

5-1-2015

Capturing Critical Whiteness: Portraits of White Antiracist Professors

Melanie Jane Stivers

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, mjstivers@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/dissertations>

Recommended Citation

Stivers, Melanie Jane, "Capturing Critical Whiteness: Portraits of White Antiracist Professors" (2015). *Dissertations*. Paper 1019.

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.

CAPTURING CRITICAL WHITENESS:
PORTRAITS OF WHITE ANTIRACIST PROFESSORS

by
Melanie J. Stivers

B.S., Baylor University, 1997
M.S., Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2004

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree

Department of Educational Administration and Higher Education
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May, 2015

Copyright by Melanie J. Stivers, 2015
All Rights Reserved

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

CAPTURING CRITICAL WHITENESS:
PORTRAITS OF WHITE ANTIRACIST PROFESSORS

By

Melanie J. Stivers

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of Higher Education Administration

Approved by:

Patrick Dilley, Chair

Larry Dietz

Saran Donahoo

Sosanya Jones

Julie Partridge

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
February 20, 2015

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Melanie J. Stivers, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION, presented on *FEBRUARY 20, 2015, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: CAPTURING CRITICAL WHITENESS: PORTRAITS OF WHITE ANTIRACIST PROFESSORS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: DR. PATRICK DILLEY

This study contains qualitative portraits based on the stories of three white university professors who are nominated by their students as white allies. Through the thick description of setting and context, white privilege is named as the researcher's experience and that of each of the participants. The researcher examines ways in which each participant strives to disrupt racism. Using a lens of critical theory applied through critical pedagogy and critical whiteness philosophies, the researcher highlights the following themes as they emerge: education, exposure, empathy, and engagement. This study contributes to the literature by providing examples of white professors challenging racism in a university setting.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Dahlia Wren Stivers.

Dream big dreams, D.W.!

In memory of

Candice L. Stivers

John T. Warren

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my husband, Jim, thank you does not begin to express the depth of my gratitude for you and all the ways you have supported me throughout the writing of this dissertation and all the crazy life-happenings in between. Love you, Jim!

To my parents and grandparents, thank you for investing in my education with your money, time, and encouragement. I am so grateful to you for the legacies of following Christ and valuing higher education. I will pass them along.

Thanks to all my professors at Baylor and Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Thanks especially to those of you who willingly served on my “marathon” committee: Kathy Hytten, Julia Colyar, Brad Colwell, Naida Zukic, John T. Warren, Patrick Dilley, Saran Donahoo, Sosanya Jones, Larry Dietz, and Julie Partridge. Kathy, learning with you and teaching under your guidance changed my life - - I am so grateful. Patrick, thank you for pushing me to finish.

Thanks to the three professors who shared their stories with me and made a difference to their student nominators. Your stories are inspiring and welcome examples of what Tatum (1999) describes as “lighting candles in the dark.”

I have discovered that I thrive in community and I truly miss learning alongside my Carbondale cohort. I am also indebted to my friends who have endured, prayed, and encouraged me throughout the dissertation-writing process. Thank you!

PREFACE

“Trying to be antiracist, trying to be an ally, seems to catch us hopelessly ensnared in the fantasy of being an exceptional white person” (Thompson, 2003).

I selected the topic for this study - - capturing critical whiteness - - in the spring of 2008, as a result of teaching about white privilege to a majority white population of undergraduate pre-service teacher education students. My interest in this topic is largely a function of my own coming-to-terms with whiteness and the ways racism impacts the realities of people within educational systems and beyond. Presently, the national angst regarding issues of race and the injustices resulting from race-based systems of power has made its way to the forefront of popular discourse, and makes this subject especially timely. The tragic deaths and subsequent handling by law enforcement and judicial systems revealed through cases like those of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Eric Garner make raw the lingering wounds of race-based oppression woven into the fabric of our country. Cries of “Hands up! Don’t Shoot,” “I can’t breathe,” and “Black lives matter!” reverberate and make known the ongoing struggle for justice in a broken system. These are just a few examples of why listening and continuing the dialogue about ways to upend racism and expose white privilege matters.

Overview

In the dissertation that follows, I create qualitative portraits from the stories of three white university professors who are nominated by their students as white allies. A white ally is “an actively antiracist white person who is intentional in his or her ongoing efforts to interrupt the cycle of racism” (Tatum, 1999, p. 61). Through the detailed description of setting and context, I name white privilege as my own experience and that of each of the participants while examining ways in which the participants and I strive to disrupt that privilege.

Research Questions:

- How do professors in this study who have been deemed by their students as white allies understand and experience their own whiteness?
- In what ways do the professors in this study act upon their commitment to antiracist action in their interaction with college students and colleagues?
- How do we (both researcher and participants) make meaning of these stories and experiences of being white and committing to antiracist action?

Theory

To make sense of these research questions, I use the framework of critical theory. More specifically, I use the lenses of a critical pedagogy philosophy (that is, critical theory applied to education) and critical whiteness (that is, critical theory applied to whiteness studies). Naming, reflecting, and acting with a goal of upsetting injustice characterize a critical pedagogical philosophy (Wink, 2005).

Methodology

To answer research questions about understanding and experiences, I look to the unique qualitative methodology of portraiture. Created by Harvard professor Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot, the methodology of portraiture is built upon establishing context, engaging in reflexivity, and searching for *goodness* (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). Two unusual aspects of this methodology in its current application - - the reflexive nature wherein the researcher becomes a participant and the search for *goodness* in the participants' stories - - warrant explanation and further definition to provide the reader with a better understanding of the dissertation that follows.

Researcher as Participant

The reflexive nature of this study requires me to write my own story as it intertwines with and informs the creation of each portrait chapter. I begin by writing my story and understanding of whiteness as it provides a context for the study itself. My brushstrokes can be found in the observations and settings I describe as well as in the choosing of which stories to tell. Within each portrait, I present the participants' stories by quoting interview transcripts verbatim or closely paraphrasing conversations with participants.

Goodness as Spark

The search for *goodness* (as in strength or virtue) is a key component of the methodology of portraiture. However, I want to be clear that the looking for *goodness* in this study is akin to interpreting “*epiphanies of a life*” (Denzin, 2014, p. 28) and not assigning a value of *good* to the person or experience per se. This is important to note because all white people - - *good* or *bad* - - receive social advantages because of their whiteness, regardless of his or her antiracism (Scheurich, 1993, p. 9). I hope to differentiate this portrayal of doing whiteness differently from the all-too-common *white savior* narrative that glorifies the white protagonist as hero among persons of color.

In her chapter, “Lighting Candles in the Dark: One Black Woman’s Response to White Antiracist Narratives,” Beverly Daniel Tatum (1999) finds the autobiographical stories of White antiracist activists to be “glimmers of hope, gift[s] of light.” She posits that these types of stories can be a “renewable source of energy and courage for the long haul of interrupting oppression.” They may consist of “ordinary moments that have extraordinary impact,” and “in telling each other the stories of our day-to-day choices, we light candles in otherwise dark spaces and give each other the courage to move forward” (Tatum, 1999, p. 62). Tatum’s use of light imagery

inspires me with the idea to use the term *spark* instead of *goodness* to describe what I am looking for in my participants' stories. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "spark" as "A small trace, indication, or portion of some quality, feeling, sentiment, etc., in some way comparable to a spark, esp. in respect of its latent possibilities." Dictionary.com lists spark as "anything that activates or stimulates; inspiration or catalyst." For this study, I am changing the nomenclature of portraiture to replace *goodness* with *spark* as defined above and especially as an inspiration or catalyst.

