to have this… there has to be friction in order to learn and grow, and I think that it, it's about addressing those small things as a… it's like exercise, you know? You can't pick up a 200 pound… you can't deadlift 200 pounds unless you've deadlifted 100 pounds and then 150 pounds, like, you have to build up.
>
> (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022)

Anne also talked about "recognizing the importance of conflict," acknowledging the need to challenge the *fear of open conflict*, another characteristic of White supremacy culture (Okun, 2021).

Susan, Martina, and Emily all provided examples of the dominance of Whiteness at their respective institutions, and the challenges of advancing meaningful, tangible change to academic systems and structures that are steeped in Whiteness. Susan expressed frustration at the cyclical conversations happening at her university around race and racism, and the obstacles she was encountering to making progress around solidifying an antiracist agenda in her WGEC because of broad perceptions of Whiteness held about that space:

> for years we've been having conversations about, you know, the legacy of our center on our campus is, people still see it as a White women's center. And so really trying to be able to be in community with folks about, like… all right, like, we can't just keep having the same conversation, something has got to change!
>
> (Susan, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Susan went on to explain that even though the majority of her close colleagues are people of color, the environment remains firmly entrenched in White norms and values:

> I was just talking with a colleague about how she's moved into a different position, and she's like, "God, I forgot how White this place is!" And so, it's

> interesting, 'cause I'm often in spaces where I'm mostly with folks of color, and so you know, forgetting how White this place really is…
> (Susan, focus group, December 8, 2022)

At Susan's university, Whiteness is so thoroughly embedded in the systems and structures of the institution that she is able to easily forget the extent to which her professional environment is designed to uphold White ways of doing things, even though she works primarily with people of color. At a unit retreat for her division, Susan and her professional colleagues, who are predominantly people of color, had been talking about the pressure for productivity that often permeates their work and how it has negatively impacted their relationships with one another. Susan described how, at the beginning of the meeting, she had shared her desire to move towards more relational and less transactional interactions with her colleagues, hoping the group could divest themselves of what she termed "the comfort of the status quo" (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022). However, by the end of the day, the planning and strategizing in their meeting had become very linear and goal-focused, necessitating a call-out by one of her colleagues of color who pointed out how the group had fallen right back into the very (White) behaviors they had been trying to avoid:

> we had a retreat for the [name of DEI unit]… earlier in the day, we had been talking about, you know, how the manifestation of Whiteness around urgency has really negatively influenced how we interact with each other, and what we prioritize, where we end up spending our time, and so I was talking about the fact that we probably need to pay attention to how Whiteness is showing up even in our predominantly folks of color work environment. And you know, so we had some conversation about that, and then towards the end of the day, we were trying to get to the place of like, all right, so what next, how do we do something so that next year we're not sitting here having the same conversation? And so, I was like, well, I've got three kinds of tactical things I can think of, we could do this, we could do this, we could do the other thing, everybody's like, that's great, we'll jump on that, blah, blah blah…
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

Acknowledging how much unconscious reliance many of us have on those very racialized ways of both communicating and measuring progress, Susan rolled her eyes and slapped her forehead in emphasis, exclaiming:

> and it was like duh, of *course*, right? Like, we just went into, "Here's the list of things that we need to get done." And it was fascinating, because I was so clear about it earlier in the day, by the end of the day, I was like… I just need, we just need to get something done and not have another retreat where we don't do anything.
>
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

Susan's story about her division meeting illustrates three characteristics of White supremacy culture: *only one right way* and *right to comfort*, revealed in Susan's exhortations to her colleagues to try and move away from the familiar, but very White way of doing things—and *a sense of urgency*, which ended up dominating the process and direction of the meeting. Whiteness, Morris (2016) emphasizes, defines "the expected or 'neutral' range of human attributes and behavior" (p. 952). At PWIs, especially, the range of behaviors commonly accepted as "normal" are shaped and codified by White people, to the extent that even in a group comprising predominantly people of color, those norms are so prevalent that they are unconsciously and unquestioningly enforced. The fact that Susan, rather than one of her colleagues of color, was the person leading the process and direction of the group's work, speaks to a privileging of her Whiteness and its associated characteristics, as described by other participants in anecdotes they shared.

In her individual interview with me, in response a story I had shared about a prior supervisor's penchant for *power hoarding*, a characteristic typical of a work culture steeped in White supremacy, Olivia talked about *individualism*, another feature of White supremacy culture that she had observed at her institution. Individualism includes the "desire for individual recognition and credit" (Okun, 2021, p. 20). Lamenting the proliferation of

attitudes at her institution that often bypassed acknowledgement of group achievements, making accomplishment an individual, rather than a team, aspiration, Olivia shared:

> This is, of course, connected to White supremacy culture, really just the scarcity… not the actual scarcity, but like the way that… well, I don't think it's particular to higher ed, but higher ed is what I know, where it's built on a culture of individuality and not collaboration, and feeling like you need that credit, or else you're not gonna make it to the next step, right? I don't know, it's just gross.
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

The culture of individuality at many institutions of higher education makes it challenging to pursue authentic relationships. Alex alluded to the White supremacy culture characteristic of *objectivity*, expressing regret that White supremacy had often forced them to suppress their emotions in the workplace, preventing them from expressing their humanity in full and genuine ways:

> a place that in the past couple of years has been a really… the spot of growth, and I think a reclaiming of my own humanity… Like, White supremacy has taken my humanity in very different ways than colleagues of color. I want to claim the fullness that exists for me, that gets me out of my head, that allows me to feel my feelings in more complete and whole ways. Like, what have I lost in my Whiteness that tells me my values, what's between my ears, and what I'm thinking?
>
> (Alex, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Okun posits that White supremacy promotes "the belief that emotions are inherently destructive, irrational, and should not play a role in decision-making or group process" (p. 10). Strongly connected to the sentiments expressed by Alex, Sullivan (2014) emphasizes how "white racism has cost white people their capability for intimacy, their affective lives, their authenticity, and their sense of connection to other people" (p. 13).

As will be detailed later in this chapter, participants expressed that building positive relationships with colleagues felt critical to their efforts to advance tangible change at their institutions. However, those efforts were sometimes adversely impacted by the dynamics of

White dominance and resulting invisibility of racism. Claire described a situation where she later realized she had colluded with another White professional colleague, with whom she was trying to build a productive working relationship, to challenge a Black colleague's authority in a particular area of responsibility:

> I had a White colleague who had done kind of victim advocacy things, and was trying to collaborate with the women's center. And our victim advocate, who kind of runs the whole victim advocacy program, is a Black woman. And I think that my White peer leveraged our relationship and my Whiteness to try to sneak into this victim advocacy space that wasn't their space or my space to be in, in the role that I was in, because I wasn't having anything to do with victim advocacy at that time. And so, I was completely oblivious, and I set up a meeting with this White person and someone else to work on this project that just totally overstepped my Black colleague's jurisdiction. And that was so wrong, and I think that… I don't think that it was like only a race thing. I think that there were many different layers as to why I just set up the meeting, but I think that race was a part of it unconsciously.
>
> (Claire, individual interview, June 13, 2022)

While Claire did not expand on what "different layers" of intention were involved in her actions, it seems that White complicity had played a key role in her inadvertently assisting a White colleague in overstepping her area of professional responsibility, to the detriment of a Black colleague whose authority and agency in her work was then directly challenged. Applebaum (2010) describes how, as a function of systemic race privilege, White people are often complicit in the oppression of people of color without awareness or intent. White complicity is inextricably bound up with White ways of being that require a "conception of responsibility" (Applebaum, 2010, p. 28) to truly understand how White people both benefit from and contribute to racism. In most cases, to preserve White comfort, White people to choose to overlook or ignore the ways in which they are both the beneficiaries and perpetrators of racism. Thus, a significant manifestation of White privilege is the concept of White ignorance (Mills, 2007). In his book *The Racial Contract*, Mills (1997) describes a

covert and unconscious “agreement” of sorts between Whites to create and maintain the subordination of people of color. In order to maintain dominant status, Whites must subscribe to and perpetuate a state of ignorance and misinterpretation of reality. White ignorance involves a “not knowing” that supports the racial positionality of Whites, and safeguards White privilege (Applebaum, 2010). While Claire identifies as an aspiring ally to people of color and is actively pursuing personal learning and growth around antiracism, the situation she described is illustrative of the ways in which White ignorance perpetuates the invisibility of racism.

Alex, Emily, and Susan all shared specific examples of witnessing White ignorance at play in situations with professional colleagues at their institutions. Alex recalled an incident that happened during a search committee meeting with some of their (White) colleagues:

> …comments get made in search committee meetings around, why would folks of color come to [name of state]? That like, I actually think are rooted in racism, of taking away the agency of folks of color, like, in their brilliance and their wisdom, to like… they know where they’re applying to a job! Right? It’s not like they threw their name into a hat of, like, I’d like a job and they don’t know where it’s gonna be. Right? So, it’s like, questioning their competence by making those comments.
>
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

Alex points out that their colleagues’ comments unconsciously reinforce racist assumptions about that candidate’s judgement and level of competence and preparedness. In discussing what they felt was the candidate’s “fit” with the institution, members of the search committee were using elements of language as a tool of discrimination, providing another example of the racially coded language that Alex described in a prior anecdote. Emily also shared an example from a recent search committee experience, where a candidate’s diction was suggested as a potential reason for not hiring her:

> the top two candidates, I had do presentations for the team and then invited the team to send feedback to me. …one candidate was a slightly more out-of-the-box candidate, biracial, but much more engaging in doing the training. …there were a couple of words she used, and she used them repeatedly and she didn't exactly use them the standard formal right way, so maybe like… "to exultate people" or something like that, it was something along those lines, and one of my staff members commented that she thought students would be turned off because this person was using a couple of words incorrectly.
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Reflecting on what she interpreted as a discriminatory observation based on race, Emily stated, "that to me sounds really close to, she doesn't speak formal enough White English, so we shouldn't hire her" (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022). In privileging "standard" English vernacular as a marker of presumed competence or professionalism, Emily's colleague was activating racialized interpretations of language usage to suggest the candidate be excluded from consideration for the position. Raciolinguistics, a field of study engaging both language and race and ethnicity, examines—among other topics—the role of language in maintaining racism as a global system of oppression. Alim et al. (2016) discuss the phenomenon described by both Alex and Emily, highlighting how "on the job market, language-based discrimination intersects with issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and national origin to make it more difficult for well-qualified applicants with an 'accent' to receive equal opportunities" (p. 27).

Providing further examples of White ignorance in an institutional setting, Susan described her professional colleagues' lack of awareness around racist stereotypes when attending a meeting about how to increase support for first-generation students at her university:

> the folks that have been taking the lead on it, especially in the beginning, are two White men who are colleagues of mine. They've been engaging faculty and staff who are first-gen in part of this as well, so I've been going to meetings, and we had a gathering and I don't remember the specifics of the

> conversation, but what was happening is that “first-gen” was really being presented as *White* first-gen students. And there were predominantly White folks in that room, and at one point, I think there was some pushback from a colleague of color around, you know, not all students of color who are first-generation want to be identified as first-generation, because it’s another marker of otherness for that. And there was some, like, not understanding that by some of my colleagues, and so that had been sort of a running theme…
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

The racial dynamics in this situation are complex and multi-layered. Susan’s two White colleagues were leading the conversation from their own frame of reference as White first-generation students, neglecting to address ways in which first-generation students of color might be better served. Susan’s colleague of color, while pointing out that the conversation was excluding students of color, was also attempting to educate the group on the stigmatizing nature of that label for many students of color, illustrating why they might be reluctant to self-identify as first-generation. The lack of understanding among some of those attending the meeting of the complex intersections between race and first-generation status provides a clear example of the invisibility of racism, even in spaces of advocacy.

Summarizing a conundrum felt by many of the participants, Emily articulated the challenge of trying to engage in antiracist action in an academic environment steeped in and dominated by White norms and structures. Dismantling the institution, she rationalized, was impossible, but also carried the possibility of negative repercussion for the communities for whom she hoped to advocate:

> I think there are people in my community who would say you can’t have a job like mine and be antiracist because I’m not trying to tear down the university. But I also feel like… I can see how the university is founded on racism, there are inequities baked into it. If we destroy it, people who lose access to education are the same people who have historically been marginalized and harmed.
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

All of the participants in this study work at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), institutions in which the establishment and maintenance of systems and structures shaped and dictated by White norms and standards produce a hostile culture and climate for students, staff, and faculty of color (Cabrera et al., 2017). Participants' stories around navigating a campus ecology steeped in Whiteness provide illustrative examples of how the dominance of Whiteness and the invisibility of racism contribute(d) to their inaction around antiracist allyship. In addition to describing the structural factors that prevented them from pursuing antiracist allyship, participants also detailed several factors related to their individual personalities, circumstances, and relationships that they felt negatively influence(d) their action for racial allyship. I will cover the most salient themes that emerged from their stories in the section that follows.

Intrinsic/Individual Barriers

All of the participants in this study had been purposefully working on growing their awareness of racism and developing their antiracist allyship for a number of years, with a range of anywhere from two years to more than fifteen. Participants' ages ranged from the early 30s to mid-50s, and in most cases—although not all—the length of their activism for racial justice directly correlated with their age, with older participants not surprisingly doing the work for longer. Nevertheless, many of the individual factors that negatively impacted participants' action for antiracism were experienced regardless of longevity in the work. These were revealed through three primary themes in participants' stories, as illustrated in the graphic on the following page:

(1) preserving relationships with other White people;

(2) fear and guilt; and

(3) exhaustion/burnout.

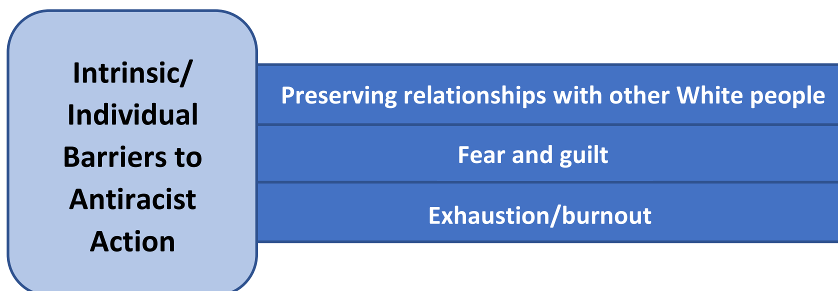

Figure 7. Intrinsic/Individual Barriers to Participants' Antiracist Action

As with the examples from the data that I provided in the previous section to illustrate the systemic/structural barriers to participants' antiracist action, I will organize the stories that fall under each theme chronologically, in terms of family experiences, societal norms, and institutional moments.