The image of *spark* as catalyst strikes me as particularly evocative of the essence I aim to capture in the stories of each participant because it connotes a possibility for change or transformation. In each portrait, there are moments of *spark*, moments that spur the participants and me to do whiteness differently, to acknowledge white privilege, and to act against racism. I listen for *spark* and for critical hope (Boler, 2004, p. 128), weaving together a philosophy of critical pedagogy with the methodology of portraiture. I identify *spark* in these portraits as the embodiment of the dialectic between being inextricably part of the culture of power and simultaneously trying to disrupt it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
ABSTRACT.....	i
DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
PREFACE.....	iv
CHAPTERS	
CHAPTER 1 – Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER 2 – Listening to the Literature	18
CHAPTER 3 – Design and Methodology.....	34
CHAPTER 4 – The Strategic Diplomat.....	56
CHAPTER 5 – The Cultural Chameleon.....	78
CHAPTER 6 – The Listener	94
CHAPTER 7 – Synthesis & Conclusion.....	106
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	113
APPENDICES	
Appendix A – Email to Students	122
Appendix B – Email to Nominees	123
VITA	124

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I am a white woman who was born to white parents in Monterey Park, California in 1975. My parents were each born to white parents as were their parents and their parents' parents. You get the idea. I am white.

My father asked my grandparents as we sat down for dinner one evening, "Have you heard what Melanie is writing her dissertation about?" While I explained, I watched my grandmother listen to me carefully, chin down, beautiful green eyes wide, and when I finished carefully delivering my attempt at a dime-store description of my dissertation she said, "You're never going to forgive me for saying this."

Whoa. I felt my throat start tightening, tears start welling. I was *not* ready to go there. I was not ready to face the context of white racism that I know is part of the hidden fiber of my family. I was trying to imagine the *unforgivable* racist thing she was about to confess to me. "There was this woman," she said, "who came to our WMU (Women's Missionary Union) group to talk about some of the community service she's involved in." My grandmother described the woman and the circumstance in specific detail I cannot remember because I was preoccupied wondering about the unforgivable thing she was about to tell me. She went on, "I'm sure she had a beautiful message, but I sat there and counted at least 90 times that she said 'you know.'" In that moment, I am not sure whether I felt relieved or disappointed. *That* was my grandmother's response to my dissertation topic: white professors working to end white racism. 'You know' were the words she heard. Was she consciously resisting the topic of racism? Was I so uncomfortable trying to explain my dissertation to my grandparents that I butchered it by

saying “you know” too much? We changed the subject from my dissertation to how often people tend to use verbal pauses.

Some part of me is very curious about the stories of white racism my parents and grandparents might have to tell. But part of me does not want to hear those stories at all. And an even larger part of me does not want to think about ways in which I have perpetuated racism through my own actions or inactions. As I embark on this portrait study of a few white university professors’ understandings of whiteness and experiences challenging racism, however, I know it is important that I come to terms with the way my own attitudes and beliefs about race have been shaped throughout my life. And part of that means reflecting on and writing about my sometimes-racist attitudes and beliefs and those of my family of origin before I can describe my resolve toward antiracist action. John Warren (2001) writes about the paradox of his own commitment to “doing whiteness differently” saying that,

While I embrace the ideal of being nonracist and having a positive effect on the world, I understand that racism is not so clearly defined and that my intention is not enough. That is to say, my whiteness makes a difference in the world; I cannot rest under the banner of the transformed. Rather, I must constantly struggle and find the uncomfortable space between resisting racism when I realize I encounter it and reflecting on what I do in order to see how white dominance may be part of my actions. It is a place of paradox, a place of struggle, and a place of active discomfort. (p. 465)

The study that follows is not an attempt by me to stamp the status of “transformed” on selected participants or myself, but is instead an attempt to more deeply understand the experiences of three white individuals who are making commitments to antiracist action in the context of a predominantly white university: paradox, discomfort, and all.

My own grappling with the reality of my privilege began in earnest when I was teaching pre-service teachers about whiteness and privilege. Applebaum (2004) writes that

social justice educators often struggle with white preservice students who proclaim, “I am not racist; I share no responsibility for oppression and discrimination,” implying that their good intentions position them “outside” of racist social structures for which they bear no responsibility. (p. 59)

Many of my white students used distancing strategies (Case & Hemmings, 2005) to avoid being perceived as racist. I noticed that even those white students who were able to overcome resistance to the realization that being white meant being privileged (at the expense of others) were sometimes paralyzed by the thought of what to do next. Through assigned readings, my students and I were discovering together some of the vast inequities that are part of the fabric of our country’s public education system. I wondered along with them if we as individuals can really make a difference when we are up against a “still separate, still unequal” system of public education entrenched in power, and privilege (Kozol, 2005). My students wanted to know exactly *how* they could step off the “path of least resistance,” (Johnson, 2006, p. 78) or avoid going with the flow that their privilege affords them. Allan Johnson (2006) challenges people who are members of dominant groups to embrace the responsibility that comes with being privileged by “getting on the hook” rather than avoiding it (p. 124). He writes that “dominant groups must embrace this hook they’re on, not as some terrible affliction or occasion for guilt and shame but as a challenge and an opportunity” (p. 124).

In the context of today’s American university, we know that college student populations are increasingly diverse (Kena, et.al, 2014). However, we also know that the racial make-up of

faculty members does not reflect that of their students (Parks & Denson, 2009). According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (Kena, et. al, 2014),

In fall 2011, of those full-time instructional faculty whose race/ethnicity was known, 79 percent were White (44 percent were White males and 35 percent were White females), 6 percent were Black, 4 percent were Hispanic, 9 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander, and less than 1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native or two or more races. Among full-time professors, 84 percent were White (60 percent were White males and 25 percent were White females), 4 percent were Black, 3 percent were Hispanic, 8 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander, and less than 1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native (p. 187).

The small percentage of minority faculty are called upon to mentor the increasing numbers of students of color while the role of mentoring these students and embracing diversity falls off the radar for an overwhelming majority of white faculty members. By using the methodology of portraiture, this dissertation reveals concrete examples of the ways in which three white college professors at a predominantly white university are stepping off the path of least resistance and in Allan Johnson's (2006) words, getting "on the hook" to challenge racism.

Critical Whiteness

Before I further introduce this study, I want to paint a quick "gesso" or primer of its theoretical foundation, which is critical pedagogy, with an emphasis on critical whiteness. Rooted most frequently from the perspective of persons of color, critical whiteness is the application of a critical theory philosophy to the issue of white privilege. In a society that normalizes and privileges whiteness, a person can either accept or reject that normalization and privilege. It follows that the path of least resistance for a person privileged by the normalization

and privileging of whiteness would be to accept it. Critical whiteness rejects the normalization of whiteness by bringing to light the ways in which we both consciously and subconsciously perpetuate that privileging. Embracing critical whiteness is especially challenging coming from a white, privileged perspective. Kumashiro (2004) describes the difficulty involved in rejecting one's own privilege:

Challenging oppression requires more than simply becoming aware of oppression, and this is because people are often invested in the status quo, as when people desire repeating what has become normalized in our lives. Change requires a willingness to step outside of this comfort zone. And for those who are favored by or benefit from the status quo, change may be even more difficult since it requires interrupting one's own privilege. (p. 46)

From a white perspective, critical whiteness means making a conscious effort daily to "interrupt one's own privilege" regarding race. For me, as a white educator, the application of critical whiteness is essential to the practice of a critical pedagogy.

Reflecting On My Own Whiteness through Portraiture

Interrupting my own white privilege requires coming to terms with and exposing what whiteness means for me. Using the method of portraiture in this study provides a unique opportunity to do so. Reflexivity (self-reflection) within the methodology of portraiture requires me to critically reflect on my own position in the context of my research and it calls for my presence to be made known explicitly throughout the research process. More specifically,

Portraiture admits the central and creative role of the *self* of the portraitist. The person of the researcher -- even when vigorously controlled -- is more evident and more visible than in any other research form. She is seen not only in defining the focus and field of the

inquiry, but also in navigating the relationships with the subjects, in witnessing and interpreting the action, in tracing the emergent themes, and in creating the narrative.

(Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 13)

In some ways, it feels self-indulgent to write so much of myself into this dissertation. Being self-reflective and transparent are integral parts of both critical pedagogy and portraiture. However, even the assertion that I am capable of writing clearly and transparently in a way that is accessible to multiple audiences reveals the fact that I identify with the culture of power (Lather, 1996). In order to better understand the experiences of the participants in this study, I must contemplate my own role as a white instructor committed to antiracist action in an increasingly diverse university context. Reflexivity should be central to a study of whiteness because those who are participants in the culture of power (Delpit, 1995) have too long been silent about where whiteness fits into the intercultural power dynamics. I must begin by reflecting on my own whiteness.

Personal Reflection on Whiteness

I knew I was white at a fairly young age. When I lived in San Antonio, Texas, I sometimes thought I could blend in with Mexican-American kids on account of my brown hair, brown eyes, and summer-tanned skin, but I still knew that I was white. To give you an idea of how dark I was, when I was 4, my aunt participated in a survey at McDonald's. The survey-taker, pointing to me, asked, "Is she white or *what?*" Knowing that I was white meant more than just knowing the relative shade of my skin. It meant that I knew that my new neighbors in Montgomery, Alabama, were relieved to see the white skin on my parents' faces when we bought the house next-door. It meant that by the time I was eight, I somehow knew it was not acceptable in my family to date, much less marry someone who was not white. Once, the little

Black boy, CJ, who was my second-grade cubby-hole neighbor asked me if I would marry him, in fact. I tried to explain to him that this was not possible because he was Black and I was white. He emphatically denied being Black. “Don’t worry, I am not Black!” he exclaimed. I am sure I gave him a dumbstruck look for at least a full minute. I also remember being told by my mother that the mixed-race kids at my elementary school in Montgomery would have *such* a hard time in life because they would never know exactly who they were. By the time I was in junior high, though, I started to doubt some of these *white* ideas that made up my perceptions of the *other*. The number of my mixed-race classmates dramatically increased when I enrolled in a Department of Defense School on the U.S. Air Force Base in Torrejon, Spain. I was challenged there by one of my band-mates, Carl, who joked, “You would probably never kiss a Black man.” I immediately and emphatically proved him wrong. That kiss happened twenty-five years ago. While there was something in me back then that longed for racial barriers to disappear, it was not until my recent exposure to critical pedagogy in an academic setting that I recognized my own role in perpetuating that racial barrier by taking advantage of my white privilege.

I cannot deny that whiteness is part of who I am and that it impacts the way I am perceived as a teacher of future educators. Milner et al. (2003) propose that “teacher educators should learn the life worlds of their pre-service teachers and help them understand their own racial and cultural capital” (p. 69) in order that they might be better prepared for diversity in the classroom. If it is so important for university faculty members who are teacher educators to prepare their students for diversity in the classroom, I wonder how college and university faculty in general might be called upon to prepare their students for life in a diverse world. Do white faculty members, especially at a predominantly white, research-intensive institution like the one in this study, even see this kind of diverse-world-preparation as part of their responsibility?

Ultimately, I think it is important that I not practice reflexivity simply for reflexivity sake or a sense of self-importance, but instead with the goal of understanding that leads to transformation. I know that my strong desire to understand whiteness is linked to my desire to see the way whiteness manifests itself in me is transformed in an ongoing way. Foley (2002) makes clear that reflexivity is the key to understanding the *other* and that it is a continual process. He asserts:

Directing one's gaze at one's own experience makes it possible to regard oneself as "other." Through a constant mirroring of the self, one eventually becomes reflexive about the situated, socially constructed nature of the self, and by extension, the "other." In this formulation, the self is a multiple, constructed self that is always becoming and never quite fixed, and the ethnographic productions of such a self and the "cultural other" are always historically and culturally contingent. (p. 473)

In the qualitative methodology of portraiture that I use in this study I aim to capture the "always becoming" commitment to antiracist action of three white university faculty members. I will also strive to be transparent about my own journey to the same commitment. Reflexivity is one of the three key points of intersection between the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy and the methodology of portraiture that I employ for this study. Both critical pedagogy and portraiture require an explicit naming of context, the reflection of one's own situated-ness in that named context, and a transformative hopefulness, which I link to a focus on *spark*, that emerges from critical reflection.

Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study

Through this study, I am responding to a call in the literature for more examples of what it looks like to embody critical whiteness. In order to own the process of challenging privilege, it

is helpful to witness others who are already doing this kind of work (Tatum, 1999). I have found that much of the existing literature on whiteness not only focuses on the ways white teachers perpetuate white privilege, but is also most likely to be situated in K-12 settings (Delpit, 1995; Hinchey, 2006 ; hooks, 1993 ; Sleeter, 1996), as is the application of portraiture as a methodology, which leaves a wide open space for a qualitative study like this one aiming to understand white faculty at the university level who are exposing and challenging white privilege. Colleges and universities in the U.S. are striving to address the needs of an increasingly diverse population. Within those universities, student affairs professionals are expected to promote diversity and aid in the development of social justice allies among college students (Alimo, 2012; Broido, 2000; Edwards, 2006). Specifically, the aim is to develop social justice allies who are motivated by the goal of achieving social justice for all rather than for selfish or altruistic goals (Edwards, 2006). However, the focus among university faculty seems to be to diversify the faculty body which may subsequently perpetuate the expectation for the teaching of antiracist attitudes and diversity advocacy to be carried primarily by faculty of color (Park & Denson, 2009). I hope this study will help to increase examples of role models for white faculty who are challenging the status quo and changing systems of privilege. I hope that the portraits in this study will serve as a catalyst for reflection and further inquiry into the ways white university faculty members are challenging white privilege.

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of three white university professors who have been identified by their students as white allies. Using a theoretical framework of critical pedagogy, I will interpret their experiences of hopeful transformation and racial justice action by presenting the participants' stories as portraits. Portraits are the product of

the qualitative methodology of portraiture in which a researcher seeks to identify *goodness* (or *spark* in the case of this study) within a very specific context while being self-reflexive. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot first utilized the methodology of portraiture in her research on high schools in an effort to “create a narrative that bridged the realms of science and art, merging the systematic and careful description of good ethnography with the evocative resonance of fine literature” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 4). It is the use of “systematic and careful description” that adds validity and depth to portraiture as a qualitative methodology. In their quantitative study on understanding diversity-related advocacy among university faculty, Park and Denson (2009) admit that, “while quantitative data can provide a broad snapshot of trends across thousands of faculty, it lacks the ability to capture the nuances of the Diversity Advocacy concept that qualitative research is better suited to investigate” (Park & Denson, 2009, p. 422). Questions of experience and “nuance” are best answered by qualitative methodology because experiences are not made up of quantifiable units. Experiences are unique to each individual and his or her understanding of those experiences. As such, the interpretation and understanding of experiences is a key function of qualitative research (Denzin, 1970; Geertz, 1973). In the qualitative methodology of portraiture,

not only is the portraitist interested in developing a narrative that is both convincing and authentic, she is also interested in recording the subtle details of human experience. She wants to capture the specifics, the nuance, the detailed description of a thing, a gesture, a voice, an attitude as a way of illuminating more universal patterns...the portraitist seeks to document and illuminate the complexity and detail of a unique experience or place, hoping that the audience will see themselves reflected in it, trusting that the readers will feel identified. The portraitist is very interested in the single case because she believes

that embedded in it, the reader will discover resonant universal themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann-Davis, 1997).

My hope is that the reader of this study will discover resonant themes in each of the three portraits of white antiracist professors. Beyond stimuli for reflection, some significant uses for life story narratives (like those found in portraiture) in the field of education, are:

opportunities for deepened relations with others; springboards for ethical action; new insights; compassionate judgment; the creation of shared knowledge and meanings that can inform professional practice; an expanded vision of responsibility as a professional; understanding moral identity; and illustrating possibilities for human action and feeling. (Atkinson, 1998, p. 17)

So in addition, this study's purpose will be fulfilled if the portraits that follow lead to the ends described above by Atkinson (1998).

In this first chapter, I describe my understanding of critical pedagogy and how it relates to the consideration of whiteness as privilege. In the next two chapters, I review literature that demonstrates the need for a study like this one, and describe in more detail the methodology that will enable me to create portraits that represent unique experiences of critical whiteness.

Throughout this study, I seek to describe the stories and experiences of white-ally professors in the context of a predominantly white, large, Midwestern university. I address the following research questions:

- How do professors in this study who have been deemed by their students as white allies understand and experience their own whiteness?
- In what ways do the professors in this study act upon their commitment to antiracist action in their interaction with college students and colleagues?

- How do we (both researcher and participants) make meaning of these stories and experiences of being white and committing to antiracist action?

Theoretical Framework

Critical pedagogy is the theoretical framework for this study. Teaching and learning about critical pedagogy leads me to this topic, frames my research questions, and guides my rendering of each participant's portrait. While critical pedagogy is informed by a combination of neo-Marxist, Foucauldian, and post-discourse perspectives, it is essentially:

‘the new sociology of education’ or a ‘critical theory of education,’ [which] examines schools [and the process of teaching and learning] both in their historical context and as part of the existing social and political fabric that characterizes the class-driven dominant society. (McLaren, 2007, p. 185)

Rooted in the writings of scholars from the Frankfurt School, a critical pedagogy emphasizes how knowledge is constructed and the importance of examining the social, historical, and political contexts of any inquiry (Jennings & Lynn, 2005; Kincheloe, 2005). At its core, critical pedagogy is a theory that challenges us to *name* problems, *reflect* critically about those problems, and *act* in response to those problems with the aim of self and social positive transformation (Wink, 2005). These three components are parallel to three key components of the methodology of portraiture: context, reflexivity, and a focus on *spark*. In Chapter 3, I provide a more explicit definition of the three components of portraiture including a nuanced approach to the focus on *spark* which is much more complex than merely giving accolades for good intentions.

Giroux (2004) describes the potential impacts of implementing educational practices rooted in critical pedagogy as follows:

As a central element of a broad based cultural politics, critical pedagogy, in its various forms, when linked to the ongoing project of democratization, can provide opportunities for educators and other cultural workers to redefine and transform the connections among language, desire, meaning, everyday life, and material relations of power as part of a broader social movement to reclaim the promises and possibilities of a democratic public life (p. 46).

Giroux's (2004) vision of critical pedagogy involves institutional change and a disruption of "relations of power." In her book, *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World*, Joan Wink (2005) describes the evolving nature of her own understanding and practice of critical pedagogy. She encourages the novice critical pedagogue to begin her journey into a critical pedagogy with what she does know, with her life experiences, and then move deeper toward critical consciousness. In my own teaching of pre-service educators, I try to encourage students who struggle with understanding critical pedagogy by letting them know that critical pedagogy can begin with something as simple as a "caring for something" that's broken in our society that leads to "taking action to repair" it (Greene, 2003, p. 105). I tell students that their visions of transformation do not have to be earth shattering, but that a hopeful attitude toward the possibility for self and social transformation is a good place to begin their social change efforts.

For Wink (2005), creating and practicing a critical pedagogy also requires a delicate balance between having a critical eye and caring heart, a balance between courage and patience. For many scholars, creating that delicate balance means applying critical pedagogical insights to issues of race. For example, Jennings and Lynn (2005) propose that in order to facilitate a critical race pedagogy, one should first, "recognize and understand the endemic nature of racism," second, "understand the power dynamics inherent in schooling," third, "emphasize the importance

of self-reflection,” and finally, “encourage the practice of an explicitly liberatory form of teaching and learning” toward social justice (p. 25-26). Along that same vein, Brookfield (2003) contends that,

[Critical pedagogy] springs from a deep conviction that society is organized unfairly and that dominant ideology provides a justification for the uncontested reproduction of a capitalist system that should be seen for what it is -- as exploitative, racist, classist, sexist, and spiritually diminishing. Organizing to teach people to realize and oppose this state of affairs is what critical pedagogy is all about. As such, it has an explicitly transformative dimension (p. 141).

Brookfield (2003) goes further to make a clear distinction between what he sees as personal and social transformation. Criticizing some interpretations of transformation as a “whimsical change of lifestyle or social practice” (p. 142), he warns against using the word transformative too liberally, for fear that it will lose its meaning. The kind of transformation that critical pedagogy calls for is one that “causes a fundamental reordering of the paradigmatic assumptions [a student] holds and leads her to live in a fundamentally different way” (Brookfield, 2003, p. 142). The three portraits in this study reveal moments of transformation and exemplify commitments to living and teaching in a “fundamentally different way.”

Some of the major contributors to the emergence of critical pedagogy are: W.E.B. DuBois, Antonio Gramsci, Lev Vygotsky, Paulo Freire, Stanley Aronowitz, Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, bell hooks, Donald Macedo, Peter McLaren, Ira Shor, Deborah Britzman, Patti Lather, Colin Lankshear, and Shirley Steinberg (Kincheloe, 2005). Critical pedagogues acknowledge the work and writings of Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator and activist, to be significantly influential to how critical pedagogy is understood today (Kincheloe, 2005;

Leonardo, 2005; McLaren, 2007). Freire introduces the concept of *conscientização*: the kind of critical reflection that leads to action (Freire, 2001, p. 74). *Conscientização* threatens the more traditional, oppressive forms of “banking education” that perpetuate the status quo by allowing teachers to “‘fill’ the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge” (Freire, 2001, p. 74).

In addition to Freire, although not directly involved in what would later become critical pedagogy, W.E.B. DuBois is “one of the earliest figures promoting many of the same ideas that animate both critical theory and critical pedagogy” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 60). DuBois (1982) identifies the “problem of the Twentieth Century [as] the problem of the color-line” (p. 24). As is made clear by recent national and global events sparked by racial and cultural injustices, the “problem of the color-line” persists. Some scholars think the consideration of race and the voices of scholars of color have been ignored in relation to critical pedagogy, while others think it is important for the issue of class power differentials to remain central to critical pedagogy (Leonardo, 2002; Leonardo, 2005). As I come to understand more about whiteness and its continued connection to class and the culture of power, I think there is a need for the discourses on class and race to converge. That is, critical pedagogy and critical whiteness studies can be mutually informative (Allen, 2004).

Jennings and Lynn (2005) cite the exclusion of scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, and Carter G. Wilson from the foundations of critical pedagogy as a reflection of white privilege even within a field that fights oppression. However, just because critical pedagogues typically foreground Marxist thought in critical pedagogy, this does not mean that they think race should not be a topic of import. For example, Brookfield (2003) calls upon the writings of Cornel West, Angela Davis, and bell hooks; all three of whom combine

Marxist thought and race scholarship. Likewise, McLaren (2007) draws his readers' attention to the fact that society is both class-driven and racially stratified. The construction of race is a construction of power. Those who are the "have-mores" not only have money, but they have power and are, more often than not, white or assimilated to white culture. McLaren (1993) believes that critical educators need to raise more questions related to race and gender so that these issues are given a more central focus in the struggle for social transformation (p. 118).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1997) joins those who do not think critical pedagogy interfaces with race enough. She asserts that critical pedagogy might actually perpetuate some of the hegemonies in schools and social systems by focusing on class over race as the source of oppressive hierarchies. Her solution is to move toward a more "culturally relevant pedagogy" (127). Through a more culturally relevant approach, educators might finally understand "race [as] a slippery category created for one purpose -- to rank and dominate" (Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 128). She suggests that "we need more opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue concerning race" within critical pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 137). So, it is with an eye turned toward becoming more "culturally relevant" that I examine the experiences of three white university faculty members who are working against racism and simultaneously exposing their own white privilege.