Theme 1: Preserving Relationships with Other White People. All of the participants mentioned intentionally cultivating and nurturing relationships as one of the key factors supporting their antiracist development and growth. However, the desire to preserve relationships with other White people and the challenging dynamics of those relationships, especially family relationships, was also a salient factor in why participants chose not to intervene on specific occasions where they observed racist behaviors or heard people expressing racist ideas. Six of the eight participants shared stories about feeling pressure to keep quiet or anxiety about speaking up to directly challenge racist sentiments expressed by White family members, friends, or work colleagues. In the Ladder of Empowerment model (Okun, 2006—see Figure 4, p. 76), designed to illustrate the different stages that White people typically go through as they process their awareness of and their relationship to racism, this experience is common in the fourth stage, *Denial and Defensiveness*. These emotions are connected to a fear of loss, including the fear of losing important relationships

with family members and friends (and professional colleagues) who aren't as far along in their learning and growth round antiracism (Okun, 2006; Smith & Redington, 2010). Hardiman's (1982) White racial identity development model outlines how White individuals going through various stages of race consciousness experience changes in their relationships with other White people. She describes how White individuals who arrive at the third stage of their identity development, *Resistance*, are often ostracized from their relationships with other White people "because their behaviors and attitudes threaten or anger Whites who are in stage II" (p. 186). Thus, the desire to maintain those relationships is likely a strong inhibitor for White people in challenging incidents of racism perpetrated by family members, friends, or colleagues.

Family Experiences. In our interview, Alex remembered having a conversation with their father around immigration, recalling how uncomfortable they became in the moment, and how they stopped short of pushing to engage more deeply with him around the topic of race:

> I was having a visceral reaction more than what my dad said in this moment, but I was like, this is ridiculous… it was not a good example of me trying to be relational and it's because my dad and I have a fraught relationship, so it's like… I think it's an example of me challenging it poorly and maybe why I find that being relational is so important, because I don't have the relationship with my dad where feels generative or helpful, it feels divisive.
>
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

Depth of relationship is critical for creating a sense of safety where vulnerable conversations about race can happen freely and authentically. Martina echoed similar sentiments when recounting a group conversation that happened during a family vacation where older family members were expressing racist views. Martina admits to feeling uncomfortable intervening:

> [We were at] at my aunt and uncle's cabin… we were guests at their place, and we just happen to be sitting out on the deck and just to hear how family

> members were talking about the Black community in [large city], but also even like in more rural [name of state], and just making a bunch of assumptions and stereotyping and… I got up and I walked away… as opposed to saying something. But I felt really disappointed in myself after the fact—that, by not saying something, it's like I'm complicit to what they were saying… where I struggle sometimes the most is with elders in my family, like, how do you push but also be respectful? And I don't feel like I've figured that out really well.
>
> (Martina, individual interview, June 23, 2022)

Like Martina, several of the participants expressed that structures of power within relationships with family members and their own positionality within those relationships had contributed to their inaction in challenging incidents of racism or racism dynamics. Referencing the conversation with their father around immigration, Alex also described the complexity of interactions with the elders in their family:

> we never circled back to talk about it, which is, I think, a place that I want to reflect on, what it would mean to try and circle back and have a more nuanced or open conversation with my dad in thinking about race and, just, identity. He is an old, straight, white man, like, he's the opposite of my grandmother and it's my mom's mom who I was very close with, we're not super close to my dad's side of the family, but it's like... almost like polar opposites of having this example of this matriarch who was so humble and continued learning, and like, a father who is more rigid and more judgmental the older he gets.
>
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

Alex hints at the struggle they experience engaging in these critical conversations with a parent, but in highlighting their relationship with their grandmother, also makes it clear that the disconnect is not always due to a generational gap, but related more to ideological differences.

Societal Norms. While several participants mentioned the challenge of interrupting family members' racist actions or words, Olivia shared a painful example of a time she failed to act in a professional environment:

> I was on a board for a local nonprofit, and it was a racial literacy organization. And we were having a board meeting, and we were talking

> about branding and marketing and we had an external person come in, and he was kind of giving the pitch on, like, a brand review. We were revamping the brand or brand identity, and in his own… I think somebody had asked him, or we had asked him, to share about his own journey to racial justice and antiracism and his commitment. And in that he shared that he was from a small town. I don't even remember all the details of the story, but he used the N-word, saying that that's what people called him, but he said it so casually, and just kept going, and I remember being paralyzed 'cause I recognized in the moment that intervention should happen, but I couldn't get myself out of that paralysis, and I remember looking at my colleague, who is a Black woman, and I locked eyes with her. And I was just still stuck in that paralysis and she looked at me, and looking back, I'm sure she was like, are you gonna say something? And we didn't. Nobody did.
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

In failing to take direct action in the moment, Olivia was conforming to the "proper" (read "White") standards of professional behavior in the situation (Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2020). The speaker was a guest of the organization on whose board she served, and even though she knew she needed to intervene, she did not want to embarrass him, or make her fellow board members uncomfortable by calling out his racist language. Prioritizing workplace politeness/decorum over advocacy for her Black colleague had devastating consequences, as she goes on to describe:

> And we kept… we continued with the presentation, and then afterwards of course, very understandably, my colleague was upset that nobody said anything, nobody stopped… I kick myself. We did in the aftermath have a conversation with the person who used the N-word and we talked with him about how it was inappropriate that he used that word so casually, and that it's not okay for him to use that word, even though he was describing it as part of his story, and that people from his high school called him that even though he's White. And so, we did have that ongoing further education with him, and we also committed to individual actions to work to do better moving forward. So, I feel like we did all of the "right things" in the aftermath, you know. But it doesn't change the damage. It doesn't change the impact and the betrayal that my colleague felt. And I think that's what eats me alive the most, is that in that moment when she needed support, when she needed somebody to say something, none of us did anything.
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

This example is redolent of the White complicity that Claire discussed when talking about side-stepping her Black colleague's authority in order to facilitate a collaborative relationship with a White colleague. The desire to maintain relationships with other White people clearly has a strong inhibiting effect on several participants' action for antiracist allyship.

Institutional Moments. Referencing power differentials in the workplace, both Rebecca and Anne talked about the challenges of interrupting or making visible instances of racism perpetrated by more senior professional colleagues. Rebecca relayed some frustrations that she had had with a former supervisor around engaging in proactive support for people of color at her institution. Discussing an incident she had heard about from another colleague, but had not actually witnessed in person, she shared:

> I really thought we needed to take a strong stance and say that Black Lives Matter. When the protests were happening and she was pushing back on that a lot, I… [heavy sigh] I don't remember which shooting it was, but at some point there was a shooting that she was upset about and she went to [name of colleague] and he had a student assistant and they were both Black, and she went to them and was asking how they were doing, which on its face seems like it would be nice. But they were like, "Oh, we're okay," and she kept pushing, "No, really, how are you doing? Really, how are you doing?" And eventually they were like, "I mean, shit is fucked up." I don't think that's exactly what they said. I heard about this from other people, and then she told me this story. And after they had said that, she started crying. And just sobbing. And when she told me this, she was very relieved and proud of herself because it was so cathartic for her. And she really didn't understand, like, how much space she had taken up in that interaction, and I didn't… I had to argue with her so much to push her to post stuff about Black Lives Matter that I didn't confront her, or challenge that… and I don't know how I would have, but I feel like I should have said something.
>
> (Rebecca, individual interview, June 9, 2022)

In addition to the complexity of the power dynamics in her relationship with her supervisor, Rebecca admits that she did not challenge her supervisor on her behavior because she felt that her intervention wouldn't have been helpful in that instance, or encouraged her supervisor to reflect on the impact of her behavior. This was a reason cited by several

participants for failing to interrupt incidents of racism. Anne also referenced an incident that happened in the presence of senior-level colleagues during a conversation with university administrators around the planning and execution of a campus-wide Juneteenth celebration. She recalled feeling frustrated by several of her White colleagues remarking on the challenges of trying to schedule events around the federal holiday, but said nothing and was instantly regretful:

> I feel like that was a huge failure of an opportunity to be, like, you need to check yourself, because this isn't the spirit of the holiday, to complain about how much extra work for a couple of White ladies was created having to switch the schedule around.
>
> (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022)

When pressed to elaborate on why she did not intervene, Anne shared:

> I was sitting in a room with the President of the university and his cabinet. And it was our first in-person meeting, oh, since COVID. Since we, you know, had been doing, mostly Zoom meetings. So, there's definitely a power dynamic. My Vice President was in the room. I'm not sure of my place in that space yet.
>
> (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022)

Anne's story illustrates the dilemma that many of the study participants have encountered in trying to move forward antiracist work at institutions where administrative hierarchies have levied a silencing or chilling effect on their ability to speak openly and honestly. "But the thing is," Anne goes on, "we can't change the institution if you don't talk to the people running the institution about the stuff that they're doing that's causing harm" (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022). Providing further commentary to the challenge of navigating the professional hierarchy, Emily also reflected that "it's hard sometimes to do this work with colleagues or with people who are reporting to us, maybe even wrong to do the work with people who are reporting to us" (Emily, focus group, December 8, 2022).

Theme 2: Fear and Guilt. The second theme that emerged from participants' individual reasons for failing to intervene in instances of racism, or feeling as if their actions for antiracism weren't as developed and consistent as they would like them to be, relates to personal feelings of fear and guilt. Fear and guilt are common emotions experienced by White people during their identity development process, and also as they examine their relationship to racism in greater depth. In her model, Hardiman (1982) explains that during the transition from the second stage, *Acceptance*, to the third stage, *Resistance*, "Whites experience difficult emotions… ranging from guilt and embarrassment, …to anger and disgust" (p. 181). Fear also enters the range of emotions they experience as they examine and question their shifting worldview. In Okun's (2006) ladder model, these emotions are present in the fifth stage, *Guilt and Shame*, as White people grapple with the realization that they are complicit in contributing to racism in society. Reflecting the bulk of the experiences that participants shared around having these emotions, they are also present in a more advanced stage of the ladder, *Taking Responsibility*, where White people begin to understand and take responsibility for the racial power and privilege they have. As Whites start to process their own racism and look for ways to be better allies to people of color, they may experience fear and/or anxiety around the possibility of making mistakes. Both Anne and Susan shared stories that directly addressed their fears of "messing up" in their efforts to be good antiracist allies.

Early Experiences. Summing up the reasons why she had sometimes failed to act in antiracist ways, Anne explained, "I'm sure there are many more days than not when I am not an ally. Because I'm tired. Or I'm afraid. Or whatever" (Anne, individual interview, June 15,

2022). She went on to express that sometimes guilt or pressure to do the right thing were motivating factors in deciding whether or not to take action:

> I'm not very far along, I don't think, in my identity development as an adult… I'm not totally self-actualized yet. But as I'm trying to work towards that… I don't know, sometimes I think I'm an antiracist ally because I have guilt. Sometimes I think I'm an antiracist ally because it seems like the right thing to do, so it is a day-to-day and a choice-to-choice and a minute-to-minute thing…
>
> (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022)

Relating to Anne's concerns about self-actualization, Olivia shared her fear of how people who perhaps hadn't witnessed the evolution of her antiracist journey might judge her based on their experiences with her family of origin:

> when I was in high school, I was not the antiracist, or aspiring antiracist person I am now. But I've come a long way and certainly a lot further than some of my family members. And I don't often share that, because I feel like… I'll share that my family's racist and conservative and all of that, but I just feel like… well, one, I feel shame that that's my family who has said those incredibly vile things, but I also… It's kinda like the guilty by way of association, you know? I know that I have to continue working on myself and showing up, improving myself, but I don't want anybody to discount me in the work that I've done because of my family who hasn't come along on the journey with me.
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Feeling a desire—both consciously and unconsciously—to be seen as a "good White person" was a consistent theme throughout the participants' stories, as I will elaborate on in the section later in this chapter discussing participants' motivating factors for practicing antiracist allyship. Olivia's fear around being judged because of her ties to racist family members early in her allyship journey bears parallels to Anne's anxiety over being judged for not being a perfect ally. The potential to be judged for a perceived lack of growth or competence in antiracism was a strong inhibiting factor to antiracist action, as Anne goes on to explain below.

Societal Norms. Anne expressed that fear of making mistakes is another reason she has sometimes felt hesitant to nurture relationships that will support developing her competence and skills around antiracist action. Every participant expressed that cultivating and nourishing relationships was one of the most important motivating factors in helping them to strengthen their antiracist practice, and yet, Anne also expresses how potential expectations for action within those relationships had made her feel uneasy:

> relationships and connectedness are like these personal core values and top strengths that I have, and it's something that I've always been nervous to build, in my Whiteness, you know… fear of making mistakes. If I'm too close, if I start having these conversations, I'm gonna screw up.
> (Anne, focus group, December 8, 2022)

The drive for *perfectionism*, a characteristic of White supremacy culture (Okun, 2021), is clearly evident here—Anne's fear of "screwing up" have potentially cost her opportunities for developing meaningful relationships.

Institutional Moments. Susan also told a story about experiencing fear of "screwing up," to the extent that she allowed her fear to perpetuate what she later reflected on as a potentially racist othering of international students in her class:

> I was doing a training for the students that are the tutor counselors in our summer TriO programs. So, all students of color. And it was a small group, so we did introductions and there was one young man… I'm making some assumptions about his country of origin, but I think he was African by… again, country of origin, based on accent. And when he said his name, I definitely was not getting it, and so I'd asked him to repeat it and I thought I had it, and I clearly didn't when I said it back to him. And I said, you know, I think it might take me a time or two, so please be patient and I'll try. And I thought, why the hell did you say that, you just put it back on him, that was dumb. And then I realized I sort of stopped using everybody's names, because I didn't want to continue to not get that right for him, which made everybody, because they were all students of color, right, who then were not being able to be actually engaged with by using their names, and then also just made the whole name thing, like, invisible for him.
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

By not persisting in her attempts to pronounce the student's name correctly, ostensibly in an effort to avoid a racist microaggression, Susan then proceeded to extend the microaggression to the entire class.

Theme 3: Exhaustion/Burnout. Four of the eight participants expressed that feelings of exhaustion or burnout had served as an inhibiting factor to their action around antiracism. Freudenberger (1974) first proposed the concept of burnout when exploring the experiences of staff working at free health clinics. Burnout, he emphasized, afflicts "the dedicated and the committed" who "work too much, too long and too intensely" (p. 161). It manifests in a variety of signs and symptoms that include severe exhaustion and fatigue, depression, and a vulnerability to illness. Chen and Gorski (2015) maintain that individuals working in social justice activism are particularly susceptible to burnout. Extensive emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) invested by gender justice and racial justice activists can produce feelings of frustration and overwhelm that over an extended period of time can result in burnout. For WGEC practitioners whose work typically promotes a strong social justice agenda (Davie, 2002), feelings of exhaustion and burnout are common experiences, due to working long hours that often include evenings and weekends, constant emotional care of students and colleagues, frustration and discouragement as a result of trying to effect change within systems of oppression with few tangible advances, and the culture of selflessness that frequently surrounds care work. Scholar-practitioners like Kathy Obear (2018) and others have examined in detail the phenomenon of burnout and passion fatigue experienced by people working in social justice-related fields.