Having established the definition of critical pedagogy, the lens through which I design this research becomes clearer. As I analyze the data in each portrait, themes will emerge that reflect my theoretical lens. Critical pedagogy informs the development of my research questions through its three key components: *naming* an issue, critically *reflecting*, and taking *action*. My research questions also inform my methodology choice as I seek to understand the participants' experiences and infer direct parallels between the key tenets of portraiture and critical pedagogy

which I see as a “praxis-oriented” approach to research (Lather, 1986), making transparent the link between theory and practice. I ask participants to **name** their own understanding of whiteness which becomes the *context* of each portrait. I listen to ways the participants and I **critically reflect** on experiences which exemplifies the *reflexivity* required by portraiture, and I foreground the ways in which participants **act** upon their convictions: the *spark* that makes portraiture unique.

Outline

In the chapter that follows, I explore literature on whiteness and describe the results of several empirical studies about the experiences of white educators. I also expose the gaps in the literature to which this study responds. In Chapter 3, I describe in-depth the methodology of portraiture and the process by which I select participants and analyze data. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are individual portraits of the three participants, and Chapter 7 houses my discussion and conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

LISTENING TO THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I offer definitions of whiteness from the literature that reflect how I have come to understand whiteness and its systemic nature. Second, I explore literature that challenges us to disrupt whiteness. In section three, I highlight findings from studies that focus on ways educators perpetuate or challenge white privilege. In section four, I discuss some of the risks associated with the study of whiteness. In the final section of this chapter, I examine more of the literature that calls us to take a position of critical whiteness and provides strategies for action.

Definitions of Whiteness

While some may think of whiteness as merely a racial signifier, it is more accurately, at least in the context of this study, a signifier of power. Peggy McIntosh (1988) characterizes whiteness as “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks,” a knapsack given to whites as a matter of course but denied to persons of color. Hytten and Adkins’ (2001) vision for a pedagogy of whiteness sees whiteness as, “a symbolically efficient way to name a constellation of social forces and cultural practices that systematically impose and reinforce the dominant culture in our institutions” (p. 435). Similarly, George Lipsitz (1998) describes whiteness as “the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, [that] never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations” (p. 1). In each of these iterations whiteness slips through the make-up of social hierarchies largely unseen or contested. As a white individual, it is not easy to admit that whiteness gives me any power or that much of the power I might have is in fact unearned or due to my whiteness. Part of seeing

whiteness through a critical lens means that I must name whiteness and its status of privilege in the context of my life and, specifically for this study, in the context of higher education and the lives of three white faculty members.

As it stands, the “culture of power” (Delpit, 1995), codified by whiteness, remains invisible to those who are part of this culture. Power is reproduced in hidden ways: in the way a person acts, talks, dresses, and interacts socially. The people who benefit from this power are oblivious to it most of the time. Fine (1997) describes the invisibility of whiteness in a study in which some working-class white men are not only oblivious to where their white privilege comes from, but who believe they are deserving of that privilege. Fine (1997) writes that, “despite the evidence of class-based politics, they adhere to whiteness as their badge of deservingness” (p. 63). Throughout this dissertation, when I refer to white privilege, I am referring to privileges like that of being “in the company of people of my race most of the time,” being “sure that my neighbors will be neutral or pleasant to me,” and being “sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 293). These examples are just a few of the many invisible privileges afforded to most whites.

In her essay, *Witnessing Whiteness*, Michelle Fine (1997) examines the ways in which whites inherit power institutionally. She argues that whiteness is constructed or “manufactured” by institutions, that it is paired “symbiotically” with blackness in that whiteness equals good and blackness equals not-so-good, that it is therefore “nested” in relation to color, and finally that the institutional construction of whiteness affects how everyone identifies racially; in that one imagines one’s position in relation to whiteness (p. 58). In one of the studies she cites, she witnesses a transformation among law students toward a culture of whiteness through intentional education on issues of privilege. Fine (1997) describes that,

through the process of what might be called ‘professional socialization,’ the young adults we studied grew anesthetized to things that they once, in the beginnings of their school career, considered outrageous (e.g., generic ‘he,’ adversarial method, differential participation by gender, inaccessible faculty, sexist jokes) (p. 61).

Fine (1997) wonders when institutions will be held accountable for this kind of “professional socialization” (p. 61). Even when some of us do recognize the systemic sources of white privilege, it is a challenge for us to see how it is remotely possible for us, as individuals, to impact or change the system.

For me, part of making an impact on society means coming to understand how the pervasive power of whiteness perpetuates itself. How is it that so many people have come to understand the current systems of power and privilege as status quo? One answer to that question is through something called hegemony. Megan Boler (2004) describes the effects of hegemony as when “dominant ideology enforces itself, not necessarily through violent means, but through people’s agreement to abide by and value a status quo that benefits institutionalized powers” (p. 122). According to McLaren (2007), “hegemony is a struggle in which the powerful win the consent of those who are oppressed, with the oppressed unknowingly participating in their own oppression” (p. 203). White supremacy is just one of many social manifestations of hegemony in U.S. society. The normalization and dominance of whiteness has historically been a part of the U.S.’s dominant ideology.

Rather than acknowledge the privilege of whiteness or even try to understand its systemic nature, many whites will go to great lengths to appear “good” and neutral when confronted with race (Moon, 1999). This is not the kind of “good” I analyze in the portraits to follow. One of the strategies people use to avoid the responsibility of privilege is claiming colorblindness. A person

claiming colorblindness might say things like, “I treat everyone the same whether they’re red, orange, green, or purple,” or “I don’t see color, we’re all the same on the inside.” Bonilla-Silva (2003) outlines five strategies white people use in an attempt to appear “colorblind.” These include “talk[ing] in a very careful, indirect, hesitant manner” (p. 55) about race, using “apparent denials” and “claims of ignorance” (p. 57) about racial inequities, citing “reverse discrimination” (p. 59), and generally removing oneself from the problem of white racism (p. 66). Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) examples are insightful, because many whites who think they are socially responsible are often reifying white racism through these kinds of “colorblind” strategies.

In contrast to claiming colorblindness, Lipsitz (1998) emphasizes acknowledgement as essential to finding solutions to white privilege. He writes that, “those of us who are ‘white’ can only become part of the solution if we recognize the degree to which we are already part of the problem -- not because of our race, but because of our possessive investment in it” (Lipsitz, 1998, p. 22). Lipsitz calls for a presence of mind that is akin to the Freirean concept of conscientization; “a power we have when we recognize we know that we know” (Wink, 2005, p. 32). In imagining change in light of knowing what we know, Lisa Delpit (1995) is “certain that if we are truly to effect societal change, we cannot do so from the bottom up, but we must push and agitate from the top down” (p. 40). And from the “top down” she is implicating those within the culture of power to initiate the dialogue. Delpit (1995) writes, “...I contend that it is those with the most power, those in the majority, who must take the greater responsibility for initiating the process” (p. 46), the process of disrupting whiteness.

Disrupting Whiteness

Now that I have established the way I understand whiteness and its power in society, I look to the literature to find suggestions as to how one might subvert that power. In order to

liberate society from racism, whiteness must be visible. One way to make whiteness visible is to apply the theory of critical pedagogy to the practice of teaching. Leonardo (2005) makes clear the importance of including not just a study of white privilege in a discourse of whiteness, but also an exposure of processes that perpetuate white supremacy. For Leonardo (2005), “a critical pedagogy of white racial supremacy revolves less around the issue of unearned advantages, or the *state* of being dominant, and more around direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it” (p. 37). Since these processes are largely systemic, rather than individual, the challenge remains in exposing the system or culture of power associated with whiteness. Embracing a perspective of critical pedagogy toward whiteness means being willing to lay bare or *name* the ways I benefit from the dominant culture of power, to critically *reflect* on my own role in maintaining that system, and to make efforts to *transform* it.