Susan, who has worked in a WGEC for over 27 years, explained that intentional efforts to leave her work at work was a mechanism for self-preservation that had allowed her

to avoid burnout and enjoy longevity in her role. She admitted that this had sometimes prevented her from intervening in racist situations when she was "off the clock." Susan shared a specific example of exhaustion/burnout acting as an inhibiting factor in her antiracist intervention, recalling a number of occasions when, driving home from work, she had seen a law enforcement officer conducting a traffic stop with a person of color, felt concerned, and yet had neglected in each instance to intervene:

> several times I've seen folks of color get pulled over or who have been pulled over and thought, you know, maybe I should just stop, like, I don't need to insert myself in this, but just so somebody knows that somebody's watching all of this, you know what I mean? Never did, right? And so, can I say that every one of those stops was racist in nature? No. Is there a great likelihood that they were? Yes. Right? And so, I think, you know, those are definitely examples of times when I could have done something and didn't.
>
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

When I asked Susan what had prevented her from stopping to just observe the interaction between the police officer and the driver of color, she paused, sighed deeply and said:

> I know this is gonna sound really terrible, but I'm gonna say it anyway because it's true. Like, I'm tired, you know, and I think there's a degree to which… And as I said, I own that as part of my White privilege, but there's so much of that work that happens at work, that outside of work, I… and, in general, this is true for me, I try to put pretty tight boundaries around my personal life. And so that feels like, ugh, you know, like really? Am I gonna…?
>
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

Susan's reference to her racial allyship happening primarily at work parallels the story Emily shared about her struggle to switch in the moment from caregiver to racial justice ally when confronted with an instance of racism by her family member's doctor. Several participants shared how critical setting boundaries between work and home life had become in their efforts to find balance in the seemingly 24/7 schedule of gender and racial justice work.

Along the same lines, Alex expressed feelings of overwhelm at juggling the competing priorities of work and parenthood, sharing that exhaustion was largely behind their choice not to engage their child's teacher in discussion around a problematic grade school curriculum when they discovered that the classroom content on Indigenous Peoples Day had been largely centered around learning about Christopher Columbus:

> in our town, it's Indigenous Peoples Day, not Columbus Day, but I'm like, what'd you learn about today, on Indigenous People's Day? Columbus! I was like… [covers face]
>
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

I asked Alex what they thought their reason was for choosing to not talk to their child's teacher, and they shared:

> This sounds terrible, but exhaustion. Like, being tired at the end of the day, is that the battle I'm going to fight? Like, that sounds terrible out loud… I think that it… just at the end of the day, being tired and like… And that's terrible because you know again, it's kind of selfish to be thinking about what I can do for my own kid versus like thinking through what I can do so future kids get better information or the other kids in class who don't have parents who are spending the time or even looking at what's being learned.
>
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

In addition to exhaustion, Alex also admitted to not wanting to be perceived as a "helicopter parent" by their child's teacher, which had also played a role in their decision not to say anything. Echoing the feelings of overload shared by other participants, Martina shared how her passion and desire for engagement in a number of different social justice issues had led to her sometimes experiencing "bandwidth" issues in fully engaging in antiracism work:

> if I 100% was [an antiracist ally], I would be out there more, I'd be doing more, I feel like there's just like a… sometimes it's a bandwidth, sometimes it's an insecurity that stops me from showing up in the best ways to support others. And so, until I carve out that time and that space, you know, I don't know if I can totally own that for myself or if I just would rather say I'm aspiring.
>
> (Martina, individual interview, June 23, 2022)

Further explaining where that feeling of burnout originates for her, Martina went on:

> It's just like, well, I care about this issue, but now I see how it's impacting this issue, and pretty soon you're being tapped all the time, and you don't have anything left to give.
>
> (Martina, individual interview, June 23, 2022)

All of the participants in this study expressed remorse or regret when describing the individual or personal factors that contributed to their lack of action when faced with incidents of racism, and many of them commented on the demands of their job and family life that left them sapped of time and energy to be "better" antiracist allies. Alex summed up the feelings of many of the participants when referencing the "long haul" nature of their antiracism journey:

> I'm on a journey of learning and unlearning and relearning, and every day is an opportunity to know better and do better. Some days I take that. Some days I'm tired, and I don't. But I will always be in progress, and that's where relationships feel important to keep me in check, because I know in my Whiteness, there'll be times that I feel I arrived, or that I'm tired, and I need people to hold me and remind me.
>
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

In addition to describing the individual or intrinsic factors that prevented them from pursuing antiracist allyship, participants also detailed several factors related to their individual circumstances and relationships that they felt motivate(d) their action for racial allyship.

Intrinsic/Individual Incentives

By far the most prevalent theme that emerged from participants' stories as they shared examples of personal motivating factors for engaging in antiracist allyship was the theme of cultivating relationships—with themselves, with other White people, and with people of color. This was followed closely by the theme of education, illustrated with examples of self-education, education by people and scholars of color, and participants

educating other White people. The third theme that emerged relates to participants' desire to be a "good White person." These themes are illustrated in the graphic on the following page:

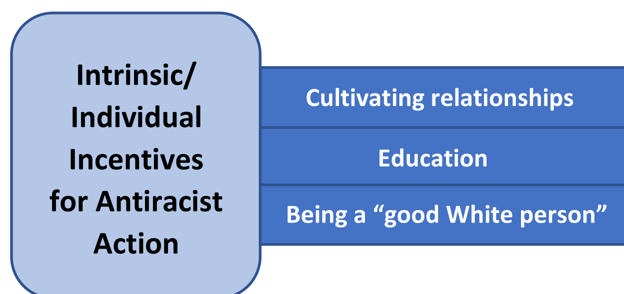

Figure 8. Intrinsic/Individual Incentives for Participants' Antiracist Action

Theme 1: Cultivating Relationships. Intentional efforts to grow in relationship with both other White people and with people of color was the most mentioned factor when participants shared their perspectives on effective strategies for challenging and decreasing acts of racism. In their study of White college students' racial justice allyship development, Reason et al. (2005) conjecture that close friendships with people of color "are likely catalysts for White students to begin reflecting upon their racial identity and attitudes" (p. 544). Frankenberg (1993), O'Brien (2001), and Helms (2008) also posit that building relationships with people of color are an important aspect of White antiracist allies' identity development process. Susan expressed at several points throughout her individual interview that her working relationships and friendships with women of color over the course of more than twenty years had helped her to progress in her antiracist allyship:

> one of the few things that has the most impact is being in authentic relationship with folks—and that doesn't necessarily have to be friendships, right? I think it could just even be like authentic working relationships with folks. But I feel like proximity is the thing that makes the biggest difference. When you have to think about what you're doing because you've got somebody right in front of you or next to you who's going to be impacted by that, or by observing what happens to other people... You know, something about that experiential piece, no matter how much education I feel like we've done, and certainly that's important, but it feels very untethered until it's put

> in practice. And so I feel like that's where the relationships and the experiences become super important.
>
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

While "being in relationship" with someone doesn't necessarily have to mean having a friendship with them, Susan emphasized that the experience of working closely alongside people of color had had significant impact on her actions for racial justice. Susan's views are echoed in the work of Sullivan (2014), who maintains that White allies can still be aligned with the goals and interests of people of color and work for racial justice even without close friendships with them. In fact, Sullivan views the efforts of White people to develop and deepen friendships with people of color with skepticism, emphasizing that, "white efforts to make non-white friends can have more to do with making guilty white people feel better about themselves or with white people's accumulation of cultural credit, than with promoting racial justice" (p. 11).

Alex explained that taking the time to nurture their interpersonal relationships with other White people in order to reach a place of vulnerability and connection had been instrumental in advancing their own growth in antiracist work, sharing how their approach has evolved over time:

> relationships, I think, are the most effective. And slowing down. I think I was in a lot of… I've been in angrier phases in my antiracist work, where it's like righting the wrongs and just like calling people out and like… that actually were from a really self-righteous sort of place. Versus, hey, I understand how you think that, I used to think that, I still sometimes think that. So yeah, like slowing down and being in relationship and being, yeah, like what are the conversations for me to have, what are the times for me to listen? An openness to learning and taking responsibility for my own learning. So yeah, like it all is through a lens of relationships and then, like, what that shows up and looks like. 'Cause, like, I view my role as a parent as relational, my role as a colleague, how I… Yeah, like that is where my greatest impact can be, and my relationship with myself, right? I think that has grown and become more honest through my antiracist work.
>
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

In addition to emphasizing the importance of relationships with others, Alex recognized the ongoing self-work they need to engage in to advance their own racial justice allyship. Claire also stressed how developing a positive relationship with oneself, as well as with others, is an important tool for challenging racist ideologies and actions:

> I think figuring out your privilege, doing diligent regular work on yourself, and in your community, and with other people, in relationship with other people. Being hold to… kind of create those relationships with other folks, so that you're able to have a constructive conversation and say, "Hey... this thing?" That, you know, this racist thing happened and how are we gonna work forward through that? Those are all really important.
>
> (Claire, individual interview, June 13, 2022)

Referencing doing that "diligent regular work" on oneself as a key part of building relationships with others, Anne shared the importance of challenging our own preconceptions and judgements in order to be able to engage in authentic dialogue:

> How do we have an actual conversation where we're with a person, and you're recognizing the humanity in them, not like some library where I'm going to trot you out based on your one identity that you're going to talk about, like a book. But like, human to human, how do we have lively debate where we're not hoping the other one fails at whatever it is they're trying to achieve? Or that we believe that there's goodness in people whose goodness doesn't look like ours?
>
> (Anne, individual interview, June 15)

Sharing Anne's sentiments, Emily cautioned against a "one size fits all" approach to building relationships, emphasizing the importance of relinquishing assumptions and stereotypes about individuals and communities in order to cultivate and be in authentic relationship:

> there is no blanket prescription for healing harms and healing wrongs. And when I hear the, like, build up more relationships piece, I'm like, yes, that makes sense, and for people who are really introverted, maybe that is not actually… Like, if you tell an introvert they have to go make two dozen friends who are people of color, that's not actually the answer and that's going to turn into something super transactional. So, thinking about just the way I move through the world and how I make those interactions and those… in a more expansive view of relationships. And then also reminding myself that

> there is no monolithic group and so, you know, I've had moments where some people on the team have said, our colleagues of color on our team need 'X' and I'm like, well, you talked to *one* of our colleagues. But another one, very explicitly, not only does not need 'X', would find 'X' harmful. Right? So, trying to not assume that because someone belongs to a group, there is a particular way they want to be treated, other than with dignity and respect.
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

In thinking about building relationships with colleagues of color that honor their individual needs and circumstances, Alex stressed the importance of being mindful to avoid co-opting the stories of people of color in order to demonstrate allyship, respecting the boundaries of confidence that people may have extended in moments of vulnerability:

> I hear from folks wanting to leave or having terrible experiences and it's like, how do I actually hold and trust those things that have been shared with me by people of color, and that not being my story to tell to other people, right? Colleagues have trusted me with that part of their experience, but I don't need to wield that in ways that are not mine.
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

While all of the participants emphasized the importance of nurturing relationships with themselves, with other White people, and with people of color as critical for advancing their action for antiracism, Susan in particular highlighted her relationships with her colleagues and friends of color in particular as central to her growth in antiracist work. Discussing the early days of her antiracism journey, Susan told a story about a colleague of color by whom she had been challenged in an ongoing conversation on the impacts of racism versus other types of identity-based oppression. Reflecting on her struggle to prioritize antiracism over other forms of identity-based advocacy, Susan related that, despite her resistance, her colleague had persisted in educating her with firmness and patience, eventually nominating her to serve on the board of an antiracist social justice fund that she was part of. Susan recalls being astonished that her colleague would extend such a gesture of trust, given their past interactions on the topic of racism: "that was a tremendous experience

for me in terms of raising my understanding of antiracist work and being in real work with communities of color and folks of color" (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022). Sharing another story about her interactions with a former colleague, Susan went on to explain how, as she's grown in relationship with her friends and colleagues of color, the way in which she's been reminded to be attentive to racist dynamics in a given situation has also changed:

> what struck me about that, and we're really good friends and have been for a long time... Racism was a part of that conversation, but that was more like a sibling fight than it was the work call-out. And so, I think there's also these different ways in which we get feedback that has been interesting for me to think about navigating that, too, like I feel like we often put these conversations about interrupting racism or any other form of oppression in this… and we talked about this yesterday in the training, right, like it's a call in or call out, like that's the only way that we talk about this stuff. And I feel like sometimes there's the sibling fight, you know, that's part of this, too. And it'd be interesting to sort of think about how to integrate that stuff into our toolbox and conversations that we're having, and is there some Whiteness also baked into the only way we talk about this is calling in and calling out?
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

Susan's comment about the Whiteness inherent in calling someone in/out on their racism is astute. This phenomenon is common in the mid-stages of White antiracist allyship development. In Okun's (2006) ladder model, it is most often seen in the seventh stage, the *Taking Responsibility/Self-Righteousness* stage, where White people understand and begin to take responsibility for our power and privilege, and want other White people to do the same. Getting more comfortable with calling friends, family members, and co-workers in/out was one of the themes that emerged in participants' descriptions of their antiracist allyship. Emily reflected that depth of relationship and a mutual commitment to confronting injustice is fundamental to the effectiveness of that particular strategy for challenging racism:

> Loretta Ross talks about calling in, not calling out. But she also talks about, you know, concentrating your efforts on the people who are, like, 90% with

> you and not wasting your energy on the people you're never going to convince. Which I think is an important component of the calling in concept.
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Focusing on having difficult conversations with people within one's spheres of influence, Emily maintained, has the potential for greater impact than trying to change the hearts and minds of people with whom one has no relationship.

In many of the examples that participants gave, the personal relationships that they had cultivated and nurtured with friends and colleagues provided a foundation for their continued education around the impact of racism. Education was the second theme that emerged from participants' stories around factors that motivated their action for racial justice.