Lisa Delpit (1995) gives her readers some sense that the system of whiteness, or what she calls the culture of power, can be made visible, “cracked,” accessed, or broken into if you know the rules, but even then, one cannot simply elect to be a part of the culture of power. In light of the notion of the culture of power, I am extremely privileged. As a young white upper-middle class Christian heterosexual married college-educated female, I hold all but the keys to the inner sanctum of power to which, perhaps, only wealthier white men and women are privy. The culture of power currently exhibits itself in my life in more ways than I can describe, but for the sake of an example, I have the privilege of networking and mingling socially with ease among business and professional types who will most likely perceive my spoken language and outward appearance as *normal*. I am also usually automatically assumed to be mentally and physically capable based on my ability to walk on two feet. I take advantage of opportunities based on the assumption that people will be most comfortable with the fact that I am heterosexual and married

- - which I disclose freely, for example, to potential landlords when looking for a place to live. I might say, “My *husband* and I are both graduate students looking for a quiet place.” For Sleeter (1993), a discourse among whites about racism must lead to action (p. 14). I am not content to just name my privilege. Now that I know it exists, I must act.

Lisa Delpit (1995) also contends that challenging white privilege and racism begins with dialogue. Delpit (1995) calls for a dialogue that exposes the culture of power, which in the case of race manifests itself in whiteness. By using the word dialogue, Delpit implies that a substantial amount of listening should occur. Unfortunately, people in the culture of power are not typically listening to what minority cultures value. They have the luxury of not having to consider how race impacts their lives. The culture of power - - whiteness - - generally involves not listening.

Many of the authors I have cited thus far are seeking to expose and acknowledge white privilege and racism. They urge their readers to listen to voices that have been silenced. They would have their audiences intentionally include and foreground the stories and voices that have not been present or valued in the culture of power. The challenge for critical whiteness theorists is opening “white” ears to hear these voices. In the following sections, I highlight the findings of several studies investigating how it is that educators both perpetuate and challenge the power of whiteness in their lives.

Studies on Whiteness

Many of the empirical studies published about whiteness emphasize the reproduction of whiteness or perpetuation of the status quo system of power, rather than its disruption. This is likely because most whites are unaware of the privilege afforded them because of whiteness. For example, Ruth Frankenberg (1993) interviewed 30 white women in the mid-1980’s in a study to

understand the ways white women experience racism and whiteness. She came to understand that these women were impacted by race because "...any system of differentiation [like race] shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses" (p. 1). Frankenberg (1993) also found that the women she interviewed were best able to identify with the parts of their identity that made them "other," which led to their inability, or at least the smaller likelihood, of their acknowledging the ways in which they were "part of a cultural and racial group that is dominant and normative" (p. 230). She concluded that while whiteness is largely defined by what it is *not*, "whiteness *does* have content inasmuch as it generates norms, ways of understanding history, ways of thinking about self and other, and even ways of thinking about the notion of culture itself. Thus, whiteness needs to be examined and historicized" (p. 231).

Hytten and Warren (2003) studied white students in a doctoral-level seminar setting at a predominantly white, public, Midwestern university. The seminar, entitled "Education and Culture," focused on critically examining culture and diversity issues within education. They used qualitative methods to observe "how whiteness gets inscribed and reified in our education practices, even as we try to disrupt its normative influence" (p. 65). The authors identified 12 different discourses of resistance used by the students (several of whom were studying to become K-12 administrators) in the classroom setting and described their "four broad appeals: (1) to self, (2) to progress, (3) to authenticity, and (4) to extremes" (p. 65). By understanding these discourses of resistance to critical whiteness, Hytten and Warren hope to find better ways to help their students understand whiteness and combat white racism.

In her ethnographic study of four white self-identified "good" teachers of students of color, Nora Hyland (2005) reveals "how the roles that [four teachers] adopted relate to the perpetuation of whiteness and how such a relation is embedded in their everyday teaching

practices and might function to sustain racist practice and ideology in the schooling of students of color” (p. 429). For example, one of the teachers she studied perceived herself as helpful to her students and their families, but in being helpful, unknowingly cast them as helpless or incapable (p. 440). Another of the teachers lauds the possibility of assimilation to whiteness, citing herself as a successful role model for students and having claimed whiteness as an Ecuadorian (443). Similarly, in Johnson’s (2002) analysis of 6 White teachers identified as having an awareness of race and racism. The women’s stories somehow, however, omit white privilege from their own lived experiences. Johnson (2002) writes that their “failure to acknowledge the structural aspects of White privilege made it difficult for them to view race as part of a hierarchy and locate their position within that hierarchy” (p. 162). Although these teachers identify “eye opening” aspects of their lives (e.g. having close relationships with people of color) they are missing a critical identification with white privilege.

While many of the researchers who write about whiteness describe examples of how white teachers and administrators continue to remain oblivious to white privilege, there are only a handful who use empirical studies to focus on antiracist efforts of white teachers, administrators, and students in K-16 educational contexts. One book that aims to make these problematizing voices heard is Thompson, Shaefer, and Brod’s (2003), *White Men Challenging Racism: 35 Personal Stories*. These authors created 35 narratives “like photographs” (p. 1) based on interviews with white men (some of whom are educators) throughout the United States who are committed to antiracist action. Thompson, Shaefer, and Brod (2003) believe that,

by holding up these white men who challenge racism, we are celebrating their lives. By asking them to be vulnerable about their mistakes and shortcomings and by asking questions that push their understanding of themselves and oppression, we are challenging

them. By supporting them and getting support from them, we are encouraging white men to use their white privilege fully. It does nothing for racial justice if we are meek and shrink into a corner, abandoning people of color and white women to fight racism on their own. The struggle for racial justice needs all of us in the center of the room” (p. 3).

While it sounds scary to think of “white men [using] their white privilege fully,” these authors envision that the key to subverting white privilege is held primarily by those *with* white privilege.

Schniedewind’s (2005) analysis of five “exemplary teachers” exemplifies the impact a teacher’s racial consciousness has on her students. One of the teachers acknowledges her white privilege in the way she came to learn about racism. “Not having experienced racism personally, she had the white privilege of discovering it intellectually (p. 282).” Schniedewind’s (2005) study focuses on practical examples of what teachers are doing in their classrooms to expose racism and white privilege. Some examples include intentionally talking with their students about race and stereotyping, supporting students of color, confronting institutional racism in ways that are relevant to the students, and supporting one another. Schniedewind (2005) upholds the practice of these teachers as evidence of the worth of conscious critical reflection on race in the classroom.

In a qualitative study of adult educators, Manglitz, Johnson-Bailey, and Cervero (2005) investigate participants’ understandings of racism and white privilege along with the ways those understandings guide them toward actions to challenge racism. Their findings reiterate the importance of understanding racism as systemic in nature. They also posit that, “the process of critically reflecting on one’s own life and obtaining insight into one’s own privilege cannot be underestimated in its importance to the process of becoming a change agent” (p. 1256). Some of

the things their participants noted as most critical to doing the work of challenging racism include creating communities of support, building relationships, and being held accountable.

Lawrence and Tatum (1997) describe the experiences of several white teachers who find themselves ready to take action against white racism after participating in a professional development seminar on race. A couple of the teachers “break the silence” (p. 339) of white racism by intentionally bringing up topics of race and racism in their own classrooms. Others decide to change their own behaviors in relation to their students of color by becoming more proactive in making contact with these students and their parents - - for example, simply by calling them at home to see how they are doing on their homework. For Lawrence and Tatum (1997), actions like these represent the most important outcomes of transformation.

In Clark and O’Donnell’s (1999) *Becoming and Unbecoming White*, the authors share their own stories of transformation along with the narratives of white university professors and community activists who are committed to antiracist action. In her own narrative, Clark (1999) refers to herself as an “antiracist racist” to signify the inadvertent or unintentional ways she - - even as an antiracist - - benefits from a racist social system (p. 93). Each of the narratives includes memories of first-encounters with “other” and segregated childhoods, but ultimately Clark (1999) shares journeys of transformation and conviction to work against racism. For example, in one of the narratives, Carolyn O’Grady describes her transformation during a doctoral class on institutional racism.

I felt I finally had language and concepts to describe the emotions and experiences I had had. Pieces of my past history took on a new meaning...it was not a big leap to understand that the racism that was so systematically embedded in me not only was

oppressive to people of color, but also limited and hurt me as well (Clark and O'Donnell, (1999), p. 130).

Clark and O'Donnell (1999) conclude from these narratives that in order to combat racism, they and we, their readers, must continue to become educated “outside the Eurocentric norm” and intentionally interact with people of color and antiracist Whites through “books, newspapers, films, and in person” (p. 8-9). Understanding difference does not happen by simply studying or reading about it, but by experiencing it (Tierney, 2014).

I would be remiss to exclude student affairs administrators from my scope of studies on whiteness among university educators. Kirshman (2005) conducted an action research study with the goal of developing strategies for teaching university-level student affairs professionals about whiteness and white racism. In part of her study, Kirshman (2005) interviewed four men and four women, five of whom were white and three of whom were persons of color - - all working in the field of student affairs. Among her key findings, Kirshman (2005) argues for “the importance of including whiteness in anti-racist education, the value of professional development, the need to discuss white identity, the value of including participants of color, the role of time, and an ongoing awareness about the impact of whiteness” (p. iv). In other words, understanding whiteness did not happen for her participants overnight or in the context of a one-time other-centered dialogue.

Chávez, Guido-DiBrito, and Mallory (2003), developed a framework for understanding “individual diversity development among faculty, staff, and students” (p. 453) based on their own educational practice. In addition to drawing from their combined years of experience in higher education, the authors draw from the research of Kegan (1994); Gilligan (1997); Belenky,

Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986); Devine (1989); and Maslow (1970) to develop a framework of individual diversity development, within which,

individuals develop in a nonlinear (Evans et al., 1998) and a deepening and expanding way toward valuing, and possibly choosing to validate, those who are other. This process is one of learning to be aware of, exploring, understanding, integrating, and valuing various types of otherness (Chávez, Guido-DiBrito, & Mallory, 2003, p. 457).

Like Baxter-Magolda (2003), Chávez, Guido-DiBrito, and Mallory (2003) contend that a person's capacity to accept otherness is dependent upon his or her capacity for understanding the complex nature of self-identity. This process of accepting otherness is on-going and life-long. Their framework's dimensions include (a) unawareness/lack of exposure to the other, (b) dualistic awareness, (c) questioning/self-exploration, (d) risk taking/exploration of otherness, and (e) integration/validation (p. 459). The authors intend their framework to be used by student affairs professionals in self-reflective practice. Using a constructivist approach to meaning-making, the authors propose that encouraging self-reflection of diversity development and growth will lead to an increased ability to create learning environments that spur on the same kind of growth among students.

Reason, Scales, and Roosa (2005) argue that all student affairs professionals have a responsibility not only to inspire and encourage racial justice action in college students, but to model that action - - especially whites. They argue,

White student affairs professionals share a special responsibility to take action as racial justice allies and serve as positive white racial role models (Tatum, 2003). One cannot teach what one does not know (Bishop 2002; Howard, 1999). If we hope to influence racial justice action positively, we must prove ourselves as racial justice allies (p. 65).

Taking all of these studies and calls for action against white privilege into account, it is apparent that there is a need for the continued study of whiteness and sharing of ways to challenge white privilege. There are, however, some risks involved.

Risks of Exposing Whiteness

The scary thing about bringing whiteness into this much-needed dialogue about race is that the idea of re-centering whiteness - - or even bringing attention to whiteness might evoke the perception of white racism. Despite the best of intentions, exposing whiteness as the culture of power may actually perpetuate the silencing of other voices. Fine, Weis, Powell, and Wong (1997) voice this very concern even as they anthologize multiple writings on whiteness. Not only do they worry that they might “reify whiteness as a fixed category of experience and identity” (xi), but they also

worry that white writers will indulge in what Susan Stanford Friedman calls a narrative of guilt, accusation, or denial, and by so doing will dispense with the real work of organizing for racial justice and engaging in anti-racism pedagogies (xii).

Garza (2000) voices a similar concern when she writes, “that ‘good intentions’ do not necessarily good engagement strategies make, and that to sincerely respect difference we must all be willing to invest the time and effort in respecting others” (p. 63). So, one must be intentionally careful about one’s purpose in bringing whiteness to the table - - all the while knowing that good intentions do not always bear positive consequences. Part of the problem with whiteness is that since it is part of the culture of power, it serves as its own barrier to dialogue. Collins (2000) describes this difficulty as follows: “Differences in power constrain our ability to connect with one another even when we think we are engaged in dialogue across differences” (p. 458). Also problematic is the fact that power is afforded to white scholars engaged in the discourse on

whiteness because one might assume that when whites engage in a critical examination of whiteness, they serve the “greater good,” but a person of color “speak[s] for self-interest” (Fine, 1997, p. 61). Even the topic itself, when presented with the most antiracist of intentions, by its very nature can embody racism. Despite these power hierarchies, the bridge across this barrier might include “moving outside our areas of specialization and groups of interests in order to build coalitions across differences” with an emphasis on defining a common cause, developing empathy, and examining our own positionalities (Collins, 2000, p. 459-62). When taking a critical pedagogy perspective, once aware of the risks, the next step is action.

Whiteness and Action

One of the most powerful ways I have come to understand whiteness and white racism has been through imagining and listening to the impact whiteness has had on people of color. Delpit (1995), in asking her readers to listen, calls her readers to validate the experience of the “other.” Delpit (1995) also asks her readers to submit to “torpification” (Diller, 1998), to engage in looking at the world from new angles - - in other words - - to be open to transformation. She believes “we must learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness” (p. 47). Coming to acknowledge white privilege then, must move beyond the game of blaming. Bearing the difficulty of this challenge in mind, it is important to think about the critical lens through which one might view whiteness. Levine-Rasky (2000) calls for a position of “critical whiteness.”

A position of critical whiteness, asks that whites initiate a dismantling of unjust and racist social relations or divest themselves from the power they embody in social institutions and help reformulate and replace our inequitable society with a truly democratic social order (Levine-Rasky, 2000, p. 272-273).

Throughout this study I listen for stories of how critical whiteness happens in the lives of each participant. I document the dialectic of institutionalized racism that Levine-Rasky (2000) describes above by collecting stories of white faculty members who, while unable to entirely avoid taking advantage of their own white privilege, are at the same time identified by their students as challenging institutional racism. However, even as I frame these three white faculty members' "divestment" from power as a *good* thing, I am mindful of the warning Levine-Rasky (2000) poses against too proudly claiming critical whiteness, resulting in "a pretentious anti-racism among 'enlightened' whites" (p. 273).

Studying whiteness through the lens of critical pedagogy offers a hopeful pathway toward the exposure of whiteness, a pathway toward transformation and change - - a pathway toward action. In exploring how to engage students in social justice efforts through creating a pedagogy of discomfort, Megan Boler (2004) proposes that her readers claim a critical hope toward transformation that acknowledges white privilege - - despite the barrier of discomfort. Boler (2004) is distinct in her description of what she means by hope. She writes that,

In contrast to naïve hope, critical hope recognizes that we live within systems of inequality, in which privilege, such as white and male privilege, comes at the expense of the freedom of others. A willingness to engage in in-depth critical inquiry regarding systems of domination needs to be accompanied by a parallel of emotional willingness to engage in the difficult work of possibly allowing one's worldviews to be shattered (p. 128).