Theme 2: Education. For most participants, self-education around topics related to race and racism had not only played a critical role in their own racial justice allyship development, but had also had a strong motivating effect in wanting to educate others. Participants' efforts at self-education were frequently referred to as "learning journeys," often beginning with a critical examination at some point during their undergraduate college years of the revisionist history that many of them had been taught in grade school. Several participants lamented the lack of thoughtful, accurate instruction on race and racism in the U.S. K-12 educational system, and referenced the importance not just of learning, but of "unlearning" and "re-learning" things that they had been taught about race and the ways in which they had been socialized to collude unconsciously with racist systems and structures. Echoing Alex's statement in discussing her own journey to antiracism, Claire shared that one of the ways in which she's endeavored to grow in her antiracism has been to relearn what she was taught in school and to be purposeful in sharing that with others:

> I think also in regard to reconciling this country's history, and talking to folks about, you know, our founding fathers, and the foundation of this country, and the racism that is entrenched in all of that… I definitely have tried to give a more realistic context of… as I understand the history.
>
> (Claire, individual interview, June 13, 2022)

Anne, Martina, and Alex discussed how they were making intentional efforts to provide a counterbalance to the education their own children were receiving in school, by having critical conversations with them at home to help them become more aware of the dynamics of race and other social justice related topics. Martina specifically emphasized the importance of challenging the limitations of the traditional K-12 curriculum by providing outside-of-school influences and opportunities for children to learn about these topics at an early age:

> I think education is really important at a young age, and like, you know… so I saw a meme over the weekend that's like… Well, now that we have this holiday of Juneteenth, we'd better start educating people about why we have this, and I think our country is not great, our educational system is not great about educating about the history of our country and how it's built on racism, and so, in that sense, it's built into everything we do, and it starts at a young age. And I even think about my, you know, elementary years, and what I was learning and I think education goes a long way because there's things that my kids say that I didn't say in terms of, like, well that doesn't seem fair, that doesn't seem right, so I feel like they're more critical than I was. And so, I chalk that up a little bit to their education that they probably got outside of the educational system, or maybe some of it at home, but also their friends and childcare providers.
>
> (Martina, individual interview, June 23, 2022)

By intentionally having conversations around race with her own children and providing opportunities for them to engage in further dialogue outside the home, Martina could already see a difference between the development of her children's critical thinking skills, and her own as a child. Anne also stressed the importance of early education for counterbalancing the social messaging around race that children are often exposed to at a young age, sharing how education, as well as building relationships with people of color, have been a critical part of her antiracism journey:

> Education has helped me. Being in community with people who are different from me with different backgrounds and life stories and identities has helped me… I think that helps, which is why I think it's a good idea, like you, liberalize people when you send them to college. They're just meeting people that aren't like everyone else who lives in their neighborhood, you know? Human to human, like, if I want my children to be less racist than I was, it's putting them in community, it's having clear conversations about how race is impactful in our society versus the colorblind model that was taught to me as a child, where we love everyone…
>
> (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022)

Recalling the experience that Susan shared of being educated by her colleague of color, Anne also reflected on how perseverance and patience can be effective in trying to educate people about race and racism, emphasizing that even if the direct target of the education is not immediately receptive, there exists the possibility of a trickle-down effect for others who are witnessing or listening to the exchange:

> the interaction, I think, is important to the engagement because there's an effort being made, that education, and it's not maybe for the person you're arguing with, but for the people around who are seeing a level of effort, right? Because we've talked about how it shouldn't always be women of color who are doing the educating and making the effort, and so if I can educate and make an effort, even if the person I'm communicating with isn't responding, I think that it shows up. Like, people read that, and maybe gears turn for them.
>
> (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022)

Piggy-backing on Anne's comment about higher education providing opportunities to challenge some of the stereotypes and biases that people might carry from their socialization in grade school or within their families, Olivia shared how her experience of being a first-generation college student had been instrumental to opening her eyes and mind to the realities of race and racism in the U.S.:

> I want to share that with my family, like my parents, to say no, this is an example. People aren't pulling a race card, or making everything about race. This is the legacy that we continue to benefit from. Our ancestors were recruited here. Other people's ancestors were murdered for us to be here, or were enslaved and captured and taken from their land, right?
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

As she indicated in the example given earlier in this chapter (see p. 138), however, Olivia's education and subsequent revelations around race and racism also became a source of tension between her and her family members, who could not relate to her educational journey and resisted her efforts to share her learning with them.

All but two of the participants credited the Sociology and Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies (WGSS) classes they took during their undergraduate degrees as opening their eyes to the realities of race and racism in the U.S. and helping to kick-start their antiracism journeys. A number of conceptual models of allyship development reference the importance of education in becoming an ally. Washington and Evans' (1991) four-stage model lists *Knowledge/Education*—intentionally acquiring knowledge about the laws, policies, and practices that negatively impact oppressed communities, as well as the culture and norms of those communities—as the critical second step towards allyship after *Awareness*. Broido's (2000) study of allyship development among college students emphasizes the importance of cultivating a strong knowledge base on social justice issues in progressing towards allyship. Bishop's (2002) six-step model starts with aspiring allies learning to understand the origins and applications of different types of oppression and how they are connected. All of the participants in this study regarded their self-education as a continual, ongoing endeavor, and many credited the White Accountability Group for providing them with important tools to advance not just their own learning, but also that of colleagues, family members, and friends.

Susan shared how her self-education has been an intentional part of her journey to growing her antiracist allyship:

> You know, I feel like I've educated myself, I've been in community with people, with folks of color. You know, I've been doing antiracist stuff with NWSA and outside as well, for a long time. So, I think that that has created a certain kind of pathway, for lack of a better way of saying it, into the kind of antiracist ally space. You know, and often because folks have been patient, and I think… I don't know if this is how I want to say this, but I think that I have quote unquote proven myself in some ways by my actions.
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

She also emphasized that a significant part of her education around race and racism has been due to the generosity and grace of people of color who were willing to take the time to help educate her. Susan's comment about having "proven" herself leads into the third major theme shared by participants around personal factors that motivate their action for antiracism: the desire to be a "good White person."

Theme 3: Being a "Good White Person." Five of the eight participants expressed the desire to be and to be seen as a "good White person"—meaning someone who is widely regarded as a strong ally for people of color and for racial justice in general—as a motivating factor in their antiracism efforts. Distilling down the conscious perpetuation of racist thoughts and actions as "bad" and the absence of that as "good," DiAngelo (2018) highlights one of the subconscious goals of White allies engaged in the pursuit of antiracist action—the desire for moral superiority. Okun (2006) describes this dynamic in the *Taking Responsibility/Self-Righteousness* stage of the Ladder of Empowerment model, also known as the "White Can Do Right, Especially Me" stage. She explains that this stage, while usually illustrative of significant growth in White people's antiracist efforts, also leaves them susceptible to false pride and self-righteousness as a result of their deepening worldview and commitment to action. Conceptualizations of "good White people" often include those who are kind, well-meaning, and opposed to racism, but who generally refuse to engage in the deeper self-reflective work of acknowledging their role in upholding racist systems and

structures (Sullivan, 2014). While this was not necessarily the case for participants in this study, they readily acknowledged in their interviews the complex dynamics of enjoying positive feedback in their efforts for antiracism, and several stated they were actively working on distancing themselves for the need for validation.

The desire to be a "good White person" was expressed by participants in both positive and negative ways, as illustrated by examples in their stories detailed as follows. Anne shared that working towards antiracist allyship was motivated for her in part by a desire to "do the right thing," but she also admitted that she enjoyed the "feel good" benefits of her efforts:

> Sometimes I think I'm an antiracist ally because it seems like the right thing to do, so it is a day-to-day and a choice-to-choice and a minute-to-minute thing, where sometimes it's motivated by benevolence… not benevolence, that's a gross word, but probably, right? Like, "Oh, look at how good I was" kind of a thing.
>
> (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022)

Claire echoed Anne's feelings of seeking positive affirmation in her antiracism:

> I wanna know that I'm doing an okay job, right? But that's not what it's about. That is such a product of Whiteness.
>
> (Claire, individual interview, June 13, 2022)

Like Claire, Alex acknowledged the problematic nature of craving positive regard by others in response to their antiracist allyship, admitting that they were probably not engaging in authentic efforts towards antiracism when the extrinsic reward of being seen as "good" was influencing their actions:

> I still wanna be a good White person, you know, even though it's like a terrible thing to lean into, right? I don't think I was doing good work when I was just, like, feeling really good about being a White person in a DEI unit. Like, where I'm positioned on campus does not excuse my behaviors, the way I'm embodying and behaving in White ways.
>
> (Alex, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Susan, a longtime antiracist practitioner whose work environment is composed mostly of people of color, mentioned on several occasions how some of her closest colleagues of color had told her that they would often forget she was White, sharing how validating that felt to her:

> So, I think that, you know… around the, like, good White person thing, it's so easy for me to fall into that. I have a colleague all the time who's like, "You know, I actually forget that you're White" kind of thing, and you know, there's part of me that's like, "Oh, good!" Right? And then, you know, and then it's like, yeah, but you really gotta pay attention to like, what are the implications of that? And how that's a…. You know, how that can be used.
>
> (Susan, focus group, December 8, 2022)

All of the participants who talked about their desire to be a good White person, or discussed how this dynamic had shown up in their racial justice allyship, acknowledged the ways in which this could be weaponized against people of color. Olivia shared her concern around how the desire for "good Whiteness" could cross the line into White saviorism:

> I also think sometimes people can move from ally to being… say, in the context of race, being a White savior, right? Like, trying to always intervene without allowing for agency or space for the person who was being targeted or the person who's from… within the racialized community.
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

In addition to highlighting the risk of sliding into White saviorism within the context of advocating for people of color, Olivia mentioned how she was motivated by a desire to "save" her brother from his racism:

> for a while, as I was kind of moving along in my antiracism journey, I tried to…
>
> I wanted to be the person who could break through to my brother, and challenge racism, and get him to not be racist, to move him to the good side of antiracism.
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Susan made an insightful point about the rewards of being a "good White person," pointing out that the concept of antiracist allyship exists only because of racism. Thus, White people

are typically acknowledged and celebrated for engaging in the work that people of color have been doing for centuries:

> that is also a benefit of racism, right, being in a position to be the White person who can do the White "ally" or "accomplice," or whatever term folks want to be using, work. That work only happens because racism exists. And it positions me differently than all my colleagues of color. So yeah, we wouldn't be having any of those conversations if racism didn't exist, and it positions me in a way that I get seen as somebody who gets it, as somebody who will ask the diversity questions and maybe I'm often seen as the "safer" person to bring in the room, when you know somebody's got to be doing that work.
> (Susan, individual interview, June 17, 2022)

In trying to be a better White person, Claire articulated a concern about focusing on self-improvement over increased action for oppressed communities, fearing that her efforts for antiracism might be regarded as transactional in nature:

> I do have the commitment… or, I'm sorry, the accountability to myself, because I know it's something that I need to do, and it's to make myself better. Like, I think that there's a lot of conversation about, like, White people doing this work so that they are a better person, or self-actualized, or whatever it might be. But like, in the broader sense, I need to be doing my part to help the bigger community.
> (Claire, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Overall, the desire to be and be seen as a good White person was regarded negatively by participants, framed in many of the instances described as being anything from self-indulgent to actively harmful. Several participants talked about wanting to distance themselves from others in pursuit of being "good White people," while recognizing that their own insecurity and fears around racial incompetence were likely contributing factors to engaging in this dynamic themselves. Kendi (2019) talks about racism and antiracism as "peelable name tags" (p. 23) that can be applied and removed based on what someone is saying or doing, or not saying or doing, at any given time. Thus, Kendi asserts, the label "racist" is an adjective, not a noun—it describes what someone does and how someone acts at a particular moment in

time, rather than who someone is. You can be racist and antiracist at the same time. The fear that many White people have around the label “racist” is based on their perception of being judged, hence the desire to move towards and to be seen as embracing a state of “goodness.” Regardless of whether they perceived it as “good” or “bad,” however, most of the participants discussed this drive as an influencing factor in their action for antiracism.

In summary, the examples participants shared of systemic or structural factors that presented barriers to their engagement in antiracist allyship relate to one main theme: the hegemony of Whiteness, or White dominance, and the invisibility of racism. Participants did not provide any detailed examples of systemic or structural factors that supported their antiracist growth and action; anecdotes relating to individual or personal factors that prevented participants from pursuing antiracist allyship, or motivated them to do so, were far more abundant. Inhibiting factors described by participants included the desire to preserve relationships with other White people; fear and guilt; and exhaustion or burnout. Supporting factors included nurturing interpersonal relationships—with oneself, with other White people, and with people of color; education—both self-education and education of others; and the desire to be a “good White person.” In the next section, I will describe how participation in a race-based affinity group has impacted participants’ perceptions of their own antiracist allyship.

The Impact of a White Affinity Group

The White Accountability Group was formed with the intention of creating an opportunity for members to advance their antiracist allyship. Participants identified a number of ways in which they felt their antiracist allyship development had been impacted by participation in our White Accountability Group. In addition to sharing the importance of

having a space to be vulnerable in exploring the "messiness" of their antiracism journey, and of establishing a consistent practice with others who share their racial identity, participants expressed the benefits to their antiracism efforts in three main areas:

(1) reinforcing a sense of accountability to themselves and to the other members of the caucus;

(2) having a community with which to engage in shared learning; and

(3) having a structure to support and advance their own learning and skill development (self-work). These themes are illustrated conceptually in the graphic below:

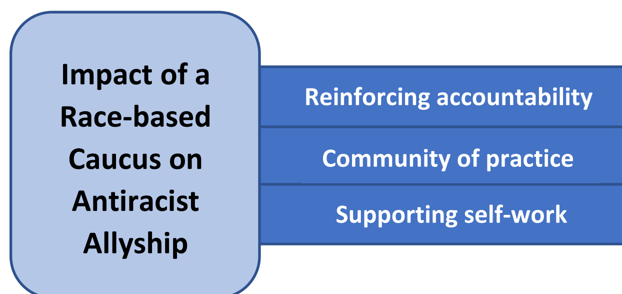

Figure 9. Impacts of Caucusing on Participants' Antiracist Action

Theme 1: Reinforcing Accountability. Fostering a sense of accountability to oneself and to the other members of the group was deemed by participants to be a critical part of an evolutionary antiracist practice. White affinity groups provide spaces for White people to analyze and challenge their own complicity with White supremacist systems and structures in order to be able to work more effectively towards dismantling them (Blitz & Kohl, 2012). Blitz and Kohl's study of a White antiracism caucus in a large social services agency describes accountability in antiracism work as "an explicit agreement that White people will answer to People of Color in an effort to better understand subtle enactments of privilege and bias" (p. 493). As participants in the White caucus that Blitz and Kohl studied deepened their

knowledge around racism and the ways in which they had colluded to sustain it, members because more personally invested in working for racial equity and "increasingly adept at holding themselves and each other accountable, in addition to maintaining accountability to People of Color" (p. 493). White affinity groups are often offered with parallel affinity groups for people of color to provide monoracial spaces where people with particular racial identities can do the very different work that White people and people of color need to do in examining and processing the impact of racism. The aim is for the members of each group to progress to working collaboratively together to address issues of racism within their organization with common goals. The National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) has a Women of Color Caucus (WoCC), as well as a Women of Color Leadership Project (WoCLP) which is sponsored in part by the Women's Center's Committee (WCC), but the WCC's White Accountability Group does not currently have a parallel affinity group for women of color. Thus, there have been many discussions within our group about the issue of accountability—examining to whom we're accountable, what that looks like, and how that's being measured.

Emphasizing how important it is for aspiring White allies to be allies not just to people of color, but also to each other, Michael and Conger (2009) describe how White affinity groups can be critical tools for encouraging White people to hold themselves and one another accountable to "know[ing] our racial selves better before we can fully participate in anti-racist work" (p. 60). The purpose of having dedicated monoracial spaces in which to do this work is to avoid re-traumatizing people of color in conversations around White power and privilege, and to relieve the burden of education around racism on those who experience it the most (Michael & Conger, 2009). Wenger (2011) discusses "a regime of mutual

accountability” (p. 81) as an important part of membership in a community of practice. Several of the participants talked about the importance of having “accountability buddies” for identifying and processing their own complicity with racism, and for supporting one another in that work. Olivia summarized feelings that were expressed by many of the participants in having co-conspirators and partners in their efforts towards developing an antiracist practice:

> it’s important to have accountability buddies in this journey, and I think that’s something that I really value with the work that… or with the group that we have that you’ve co-led, and I just really appreciate it because I think that space is so precious and unique, and I really value it. And it has helped me continue to grow because it’s, like… you know, nobody can do this work alone or in isolation, we need to do it in community and when we’re talking about privileged identities, we need to be able to call each other out and really think through that together.
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Olivia felt her participation in the group had been instrumental in helping her to identify and process her own racism, as well as giving her the opportunity to carry that learning into her professional and social environments:

> It’s been a really enriching and nourishing space for me, and also a challenging space, too, and I mean challenging in that I have been challenged to really start to look inward and to think about ways in which I perpetuate racist thinking. And I can think of several occasions where the conversations that we’ve had in the group have been really helpful to me in interactions that I’ve had, mostly in my professional realm, but in some personal interactions, too. So. I really appreciate all of you. It’s been an awesome group, and I look forward to continuing that…
>
> (Olivia, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Alex also shared how important it had been to them to have a community of people on a similar journey of racial reckoning hold them accountable to working through occasions on which they’d fallen short of antiracist action, and to be proactive about reflecting on ways to do better:

> it feels, I think, like this congruence between who I feel as a human trying to navigate the world and doing racial justice work, where that intersects with,

> like, my vocation and yeah, just craving a deeper sense of community. 'Cause I mess up a lot, and like, wanting people to process and feel held in those mistakes, and pushed and nudged to feel deeper and to think deeper.
> (Alex, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Speaking to the ways in which the group's work supported her own antiracist practice, Claire shared how important feedback she had received in the group had been for helping her process and learn:

> There have been moments throughout our time together, too, where I feel like I've been held accountable by our group. Like, I remember there was a small breakout session I did with Anne. And Anne, I forget what we were even talking about, but you totally held me in accountability, and you were like, "But why?" this kind of thing, and I was like, wow!
> (Claire, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Martina expressed how impactful other participants' vulnerability had been for her in thinking about her own efforts for antiracism, and how it had encouraged her to address particular situations at her own institution:

> there was a time, Claire, that you brought like a really kind of tough interaction that you shared. Anne, you did that once, and I feel like those moments of people… of you all being vulnerable has made me reflect on, like, what I would do in that situation, or how it relates to a situation that I've been in, or conversations, and I think, Alex, you said courage, and what the… like, tangible coming out of that is, like, reminding myself and then having the courage to show up again when I've made missteps, or didn't feel good about how a meeting went, and I can own a piece of that, of like, that was part of me not showing up in the way I wanted to or saying something I didn't want to. Or just like getting a sense of something, and having the courage to go back and circle back to individuals. There was a situation with my team here and the team at the LGBT resource center that I don't know if a year ago I would have had that courage to go back and just, like, name something that I did, or own it in a way that I did this year. So, I attribute some of that to you all…
> (Martina, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Susan also shared how the work we've been doing together in the group has encouraged her accountability to the work she's doing at her institution with students and colleagues of color:

> being able to be in community with folks who are doing the gender equity work and to think about what that means, especially since a lot of us also work

> closely with other cultural centers, or sort of in the DEIJ space. And so, you know, I think really being able to think about that, and to be challenged around that. I was just having conversation with some of the other cultural center directors yesterday about, you know, how are we really embracing… and the students, I think, are pushing us to do this, how are we really embracing the idea of and the embodiment of intersectionality, and also maintaining the spaces that folks need based on whatever identity feels salient at the time...
>
> (Susan, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Several of the participants hinted at concerns they had had at the outset of the group forming, that convening a group of White WGEC staff could have the potential of replicating some of the harmful dynamics that historically have been perpetuated by White feminist women. Anne specifically offered her thoughts on this possibility, sharing:

> I was a little nervous that getting a group of White women together to talk about anti-racism and Whiteness, I was worried it'd be a little navel-gazey, of like, "Oh, well, you're doing a great job, just try to…" and you know, some of that, like, ways that we perpetuate White supremacy and I have really been… I've really felt challenged and supported and encouraged to dig deeper and to think further and to reflect on what we talk about, which has been… like, I'm really grateful for.
>
> (Anne, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Anne's reflection on accountability was a concurrent theme throughout participants' individual interviews and the focus group. As mentioned, the theme of accountability has also been present in many of the conversations the group has shared during our regular gatherings. Responding to Anne's comment, Susan pressed the group for a deeper examination of what she termed our "feedback and accountability loops":

> Anne, I think when I first jumped on, you were talking about, like, how you were afraid that this was going to be a navel-gazing kind of group, right, and certainly don't think that that's the case, but like, how do we know? You know, you've asked us to self-identify how we think our ally work has changed or evolved. But that's only our perceptions of it, right?
>
> (Susan, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Emily reinforced Susan's perspective, emphasizing her feeling that accountability to the communities we're trying to support is critical, but also cautioning against demanding additional labor of those same communities:

> We need to know, and how do we measure it? If we're trying to measure it, [we need to do it] in a way that doesn't put more burden on the very people that we don't want to burden.
>
> (Emily, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Speaking to the primary purpose of a White affinity group—creating a space for White people to engage in self-exploration, learning, and community accountability around ways in which they've perpetuated racist thinking, Alex shared they mostly felt accountable to themselves:

> to the question, like, who we are accountable to? Like, maybe this is too self-centered, right, and… I feel accountable to myself! Really, if I profess… like, that's my metric, right? …as I think about it, that's really a place that in the past couple of years has been a really… the spot of growth, and I think a reclaiming of my own humanity, right? Like, White supremacy has taken my humanity in very different ways than colleagues of color, right? I want to claim the fullness that exists for me, that gets me out of my head, that allows me to feel my feelings in more complete and whole ways, right? Like, what have I lost in my Whiteness that tells me my values, what's between my ears and what I'm thinking, right? So, my accountability is, like, how do I feel in my body moving through this world?
>
> (Alex, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Anne echoed Alex's sentiments, explaining how the structure of the group gatherings had helped hold her accountable for her own learning and pushed her to be intentional in sharing and processing that learning with others:

> I think we've built accountability to one another in the… since there is a little bit of homework, there is some work we're doing, there's knowledge we're taking in that's not like the recirculation of like, again, those good White people ideas. We're hearing from other folks and we're processing how we feel about that together, and I think there's a ton of value in that. …just recognizing that ongoing commitment to learning and the unlearning and the decolonizing that we need to do for ourselves…
>
> (Anne, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Participants agreed that the White Accountability Group gatherings had created critical space for a number of factors that contributed to holding themselves and each other accountable in their learning/unlearning/relearning journey around racism: the consistency of practice that provided opportunity to vulnerably and honestly process their own acts of racism with other White people who had had similar experiences; the commitment to learn about antiracism from educators, content creators, and activists of color; and the encouragement and skills to engage more deeply in authentic relationship with other White people struggling with the dynamics of systemic racism, as well as with people of color doing antiracism work.

Theme 2: The Importance of a Community of Antiracist Practice. The primary motivation behind the formation of the group was to create an intentional community of practice around antiracism for White feminist women working at campus-based women's and gender equity centers. In addition to bringing our Whiteness and its associated norms and values to the group for examination and understanding, members of our White Accountability Group also brought critical aspects of our common professional identities to the space. Wenger (2011) described three main features that constitute a community of practice, the first of which is the *domain*—a topic of mutual interest shared by members of the group. A key impetus for the formation of our group was the opportunity to work on developing our antiracism skills, including as they relate to feminist praxis. The second feature, *community*, speaks to not just the act of gathering together every other week to participate in discussions and activities together, but also to the fact that we specifically chose to do so with other professional feminists working on antiracism in a higher education environment. All of the participants talked extensively about how important it had been for them to have a community of other WGEC practitioners with whom to share their learning

journeys, to work on examining and processing their own racism, unlearn the toxic messages and frameworks of White feminism, find ways to work more collaboratively with colleagues of color on their campuses, and begin to actively challenge the embedded racism and hegemonic Whiteness at their institutions.

Both Martina and Emily expressed feeling somewhat alone in their efforts to self-educate around issues of race and racism prior to the formation of the White Accountability Group, highlighting the importance of learning in community. Wenger's (2011) social theory of learning contends that a central aspect of learning is that people are social beings—for individuals, learning, therefore, "is an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities" (p. 7). And in his work on White-body supremacy and body-centered healing, which formed the basis of our group's grounding practices in connecting ourselves to the issue of racism, Menakem (2017) shares the power of working on healing communally, as a collective.

All of the participants expressed strong motivation to join the group based on this focus, and gave concrete examples of how learning in a community of people with shared social identities and similar professional experiences had impacted their pursuit of antiracist allyship. Summing up how critical cultivating a sense of community had been for her, Anne talked about ways in which the work within the group was reflecting the practice that participants wanted to see outside of it: "I feel like the work that we've done to talk about how we're making connections and how we're building relationships and how we're truly showing up for people, is to be in community" (Anne, focus group, December 8, 2022). In keeping with the same theme of community, Alex shared their desire to not only deepen in relationship with me and with our other WGEC colleagues, but also to create a model of

shared leadership where we could rely on other members of the group to step up in ways that allowed for more expansive ways of learning and growing together:

> back to the relationships, I'm grateful for the ways that we have grown deeper as humans doing this work together, and you know, I think what we both reflected, that we invited folks in through the accountability group, is something that we'd both been craving, but it may be felt like too much to do alone, or too risky, like what if people don't show up, or do I feel qualified enough to do this, like, what if I mess it up, right? And so, yeah, back to the conversation of the car, right, like thanks for getting in the car and trying something, and inviting other people, and like, you know, being someone who is, like, you can drive this week and I'll hold the roadmap, or I need to snooze in the backseat, like, how do we fill up the 12-passenger van and keep moving somewhere?
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

Several participants expressed that, prior to the group forming, they had felt that opportunities to invest in their own learning and growth with a community of like-minded individuals had been limited. Emily shared that she had joined an antiracism learning initiative for White people in her faith community, but had ended up unofficially co-leading the group, thus depriving her of the opportunity to focus more deeply on her own practice:

> the assistant pastor led the group, but she and I were the only people who really knew any of the content, and so it often felt like I was sort of a like, co-leader/expert in the room, which then… I was "at work" and I didn't have space to be doing my own processing. It wasn't for *me*—I was there for them. So, when I saw this opportunity, I thought, oh, a genuine community of peers, where hopefully we would… we will… and then we did, form an environment where we're ping-ponging off of each other, and that was what I was craving.
> (Emily, individual interview, June 16, 2022)

Anne also talked about the value for her of being a space that encourages self-reflection in community:

> Having space to… it's the reflection process, right? Maybe that's my answer to, "How do you decrease acts of racism?" You mandate self-reflection of racist people. It's so powerful to put the words to thoughts that you… you know, when did these questions come up, so thank you for the opportunity to answer them, and... I don't know, be in community. I appreciate your stories, I appreciate your perspective… (Anne, individual interview, June 15, 2022)

Seeking community beyond the confines of their campus, Alex shared how they were specifically looking to build relationships with other White people doing feminist-influenced racial justice work, not only for the purpose of informing their antiracist practice within their own professional area of influence, but also to avoid imposing the burden of their learning on their White colleagues at their own institution:

> as someone who, like Lysa, we... kind of had been in community and in relationship around our own Whiteness. And I think particularly how it connects to our work as White leaders in feminist spaces and what we were accountable to in trying to decenter Whiteness, and so… yeah. I think it was… I was craving community. Right? Like, I'm a one-person shop and I'm organized alongside other cultural resource centers. So, our queer resource center is White-identified, but the rest of our staff is folks of color. And I'm in relationship with her around things, but I was just craving something deeper to process and not have that take up too much space within my work relationships.
>
> (Alex, focus group, December 8, 2022)

The community created by the group, Alex went on to explain, had been instrumental in helping them to work through a sensitive and difficult issue on their campus that they felt they could not have processed with their immediate colleagues:

> I was grappling with a professional thing and was able to reach out to one of you, and like, I felt the trust was built. Like, due to the confidentiality of what I was grappling with, I couldn't have talked to a colleague on campus about it and felt like I was in my integrity. But I needed someone, and so yeah, like, I think that's been a beautiful thing that's come from this.
>
> (Alex, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Referencing the impact of the group's work on ways in which she had been able to handle situations on her own campus, Emily shared, "…for me, having this group, and knowing that every 14 days, I was gonna see your beautiful faces and have the support of our work together, has helped me sit in those difficult conversations and let other people talk it all out and not feel like I have to rush in and fix it all" (Emily, focus group, December 8, 2022). Rebecca echoed these sentiments in her individual interview, sharing that witnessing the

group process specific experiences and scenarios had become an important part of her own self-work: “I just learn from hearing you all process, like, when you all think through these things that you're doing, I’ll learn a lot from that” (Rebecca, individual interview, June 9, 2022).

Theme 3: Supporting Self-Work. In the previous section, I discussed examples that participants shared of ways in which having a community of practice had influenced their actions for antiracism. The third theme that emerged from participants’ stories relates to how the White Accountability Group helped foster the development and growth of participants’ own antiracist practice. Consistent with prior research on White women’s antiracist allyship development (see Case, 2012 and Linder, 2015), participants recognized that engaging in critical self-evaluation around race and racism would be a lifelong endeavor. Alex articulated the importance of an ongoing “openness to learning and taking responsibility for my own learning” (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022), expressing their awareness of the risks inherent in ever feeling like their antiracist journey was complete:

> [that is] where my greatest impact can be, my relationship with myself, right? I think that has grown and become more honest through my antiracist work. Yeah, and then, when you step in it, I think, resisting the urge to feel like you have ever arrived. I have felt like I’ve arrived in the past, I have been a very dangerous White person, you know, and not from bad intent, but I think that’s the insidiousness of Whiteness, like, it was like my Whiteness co-opting my attempts to do racial justice work.
>
> (Alex, individual interview, June 24, 2022)

Case (2012) suggests that White antiracism should be regarded as a personal “striving”—a long-term goal rather than an endeavor with a finite conclusion, given that the complex process of examining one’s racism will likely never end. The goal of dismantling racism, Case contends, “means Whites must remain vigilant to their own racism over time” (p. 91).

Martina expressed how, in particular, the group had encouraged a consistency and intentionality of practice that she had lacked before:

> there's been seminars or opportunities for professional development or engaging conversations, but they're like a one-off event, and so sometimes I think it's hard to really have those real conversations, if it's a one-off event, because it's like, oh, I'm just getting to know these folks and then it's done in 2 hours. So, I think that piece about accountability and continual practice and carving out that space is really important.
>
> (Martina, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Like many WGEC staff, often having to prioritize the needs of others had made it challenging for Martina to support her own needs around antiracist learning and growth. She described "feeling a little bit isolated in my role in the sense of, you know, when I'm with my team or with my colleagues, not feeling I like I can process as much because I feel like I need to hold space for others" (Martina, focus group, December 8, 2022). Other participants, like Emily, shared similar sentiments. Claire also cited the consistency of the group gatherings as a reason for wanting to participate:

> something else that drew me in, aside from the community piece, is that it was an ongoing and consistent practice, and that's something that I knew I wanted to do for myself, and I appreciate the tool to do that.
>
> (Claire, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Rebecca talked explicitly about how the White Accountability Group had helped to shape her own antiracism awareness and practice:

> the conversations that we have in our group help me look at my own internalized racism a lot more… I think it helps me be more reflective of my actions, which is something I have control over. I might not be able to dismantle racist structures at large, but I can be more thoughtful in how I'm interacting and responding and operating on a daily basis, and the practices that we're promoting within the space that I oversee every day and have a responsibility for.
>
> (Rebecca, individual interview, June 9, 2022)

Sharing an example of a difficult conversation she had recently had with a colleague of color, Emily admitted that the situation and her response to it would have looked very different prior to the formation of the group:

> A year ago, that conversation would have been so painful, and would not have gone well at all. And Tuesday, it was one of the things at the end of the day, when I did my gratitude journal, it was one of the things I could write down. (Emily, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Several participants mentioned the importance of the group gatherings having a "curriculum" and participants being assigned "homework" to do in between sessions. As discussed in Chapter 3, my co-convener and I have offered participants the opportunity to engage with articles, book excerpts, podcasts, and/or videos by authors, educators, and content creators of color, focused on a specific theme, to kick-start the conversation in our gatherings. Like Claire, Olivia expressed how much she appreciated the consistency of the group, but also how valuable the materials provided have been to her own learning and growth, as well as that of other White allies:

> having that constant reminder and commitment every 2 weeks to check in, I think that has been really helpful, and then of course, like, having additional resources to share. Like, I really loved the *Whiteness at Work* webinar and I've shared that with a bunch of folks, so I think, like, using the tools to grow and deepen my own understanding but then also being able to share that with other people who are wanting to engage in the work, as well. (Olivia, focus group, December 8, 2022)

Anne also described how much she valued the opportunity to engage with material that challenged her to think critically and to get out of the "echo chambers that I surround myself in" (Anne, focus group, December 8, 2022):

> that time piece… Ohhh! [makes "mind blown" gesture] I had to sit with that for like three weeks before I finally was like, oh, you're right. [laughs] You know? And so, I think that is something that has felt… I have felt like those… you know, the readings during our sessions, and the work that we look at, and the reflection questions we've been asked to consider, and have developed in

> community has really been just like a cornerstone to my perception of the success of this group, or my interest in, like, maintaining it over time.
> (Anne, focus group, December 8, 2022)

In summary, participants' perceptions of the impact that participating in a White Accountability Group has had on their antiracist allyship development were expressed through three main themes: it created a circle of accountability that encouraged them and other group members to maintain a consistent and critical antiracist practice; it created a community of learning within the sphere of feminist-related work; and it provided a structure and resources to engage in intentional learning and skill development around antiracism.

Chapter Summary

The stories shared by the White feminist WGEC staff who participated in this study were moving and deeply personal. In sharing anecdotes relating to their emerging antiracist activism and the ways in which they felt our White Accountability Group was helping them progress in their antiracist feminist journey, they generously and vulnerably described experiences relating to their upbringing, to their personal lives, and to their professional environments. All of the participants worked—at the time of being interviewed for the study—in women's and gender equity centers at institutions of higher education across the United States, and most had taken at least some Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies classes in college. Thus, they all had very similar academic preparation and professional backgrounds going into the study.

The themes described in this chapter were salient and common to most or all of the participants, and revealed some of the individual and structural factors that they felt either motivate(d) them in or prevent(ed) them from pursuing antiracist allyship. The systemic/structural factors relating to social systems, practices, and attitudes/expectations

that participants discussed as impacting their antiracist allyship were shared in examples that exclusively illustrated an inhibiting effect. Participants did not share any examples of systemic/structural factors that they felt encouraged or motivated them in the pursuit of their antiracist allyship. Those structural factors were grouped under one main theme—White dominance, or White hegemony, with a subtheme relating to the invisibility of racism. Participants talked about the ways in which racism is invisiblized by social conditioning in a hegemonically White environment, reinforced by White normativity, White privilege, and White supremacy. This socialization—illustrated with experiences throughout the lifespan—had on many occasions led to a lack of self-awareness and introspection around racism, making it challenging to resist racism even when participants were clearly aware of its presence.

Intrinsic/individual factors impacting participants' antiracist allyship were described in terms of both positive and negative influences. Factors that inhibited their action for antiracism included a desire to maintain relationships with other White people, usually family members or professional colleagues; feelings of fear and guilt around acts of racism they had either perpetrated themselves or from others that they had neglected to interrupt; and exhaustion/ burnout—the feeling of competing priorities, of being overloaded at work, or of simply wanting to be "off the clock." Narratives that included examples of positive influences on participants' antiracist action included stories about cultivating relationships—with themselves, with other White people, and with people of color; the importance of education, tending both to one's own self-education but also being intentional about offering educational opportunities for others; and the desire to be seen as a "good White person." Many of the participants expressed a sense of shame around their admission of being

motivated to antiracist action by this last factor. There was a strong feeling of wanting to "do the right thing," but also enjoying the benefits that doing the right thing often brought as a result. Participants were reflective around the problematic nature of this dynamic, and readily acknowledged it.

In sharing the importance of their participation in a race-based affinity group, participants discussed three key factors that they felt comprised a positive influence on their racial allyship development: first, the group reinforced a sense of accountability, both to themselves and to other participants in the group. Most participants expressed that having people with whom to safely and vulnerably process acts of racism, both their own and those they witnessed from others, was fundamental to helping them learn and grow in their antiracism efforts. Participants shared the value of doing this work with a community of professionals in their field with whom they shared salient identities, speaking to how it had helped them to process situations and circumstances on their own campuses. Finally, participants shared examples of how their personal efforts towards antiracist learning and growth had been enhanced by being part of the group, citing consistency and intentionality as fundamental to the development of their own practice, in addition to the opportunity to engage with content that challenged them to think critically.

The stories shared by participants illustrated the positive influence of the White Accountability Group on their efforts to synergize their feminism and antiracism in transformative ways—for their own learning and growth and that of family, friends and colleagues; and to promote the evolution and growth of their social and professional environments. In the next and final chapter, I will explore the implications of the study for scholars and practitioners, and offer directions for future research and conclusions.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

Implications of the Study

> *White feminists come to renewed and earnest thought about racism not entirely spontaneously. We are pressed by women of color. Women of color have been at feminist conferences, meetings and festivals and speaking up, pointing out that their needs and interests are not being taken into account nor answered and that much that white feminists do and say is racist. Some white feminists have been aware of and acting against racism all along, and spontaneously, but the topic of racism has arrived per force in the feminist newspapers and journals, at the National Women's Studies Association, in women's centers and women's bookstores in the last couple of years, not so much because some white feminists urged this but because women of color have demanded it.*
>
> (Frye, 1983, p. 110-111)

In her essay examining efforts by White feminists towards developing greater awareness of race and racism, Frye (1983) described her experience participating with other White feminists in what she called "a white women's consciousness-raising group" (p. 111) to identify the racist systems and structures in their lives and to examine the ways in which they were complicit in perpetuating them. The group was convened with the encouragement of some women of color, and in the face of strong opposition by others. In particular, a Black female colleague called the group out for thinking that they could achieve their goals of antiracism by working in a monoracial space without the involvement of women of color.

In committing to doing the work of dismantling racism, White feminists must be attuned to the power they have simply by virtue of being White. As Frye points out, White feminists can choose to hear (or not hear) the concerns of women of color, just as they can choose to engage (or not) in actions for antiracism. The work of transformative change must be attentive to the power dynamics and differentials inherent in social change processes. As

White women on the privileged side of racism, the members of our White Accountability Group have what Frye calls “a matrix of options” (p. 113) available to us to decide how and what we will do to challenge racism—for women of color, that matrix looks very different. “Paying close attention to positioned truths,” Mahoney (1997) emphasizes, “is fundamental to progressive change” (p. 643).

Critical White Studies (CWS) provides a critical lens through which to examine and understand a race consciousness process that, despite the best of intentions, still lives within a context of power. In seeking to better understand the complex dynamics of racism and White supremacy, White allies for racial justice must commit to intentionally analyzing what it means to be White, how power is distributed based on the social norming of Whiteness, and how White privilege functions to sustain our complicity in racist systems and structures. Participants in this study, like Emily and Susan, provided specific examples of their growing awareness to White normativity in society—the idea that Whiteness is ordinary and defines what is “normal” and “acceptable.” All of the participants shared ways in which their White privilege had given them access to benefits and advantages based on race: Claire described having her pick of apartments in a new city; Martina talked about her unfettered access to restricted spaces both within and outside her institution. Many participants shared examples of unconscious thoughts and actions that reflect the characteristics of a White supremacy culture (Okun, 2021). And all of the participants expressed a realization that White dominance and the resulting invisibility of racism had significantly impacted their ability to exercise allyship on multiple occasions where racism was present. Aspiring antiracist allies must remain consciously and continually vigilant of their positionality in this work, and seek

to build cross-racial coalitions with people of color, if their efforts for racial justice are to meaningfully advance social change.

Challenging the dominant White narrative within mainstream feminism, Critical Race Feminism (CRF) proposes a feminist theory "built out of the diverse experience and needs of women" (Mahoney, 1997). All of the participants in the study expressed a desire to disrupt and dismantle the hegemonic Whiteness of feminist spaces at their institutions, and to develop a more inclusive and intersectional feminist practice. Decentering Whiteness and challenging the power differentials in these spaces requires pluralistic efforts to uplift the voices and experiences of all women. To this end, several of the participants described ways in which they were engaging in efforts to build authentic, non-transactional relationships with female colleagues of color to center voices and experiences that had often been absent from their WGECs. Drawing from the teachings of feminists and other thought leaders of color to design educational and programmatic experiences for their campus communities illustrates another way in which the study participants were committing to promoting an anti-essentialist vision of feminism to challenge the situational power and status quo of Whiteness in their spaces.

Critical Race Feminism (CRF) and Critical White Studies (CWS), when used as interactive frameworks for analyzing how White feminists examine their own racism and complicity with racist systems, have the potential to challenge the dominant structures and narratives of power within institutions of higher education. The research study and findings make a number of contributions to the literature and praxis around White educators developing their awareness and competence in antiracism work, and offer suggestions for developing coalitions of White allies to challenge systemic racism at the institutional level.

The structure and format of the White Accountability Group offer possibilities for the creation of White race-based caucuses as a strategy for antiracist learning and practice development among student support services practitioners and other professionals in higher education.

Implications for Practice

While prior studies on White affinity groups in higher education have examined the experiences of undergraduate students (Michael & Conger, 2009; Buehler et al., 2021) or mixed groups of students, staff, and faculty (Case, 2012), this study focuses on a group of university staff members, and more specifically, on a group of feminist-identified staff working at campus-based women's and gender equity centers (WGECs). Most women's centers are located on White-majority campuses and are usually led by White professional staff; however, many of these centers still serve as critical spaces for women of color to seek support and guidance in processing the impacts of negative experiences based on their gender and/or race (DiLapi & Gay, 2002). As such, intentional engagement in antiracist learning and practice has important implications for White WGEC staff trying to move towards improving their support and advocacy for constituents of color on their campuses. In addition, prior research on race-based caucusing has largely examined the experiences of in-person (face-to-face) affinity groups operating at a single organization or institution. The White affinity group formed by participants in this study is unique in that it comprises a virtual community of practice that brought together professionals from several different institutions of higher education around the U.S. This format yields significant benefits to this practice: first, it allows for cross-institutional participation, which expands the impact of the work being done in the group. Several participants mentioned how they had been able to share the materials

from our group gatherings with their colleagues, and had actively engaged strategies they had learned in direct interactions on their campuses. Thus, constituents at nine different universities across the country were being impacted by our group work. Second, having participants from institutions in different parts of the U.S. added significant depth and breadth to the conversations we were able to have, particularly as we grappled with the racial and sociocultural histories of specific states. Both Emily and Alex mentioned the impact of their respective states' racialized policies on attitudes towards race and racism at their institutions. As Emily explained, "there's this added benefit of hearing reflections from people in other institutions with different histories, and so that helps me parse out what is a [name of institution] thing, versus what is a U.S. thing, or a race thing" (Emily, focus group, December 8, 2022).

Women's centers' organizational configurations within their institution "vary widely across institutional types, needs, and histories" (Goettsch et al., 2019, p. 10), but many are located within Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) spaces and divisions. Women's centers usually have strong partnerships with other identity centers and offices geared towards serving students from global majority populations, and some are co-located as part of integrated cultural centers. At many institutions, these units are responsible for most or all of the DEI-related training and professional development for their universities. In addition, women's center staff frequently guest lecture in classes for a variety of disciplines, as well as teaching in Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies (WGSS) and other academic programs. Women's center staff advise student organizations, lead study abroad and service trips, and give workshops and presentations in residence halls and Greek Life chapter houses. They also often have a well-developed network of partners with whom they work to create

programming both on and off-campus. The number and variety of university constituents with whom women's center staff connect throughout the year is significant; thus, having more women's center professionals engaged in antiracist learning and committed to incorporating antiracism into their praxis has the potential to engage other constituents, including faculty, staff, and students. Cabrera et al. (2017) discuss the importance of forming and growing a community of racial justice allies in order to challenge and transform the dominant discourse and frameworks of Whiteness within and beyond the academy. Working with campus partners to infuse an expressly antiracist orientation into curricular and co-curricular offerings, professional development opportunities, service-learning and internships, and recruitment, hiring, and retention practices, could make a significant difference in the way that constituents of color experience a sense of inclusion and belonging at institutions of higher education in the U.S.

Participants in this study expressed a meaningful impact on their antiracist practice from the structure and format of a White affinity group. The ability to grow in relationship with one another, to be vulnerable and authentic, and to co-create a circle of accountability, had several positive repercussions in real-world applications, including a deepening of relationships with both White colleagues and colleagues of color, the courage to name racism when they witnessed it, and a substantial body of antiracism materials with which to engage in shared learning with members of their community. Thus, the study has important implications for creating professional development opportunities in antiracism for all professionals, not just women's center staff, at institutions of higher education. The findings from this study could be useful in developing race-based affinity groups to deepen employees' learning and growth around racial justice issues at various levels of the

institution, including within university-wide committees and task forces, and within individual departments and colleges.

Implications for Scholars

The desire to be a "good White person"—one of the themes that emerged from the study's findings around individual factors that motivated study participants to pursue antiracist allyship—warrants further examination, and has the potential to make additional contributions to the field of Critical White Studies (CWS). This concept has been examined extensively by other scholars (see Katz, 1978; Hayes & Juárez, 2009; Applebaum, 2010; Sullivan, 2014). Sullivan (2014) discusses what she calls "white middle-class moral goodness" (p. 5), which she summarizes as a collection of attitudes common among well-meaning White people who are more concerned with antiracist credentialing than in genuine efforts to end systemic racism and White dominance. Sullivan argues that well-meaning Whites use specific strategies to distance themselves from their own racism, including over-indulgence in White guilt and shame, emotions that also surfaced in study participants' narratives. Hayes & Juárez (2009) discuss how the perception of Whiteness as problematic among Whites with emerging race cognizance also leads them to distance themselves from other White people in pursuit of the "good White person" label, a phenomenon described in numerous White racial identity models discussed in this paper (see Helms, 1990; Hardiman, 2001; Okun, 2006). Applebaum (2010) describes what she calls "white complicity," the idea that "white people can reproduce and maintain racist practices even when, and *especially when*, they believe themselves to be morally good" (p. 3, author's emphasis). However, in most instances described in the literature, White people are usually unaware of the self-serving factors inherent in their aspirations to good White personhood. In this study,

however, participants were all keenly aware of the racist implications of trying to be a "good White person" and were actively working to distance themselves from the latent pursuit of White goodness. Further examination of how and where this phenomenon shows up in the efforts of those already engaged in deep, self-reflective antiracist work has the potential to inform current scholarship around the motivations of White people to engage in antiracism.

All of the participants in this study referenced undergraduate courses they had taken in Sociology and/or Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies (WGSS) as foundational to the beginning of their learning journeys around the intersection of race and gender. As mentioned throughout this paper, the women's rights movement in the U.S. (and often, the teaching of it) has had a long history of racism, frequently marginalizing women of color and excluding mention of their contributions from the curriculum. The findings from this study provide an opportunity for WGSS faculty to intentionally explore issues of White privilege and racism in their curricula, rejecting Whitestream feminism by engaging and uplifting more work by scholars of color. They also provide an opportunity to better understand the conditions necessary to offer encouragement and support to White feminists who aspire to antiracism.

Race-based caucusing also has potential value in the development of academic programs in Student Affairs, which serve as pipelines for many new college and university professionals entering higher education. Providing students with opportunities for learning and growth in antiracism in a cohort-based model could offer valuable experience that may translate to action for a new generation of university support staff on their future campuses. Based on existing literature on the development of racial justice allyship among students, as well as the findings from this study, the process of supporting emerging racial consciousness

and the development of an antiracist orientation could include the following components: (1) focused education on the social and historical construction of race and racism; (2) engagement with models of White racial identity development, examining the development of students' own White identity as well as learning how Whiteness has influenced the structure and systems of U.S. society; (3) collaborations and integrated learning experiences purposefully designed to bring together individuals and groups of diverse racial identities; (4) the development and nurturing of a community of peers with shared identities with whom to share the journey; and (5) mentoring opportunities from faculty and staff engaged in their own antiracist leaning and growth.

Limitations

Certain characteristics related to the design of the study could present limitations to this research project. Purposive sampling, the sampling method used to recruit participants for a case study, seeks information from or about a specific target population (Trochim et al., 2016), which has the potential to introduce selection bias. The particularistic nature of a case study (Merriam, 1988) might be regarded as too narrow—when group members with specific sociopolitical identities convene to have discussion on a specific issue, there will naturally be some lack of heterogeneity among participants, and thus, spontaneity and variety in conversation content may be limited. Additionally, for much of the group's existence, gatherings have typically been organized by the same two participants (me and one other colleague) who have taken on the role of co-conveners. These individuals could be seen to have the power to control the dynamics of the gathering, in terms of setting the agenda, influencing discussion topics, intervening in the flow of conversation, and otherwise directing the exchanges that happen within the group (Berg, 2007). Participants were also aware of the

purpose and scope of the study, which may have introduced social desirability bias (Paulhus, 2001), influencing them to share their experiences with antiracism in ways that they felt were relevant and important to the purpose of the inquiry.

Case studies are also argued to contain a bias toward verification, meaning that they tend to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions about the topic of inquiry. For this reason, the researcher's identity and positionality are critical to consider in the process of collecting and analyzing data. There are certainly limitations to the participant-researcher role that could have the potential to impact the study. This study specifically examined the experiences in antiracist activism of White feminist women; the researcher was a White cisgender feminist-identified woman, and thus, the study was conducted from a particular social position and location. The experiences and perspectives of White men (feminist-identified or otherwise) and non-feminist White women doing antiracism work is absent. Notably absent, too, are the voices and perspectives of people of color. Proponents of race-based affinity groups emphasize the importance of creating separate spaces for White racial justice allies and racial justice activists of color to discuss their very different experiences of racism and White supremacy. Exploring the experiences of people of color engaged in racial caucusing, and their perceptions of the work being done by White allies in White affinity groups, is critical for forming effective and collaborative cross-racial coalitions to tackle issues of systemic racism and White dominance within organizations.

Some researchers might view the use of a single case study as too narrow in scope; case studies have been criticized for being too "eclectic" in their application within a diversity of research approaches (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). A common argument against case studies, refuted by some researchers, is that they do not produce generalizable results and

therefore cannot contribute meaningfully to scientific inquiry. However, other scholars such as Stake (1994) propose that focusing on a single case is important for the development of theory. And Flyvbjerg (2001) cites the importance of the "power of example" (p. 66) and of personal narrative that case studies offer to the overall impact of social science research. This research project was intentionally designed to examine the experiences in antiracist learning and growth of a small group of White women engaged in feminist praxis at institutions of higher education in the United States. While the findings from a case study with nine participants could not generally be extrapolated to the broader society, they provide important insights that have the potential to inform future efforts to develop intentional communities of antiracist practice at colleges and universities across the country. The findings from this study provide a suggested starting place from which to address employee engagement in issues relating to White antiracist support and advocacy in a higher education context, particularly in feminist spaces. However, they are not presented with the intention of representing the experiences of all White people engaged in antiracist work.

Directions for Future Research

According to Cabrera (2012), higher education remains "an understudied but promising arena in terms of interrupting racism" (p. 376). Museus et al. (2015) contend that while academic scholarship has addressed in detail the nature of and contributing factors to campus climate issues that create hostile environments for students of color, more research is needed on specifically how to create nurturing, welcoming, and inclusive campus spaces for racially diverse populations. As mentioned, existing models of White racial allyship development in higher education focus largely on the experiences of students. Given that access to White racial justice role models plays an important role in student allyship

development, more research is needed that explores the allyship development of faculty and staff, and how institutions of higher education can support the efforts of employees engaged in the development of race consciousness.

There is currently a fairly limited body of research on antiracist allyship by White feminists, and it is a potentially contentious topic, given the racist history of White feminism and the fact that racial allyship by well-meaning White people, especially White women, has often been perceived as performative and self-serving. Expanding the scope and breadth of this study by examining the intersection of other gender identities and racial categories with activism for racial justice could be useful for informing future professional development opportunities in antiracist activism and growth for higher education professionals, as well as starting to dismantle from within those attitudes and practices that continue to make feminism a sociopolitical identity inaccessible or undesirable to people of color. Linder (2015) suggests, for example, that an increased focus on the intersection of both privileged and marginalized identities could be valuable in contributing to a more comprehensive framework for racial allyship development, as well as a more thorough understanding of the ways in which White allies understand the dynamics of power and privilege.

The impact of a longitudinal study design could have the potential to yield richer data for better understanding participants' racial allyship development. The opportunity to observe participants and record their reactions over a period of time would allow for greater depth and breadth of analysis. In addition, reviewing participants' journal entries for the pre-work required for each White Accountability Group meeting might have provided more insight into their individual backgrounds and processes. I had originally intended to include an autoethnographic component to this research project, examining my own experiences and

reflections alongside those of the group's other participants, but chose instead to use my self-reflective notes and memos as part of the researcher reflexivity exercise in my bridling process, rather than using my reflections in my data corpus.

Given that this research project focused on White feminist leaders working in higher education, all of the participants in the study had an advanced level of educational attainment—at least a master's degree, and some either had or were working on doctoral degrees. Additionally, all had taken several Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies classes (some had WGSS degrees) as well as courses in which critical race theories were presented and taught, meaning that all of the participants had had some academic preparation in antiracist theory and scholarship. Future research studies focused on creating more inclusive campus environments for students from racially diverse backgrounds could examine, for example, the experiences of White antiracist activists in student support areas of higher education who have a lower level of educational attainment, or who do not identify as feminist.

Considerations for further research efforts might also include sampling participants from different types of higher education institutions, e.g. public, private, faith-based, etc. A longitudinal study wherein participants engage as a cohort in reflections and activities designed to identify the origins and emergence of their antiracist allyship could provide a rich perspective of White racial allyship development. In addition, creating parameters around the researcher-participant relationship might have a greater likelihood of effective researcher "bracketing," in which researchers consciously set aside their everyday assumptions and previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon under study (Gearing, 2004), and

improve impartiality in observation and analysis. These efforts would likely create a more generalizable data set that could inform critical research in this area.

The issue of accountability was an urgent concern for participants in this study. While significant efforts were made to try to ensure that the work in the group did not devolve into self-indulgent navel-gazing, participants expressed a strong desire to understand how they were holding themselves and other members of the group accountable in effectively and respectfully supporting their friends and colleagues of color. Several studies of race-based caucuses (RBCs) in the literature describe parallel affinity groups for people of color, working independently but alongside White affinity groups (Blitz & Kohl, 2012; Varghese et al., 2019; Buehler et al., 2021). The goal of having parallel groups is to provide a separate space for White people and people of color to do their own reflection and processing around issues of racial justice before coming together to work collaboratively to address issues of racism in their organization as a collective. An area for further research could include examining the experiences of individuals participating in parallel RBCs for White employees and employees of color, working in tandem to address issues of racism within their institution or professional organization.

Final Reflections

As I come to the end of this research project, I've been reflecting on my choice to omit an autoethnographic component from this process, which I had originally intended to comprise part of the study's design. For complex reasons, many of which were beyond my control, I did not have the logistical or emotional capacity at this time to interrogate my own internalized White dominance for this project beyond self-reflexive note-taking and journaling as part of my researcher bridling process. I fully admit to being a work in

progress, still pursuing the courage and vulnerability necessary to share publicly a thoughtful, critical analysis of my own antiracism journey, which I hope will be another direction for future research efforts, in addition to those mentioned in the prior section. However, as I read through my journals and researcher notes, it is clear that I am grappling with many of the same struggles and challenges as the study's participants. I can clearly discern ways in which I ascend and descend the rungs of Okun's Ladder of Empowerment, moving between experiences of denial and defensiveness to occasionally achieving moments of collective action. My own relationship to racism does not progress in a linear fashion—it moves, as Tatum (1997) explains, as if through a spiral staircase: "As you proceed up each level, you have a sense that you have passed this way before, but you are not exactly in the same spot." (p. 76). I am moving forwards and backwards, but thankfully not always repeating the same mistakes. Like the other participants in this study, I acknowledge the lifelong nature of this journey, and I remain committed to continuing to work on dismantling my racist conditioning within my personal relationships, my work environment, my institution, and my professional field. The many "click" moments of racial awakening I've had on my journey so far have lessened in frequency but by no means in intensity, and each moment has been an opportunity to learn, to grow, to know better, to do better.

The themes that emerged from participants' stories are strong and present within my own range of experiences. I witness the dominance of Whiteness and the resulting invisibility of racism at my institution—and within my women's center—on a daily basis. Just days ago, I had a long email conversation with a faculty colleague who, frustrated that a colleague of color whom she had nominated for a gender justice award was not being honored this year, pointed out that in the 21 years of the award's existence, only 3 (out of almost 70) of the

awardees have been Asian women—a fact that hitherto had utterly escaped my notice. I regularly find myself challenging both my own and my White colleagues' acceptance of the ways in which White supremacy culture has indoctrinated us into adopting arbitrarily "appropriate" ways of thinking, being, and doing in our work. Our national search this spring to fill our vacant Program Coordinator position yielded few applicants, and only one candidate of color. Folks are wary of working in feminist spaces, and not without reason.

My own collusion and complicity in White silence and White ignorance has shown up when I've failed to challenge White colleagues' racialized missteps or acknowledge my own in the moment. I asked Alex to interview me as part of my bridling process, and during our conversation, I named several instances in which I had made conscious choices to decline to challenge racist thinking in order to preserve relationships with White colleagues and friends. Like many White people exploring antiracist growth, I regularly experience feelings of fear, guilt, and shame as I work to acknowledge past incidents of racism and reconcile them as moments of learning in my journey. I am also acutely conscious of the way that the grind culture at many institutions of higher education invokes pressure to achieve a level of productivity and service that often leads to deep exhaustion and eventual burnout. "Academia," Hersey (2022) wrote in her bestselling book, *Rest is Resistance*, "is the headquarters for grind culture" (p. 25). Throughout the six months that I researched and wrote this dissertation, absolutely nothing at work came off my plate. On the contrary, it was added to exponentially, as I took on significant additional care work related to my state's oppressive legislative actions, built and celebrated an ambitious year-long series of programs to observe my center's 50th anniversary, took on extra DEI training duties for my unit, and dealt with a key staff vacancy. Exhaustion and burnout are concerning but genuine reasons

why White allies working in social justice fields sometimes decline action for antiracism, and they are inextricably connected to the expectations levied by a White supremacy culture.

I aspire wholeheartedly to further that "race intervention in feminist discourse" that Wing (1999) described. Having learned through many challenging interactions that my antiracism needs to come from a place of humility and authenticity, I'm working to understand the impact of my actions and to grow in my relationships with my colleagues and friends, trying to be mindful not to yield to the temptation to feel too confident in my learning, and to understand that seeking the extrinsic rewards and recognition of being a "good White person" are an integral part of that White supremacy culture I'm trying so hard to fight. I have long and deep histories of racism and White dominance to unlearn and overcome, but I'm grateful to be doing it with a community of colleagues who are struggling towards the same goals. May our work continue, may we hold ourselves and others in compassion and care, may others feel inspired to join us, and may we build those coalitions of hope and solidarity to construct the communities of love and resistance we all need and deserve.

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Appendix A

Sample Agenda for White Accountability Group Meeting

Welcome Music

- *Everybody* by Ingrid Michaelson

Check-Ins

- Intention of holding space with and for each other
- Disrupting the pressure for productivity in our meetings/gatherings

Grounding

Omid Safi is the Director of Duke University's Islamic Studies Center and the Chair for the Islamic Mysticism Group at the American Academy of Religion. The reading is excerpted from his blog, OnBeing (http://www.onbeing.org/blog/the-disease-of-being-busy/7023)

How is Your Heart Doing? by Omid Safi

In many Muslim cultures, when you want to ask them how they're doing, you ask: in Arabic, "Kayf haal-ik?" or, in Persian, "Haal-e shomaa chetoreh?" How is your haal?

What is this haal that you inquire about? It is the transient state of one's heart. In reality, we ask, "How is your heart doing at this very moment, at this breath?" When I ask, "How are you?" that is really what I want to know.

I am not asking how many items are on your to-do list, nor asking how many items are in your inbox. I want to know how your heart is doing, at this very moment. Tell me. Tell me your heart is joyous, tell me your heart is aching, tell me your heart is sad, tell me your heart craves a human touch. Examine your own heart, explore your soul, and then tell me something about your heart and your soul.

Tell me you remember you are still a human being, not just a human doing. Tell me you're more than just a machine, checking off items from your to-do list. Have that conversation, that glance, that touch. Be a healing conversation, one filled with grace and presence.

Put your hand on my arm, look me in the eye, and connect with me for one second. Tell me something about your heart, and awaken my heart. Help me remember that I too am a full and complete human being, a human being who also craves a human touch.

Heart Check-In:

- Invitation to answer: How is your heart?

Group Processing: Reflections & Sharing

- What are the feelings that come up for you in your body when you hear the words "white women's tears?"
- Body Practice: *My Grandmother's Hands*, pg. 35
- Discuss the readings:
  - When White Women Cry – Accapadi
  - White Women's Tears - DiAngelo
- How do we honor our emotions and also safeguard against their weaponization?

Reminders/Engagement for our next session

- Extend an invitation to join us for pour planning meeting this week
  - Friday, at 9:00 am PST at https://uidaho.zoom.us/j/88664195735
  - Are there any topics/content suggestions? Groundings/Closings? Music?

Closing

- *Guest House* by Rumi

  This being human is a guest house.
  Every morning a new arrival.
  A joy, a depression, a meanness,
  some momentary awareness comes
  As an unexpected visitor.

  Welcome and entertain them all!
  Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
  who violently sweep your house
  empty of its furniture,
  still treat each guest honorably.

  He may be clearing you out
  for some new delight.
  The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
  meet them at the door laughing,
  and invite them in.

  Be grateful for whoever comes,
  because each has been sent
  as a guide from beyond.

Wrap-Up Music

- *Better Together* by Jack Johnson

Appendix B

Recruitment Email

Dearest colleagues,

I shared this news with folks who were able to attend our meeting yesterday—we were a small but mighty crew! You may remember when we started this group last summer that I mentioned I was hoping that the work we've been doing together would help inform the direction and research topic for my PhD. Since then, I've made it through my prelims and my proposal defense, and am finally in the last stages of this long but rewarding journey. The IRB protocol for my dissertation research project was approved a couple of weeks ago, and I am ready to start collecting my data.

And so—it is my honor to warmly invite you into an exploration with me of how and why White feminists who work in higher education develop and implement their antiracist practice.

This will be a phenomenological study with an autoethnographic component. I plan to collect data through self-reflexive journaling, and through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. To this end, I would like to invite each of you to a private interview with me over Zoom. In addition to interviewing you, I will be writing and reflecting extensively on my own journey in this work. In order to minimize invasion to our group, I plan to engage fully in all the meetings, and record field notes from memory immediately after each meeting ends. I am going to try not to take extensive notes during our meetings. Please know that the focus of analysis in my review of group conversations is me—my thoughts, reactions, feelings, and observations of self. I will not be examining patterns of behavior across the group or specific input from any particular group member during the meetings.

I'm proposing to collect data for a period of three months, from May to July 2022. Over the past several months, it has been an honor to hold space for and participate in a level of relationship-building and vulnerability with you all that is unique and deeply special to me. Please know that I have no expectation that you will participate in my study; I sincerely hope, however, that you will want to! This work and the community we're creating together are so important, and I hope that our experience may eventually help guide others who want to embark on a similar journey.

Please let me know **no later than Friday, April 29** if you would be willing to participate in my study, and I will send you the relevant consent form and demographic data form for completion. Thank you so much for your consideration. You all enrich my life immeasurably, and I value you and this group far beyond what I'm able to convey in this email.

Warmly,
Lysa

Appendix C

Participant Demographics Form

Race and Real Talk: White Feminists and Antiracism

Please complete this form and return to the researcher (lsalsbur@uidaho.edu) by email, together with your completed Consent Form.

Name:

Title:

Institution:

Chosen pseudonym:

Age (years):

Gender identity:

Marital/partnership status:

Status as a parent:

Racial identity:

Feminist identity:
(how you describe your feminism)

# of years in racial justice activism:

Educational level attained:
(include discipline)

# of years in higher education:

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

University of Idaho
Research Study Consent Form

Study Title: Race and Real Talk: White Feminists and Antiracism

Researchers: Dr. Vanessa Anthony-Stevens (vstevens@uidaho.edu), Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Studies, Dept. of Curriculum & Instruction, College of Education, Health & Human Sciences; Lysa Salsbury (lsalsbur@uidaho.edu), Director of the Women's Center and Ph.D. candidate, Dept. of Curriculum & Instruction, College of Education, Health & Human Sciences.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the research is to explore and understand how and why self-identified White feminists who work in higher education develop and practice anti-racism. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your intersecting identities as a White feminist, and because of your active engagement in anti-racist work. Approximately ten people will be invited to take part in this research study.

What will I be asked to do if I am in this study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in one semi-structured interview comprising approximately 10 open-ended questions. The interview should take about one hour to complete. The interview includes questions such as: *"Tell me what feminism means to you and how racial justice figures into your feminism"* and "*Have you ever witnessed an act of racism and failed to do anything?"* You may decline to respond to any question that makes you uncomfortable, or stop the interview at any time. The interview will take place remotely via Zoom. Please refer to the Zoom Terms of Service (https://zoom.us/terms) and Privacy Policy (https://zoom.us/privacy) for further information about the interview platform. The study is being carried out at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho, U.S.A. and will take approximately 12 weeks to complete. You will be provided with any and all new information that may affect your willingness to continue participation in this research.

The interviews will be recorded on Zoom. Audio and video files will be stored in a secure location that only the researcher has access to. No identifying information will be linked to the data—a pseudonym selected by you will be used to attribute any direct quotes from your interview. The interview audio recording will be transcribed using Otter.ai transcription software. Please refer to the Otter.ai Terms of Service (https://otter.ai/terms-of-service) and Privacy Policy (https://otter.ai/privacy-policy) for further information about the transcription platform. Once the interview recording has been transcribed, you will receive the transcript to review for correctness and to determine your comfort level in including the information you shared in the study.

Data from participant interviews will be triangulated with data from self-reflexive journaling recorded by the researcher. In order to preserve participants' comfort, avoid creating distractions that could potentially detract from the purpose of the meetings, and to be able to actively participate in the meetings, I will compile my fieldnotes from memory immediately following each meeting, inviting members to review my notes for content accuracy if they so desire.

Are there any benefits to me if I am in this study?

Although there is no direct or intended benefit from participating in this study, you may help others in the future by providing data that may inform the development of future professional learning opportunities in anti-racist activism and growth for higher education professionals. The findings from this study may also make a meaningful contribution to the body of academic knowledge comprising Critical Whiteness Studies, specifically around the development of anti-racist practice in White feminists who work in higher education.

Are there any risks to me if I am in this study?

The risks or discomforts to you for participating in this research are minimal, but may include privacy concerns and risks associated with answering sensitive questions, for example, emotional distress or discomfort. You may decline to respond to any question I ask, or stop the interview at any time. Your responses, the interview recording, the transcription of the recording, and the researcher's interview notes will be kept private and stored in a secure location that only the researcher has access to. The likelihood of study-related injuries is minimal, and there are no funds connected with this study to provide compensation for such injuries.

Will my information be kept private?

The data for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by federal and state law. Under certain circumstances, information that identifies you may be released for internal and external reviews of this project. The Zoom interview will be conducted in a private location with the primary researcher only. A noise cancelling device will be activated outside the interview room to obscure details of oral conversation. Your responses to the interview questions, the interview recording, the transcription of the recording, and the researcher's interview notes will be kept private and stored in a secure location that only the researcher has access to. As mentioned, no identifying information will be linked to the data—pseudonyms will be used to attribute any direct quotes from your interview. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous. Your personal information collected during this study will not be used or distributed for future research studies, even if the information is de-identified, and cannot be linked back to you.

Please note that the researcher may required to report to the University of Idaho any disclosures of potential or actual harm to self or others, child abuse, elder abuse, or other reports that may be made during the interview.

Are there any costs or payments for being in this study?

There are no costs associated with participation in this research study, and you will not receive payment or any other form of compensation for taking part in this study.

Who can answer questions about this research?

If you have questions about this study or the information in this form, please contact the research team by email or phone as listed below:
Dr. Vanessa Anthony-Stevens, vstevens@uidaho.edu, (208) 885-0178
Lysa Salsbury, lsalsbur@uidaho.edu, (208) 885-2777

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or would like to report a concern or complaint about this study, please contact the University of Idaho Institutional Review Board at (208) 885-6340, or e-mail irb@uidaho.edu, or regular mail at: 875 Perimeter Drive MS 3010, Moscow, ID 83844-3010.

The University of Idaho Institutional Review Board has approved this project.

What are my rights as a research study volunteer?

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to be a part of this study. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. In order to withdraw your previously collected data from the study, you must contact the primary researcher, Lysa Salsbury, by email. There are no consequences for withdrawing from the research project.

What does my signature on this consent form mean?

Your signature on this form means that:

- You understand the information given to you in this form.
- You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns.
- The researcher has responded to your questions and concerns.
- You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks that are involved.
- You are giving your voluntary consent to take part in the study.

As described above, your interview will be audio and video recorded as part of the research procedures. Recordings will be used for data analysis only.

____ I agree to the use of audio/video recording.

____ ____________________
Signature of Participant Date

____
Printed Name of Participant

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)
I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of their questions. I believe that they understand the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

____ ____________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Race and Real Talk: White Feminists and Antiracist Allyship
Interview Protocol

Welcome and Study Introduction Script

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my research project. As I mentioned in my email, this study seeks to understand how and why self-identified White feminists develop and practice anti-racist allyship. The project comprises my research for my doctoral dissertation. This study has been reviewed by the University of Idaho's Institutional Review Board, and certified as Exempt.

Our interview will last approximately one hour, during which I will ask you to share your definition of racism, your experiences with racism, your level of awareness of and complicity in racist systems and structures, actions you have personally taken to reduce racism, and your definition of and ways you practice anti-racist allyship.

Prior to this meeting, you completed a consent form indicating that I have your permission to record this Zoom interview. Are you still ok with me recording our conversation? (Yes/No)

If Yes: Thank you! Please let me know if at any point you want me to turn off the recording or keep something you said off the record.

If No: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation.

As indicated in the consent form, there is no compensation for your participation in this interview. The primary benefit to you for participating in this study is that you will be contributing to a repository of research data that may inform the development of future professional learning opportunities in anti-racist activism and growth for higher education professionals. The findings from this study may also make a meaningful contribution to the body of academic knowledge comprising Critical Whiteness Studies, specifically around opportunities for development of anti-racist allyship in White women who work in higher education.

Please know that you can decline to respond to any question I ask, or stop the interview at any time. Your responses, the interview recording, my transcription of the recording, and my interview notes will be kept private and stored in a secure location that only I have access to. No identifying information will be linked to the data—I will be using the pseudonym you provided to attribute any direct quotes from your interview. Once I have transcribed the interview recording, I will send you the transcript to review for correctness and for you to determine your comfort level in including the information you shared in my study.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions, if applicable]

If any questions (or other questions) arise at any point during the interview, please feel free to ask them at any time. I would be more than happy to answer any questions you have.

If it's ok with you, I'm going to start recording our conversation now.

Interview

You were invited to participate in this study in part because I know you identify as a feminist. To begin our interview, I'd like to ask you some questions about your feminist identity.

1. Tell me what feminism means to you, and how racial justice figures into your feminism.

Thank you for your responses, I appreciate your generosity in sharing that information with me.
Now I'd like to ask you more specifically about your definitions and perceptions of racism.

2. How do you define racism?

3. Please describe an instance or instances of racism that you've witnessed or encountered.

Thank you for sharing that. I'm interested in knowing a little more about personal actions you've taken in responding to racism.

4. Have you ever challenged an instance of either overt or covert racism?
   If Yes: How did that go?
   If No: Why not?

5. Have you ever witnessed an act of racism and failed to do anything?
   If Yes: Tell me why you decided not to intervene.

6. What are some benefits you have from the existence of racism?

7. In your opinion, what are some effective ways to decrease acts of racism?

Thank you for sharing that. We're coming to my last set of questions for the interview. I'm going to ask you specifically about anti-racist allyship.

8. Do you identify as anti-racist? What does that mean to you?

9. How do you define allyship?

10. Tell me about yourself an anti-racist ally.

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me today. Is there anything I didn't ask you about that you'd like to add to our conversation?

I will be transcribing the recording from the interview in the next week or so, and will send it to you for your review prior to starting the data analysis, so that you can ensure its accuracy and determine your level of comfort with what you shared during our discussion. As mentioned at the beginning, your identity will be kept confidential—I will be using a pseudonym for the purpose of attributing any direct quotes from your interview.

Do you have any further questions at this point? Please feel free to reach out to me at any time if you find you have questions that didn't occur to you to ask today, or if you need more information about the study process moving forward.

Thank you for participating!

Appendix F

Prompts for Written Reflections

1) Please share the identities you hold that are most salient to you and that you feel are important to mention in the context of this work.

2) When did you first become aware of your race? What experiences with race did you have (with friends, family and/or colleagues) that you feel may have influenced your current attitudes and perspectives? How have these evolved over time?

3) Tell me about your journey to feminism. When did racial justice start to become an important part of the way you live your feminist values, and what does that look like now?