It is one thing to come to the point of acknowledging white privilege, and quite another to translate that acknowledgement or consciousness into action. So who is "engage[d] in the difficult work of possibly allowing [his/her] [white] worldview to be shattered" on a university

campus? Much of the literature on whiteness and antiracist action calls for there to be a support system among whites engaged in antiracist action (Broido, 2000; Tatum, 1997). That support system should involve more than just engaging in dialogue among peers and colleagues, but should also include identifying and serving as role models for those who are following behind. Applying a lens of critical whiteness to stories of professors who are acknowledging the privilege of whiteness in their own lives makes the desired end of transformation one of possibility and hope rather than one of guilt and helplessness. I find no examples in the existing literature of in-depth qualitative studies of white university faculty members who are “willing for their [white] worldviews to be shattered” and I hope this dissertation helps to fill that gap in the literature.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to learn from the stories and experiences of three white antiracist professors at a large predominantly white Midwestern university who have been identified as antiracist allies by students whom they teach and/or advise. In combination with my own on-going process of coming to understand whiteness and white racism, it is largely Beverly Daniel Tatum's (1999) chapter "Lighting Candles in the Dark" in *Becoming and Unbecoming White* (Clark and O'Donnell, Eds.) that has inspired me to conduct the present study. Clark and O'Donnell (1999) use Tatum's chapter as a launch-piece to their collection of narratives written by white college professors and community activists who reflect on some of the moments that have transformed them and inspired them to become antiracist activists. Tatum (1999) uses the term, "White ally," to describe the authors of these narratives - - and by "White ally," she means "the actively antiracist white person who is intentional in his or her ongoing efforts to interrupt the cycle of racism" (p. 61). She goes on to describe that,

there is a legacy of White protest against racism, a history of Whites who have resisted the role of oppressor and who have been allies to people of color. Unfortunately these Whites are often invisible to us, their names are unknown or unrecognized (p. 61).

Tatum (1999) joins Clark and O'Donnell (1999) in sending out a call for more of these "invisibles" to be made known. Clark and O'Donnell (1999) found that,

the literature on antiracist White consciousness and/or the role of Whites as allies (Tatum, 1994) in the struggles of people of color, including that engaged in to engender the acceptance of comprehensive, critically conscious multicultural education, while growing is still sparse (p. 2-3).

While there are a handful of researchers who concentrate their studies on white K-12 teachers, white college students, or white student affairs administrators, very few focus on the university professor. This dissertation contributes to the literature that is still lacking by making visible through portraiture the experiences of three white university professors. I embrace “the dual motivations guiding portraiture: to inform and inspire, to document and transform, to speak to the head and to the heart” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 243). My hope for this study is not merely to create written portraits of white faculty members who are committed to challenging whiteness, but for the reader of this dissertation to examine his or her own experiences in a way that calls him/her to self-reflection and action whether from within or outside of the culture of power.

Researcher Positionality

While I ask my reader to engage in self-reflection, I fully understand that although ultimately (hopefully) cathartic, the process of self-reflection, especially as it relates to identification with or apart from the culture of power, is not easy. I am eager to investigate this topic of white professors challenging white privilege because it fascinates me, but I have to admit I am a little afraid of what it will reveal about me: a white doctoral candidate, only recently aware of her own white privilege. However, my desire to conduct such a reflexive study comes from my perspective on critical pedagogy: a perspective that I am still learning from teaching critical pedagogy to pre-service teachers. Critical self-reflection is an important part of doing critical pedagogy. For three years I spent almost six hours a week with students who were working toward teacher-certification, the majority of whom were white. Of the ninety students I taught each semester, there were usually only between six to eight students of color. Quite a few of them, at least in the beginning, saw my class as just another required hurdle to meeting their

goal of teaching licensure. My challenge has been to begin where they are (often with attitudes of resistance), and help them move toward critical self-reflection, including understanding their own white privilege, which for me meant six semesters of doing the same thing right along with them. From a critical pedagogical perspective, I assume that a teacher will not only listen to the life stories of her students, but will reveal her own story during the process of co-learning. While this kind of equalizing exchange serves to maximize learning, it can also be exhausting. Still, I am compelled to conduct this study in response to so many of my white students who, upon completing my course still wanted to know, “So, what am I supposed to do now?”

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

- How do professors in this study who have been deemed by their students as white allies understand and experience their own whiteness?
- In what ways do the professors in this study act upon their commitment to antiracist action in their interaction with college students and colleagues?
- How do we (both researcher and participants) make meaning of these stories and experiences of being white and committing to antiracist action?

Qualitative Design

I utilize qualitative methods for this study in order to capture the depth and richness of three white individuals’ critical whiteness experiences and the meaning-making associated with their experiences. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000),

qualitative research...consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of

representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self (p. 3).

The portraits I create of each participant “make the world visible” - - make critical whiteness visible - - within the combined contexts of my own lived experiences, my interaction with each participant, and the meaning each participant makes of his/her lived experiences and critical whiteness stories. Using qualitative research (and more specifically, portraiture) to study whiteness through a lens of critical pedagogy is a natural fit because,

the thick descriptions of sites (e.g., conducting and analyzing interviews and long-term participant observations) that are characteristic of educational anthropology (Wolcott, 1994) not only serve an illuminative purpose, but can also be used to document overt and institutional racism (Parker, 1998, p. 50).

In the case of this study, I document overt and institutional racism and the efforts the participants are making against these forms of racism. I also match the components of critical pedagogy with those of the methodology of portraiture. Through the thick description of setting and context, I name white privilege as my own experience and that of each of the participants. By employing reflexivity - - “the role that [my own] identifications and subjectivities play in the research process”, I engage in critical reflection that is key to a critical pedagogy (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009, p. 238). And, by focusing on *spark* in the stories and experiences of each participant, I bring light to the hopeful transformation or “critical hope” (Boler, 2004) a critical pedagogy has to offer.

Portraiture

One of my favorite undergraduate classes was *Ceramics I* with Paul McCoy. I have always been intrigued by creative endeavors and the process of making things with my hands. I

find there is something therapeutic about getting my hands wet with clay, squeezing the soft earth through my fingers, and ending up with a functional and sometimes beautiful object. While ultimately, my research questions - - questions about understanding experiences - - lead me to the qualitative methodology of portraiture, I think my choice of portraiture as my method of data analysis and presentation is also influenced by the artist and poet (Hill, 2005) in me imagining that conducting research is making art, and that there might be something beautiful waiting to be discovered in a soft muddy pile of data. A Harvard professor and sociologist, Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), created the methodology of portraiture and describes the portrait-writing process in the following way:

Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions - - their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image (p. xv).

I blur “the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism” as I apply the method of portraiture to an in-depth study of three white faculty members challenging whiteness. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) each use language that emphasizes the joining of empiricism and aesthetics in their descriptions of qualitative research. They liken the qualitative researcher to the creator of film montage, jazz improviser, quilt-maker, and portrait-artist. For this study, I become a research portrait-artist.

Portraiture is a branch of life history and narrative inquiry. “Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus...simply stated: narrative inquiry is stories lived and told.” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Within the category of narrative inquiry and designed specifically for application in field of education, it is important to understand that for Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), the methodology of portraiture is a deliberate departure from traditional empirical methodologies. She writes,

I was concerned, for example, about the general tendency of social scientists to focus...on pathology and disease rather than on health and resilience. This general propensity is magnified in the research on education and schooling, where investigators have been much more vigilant in documenting failure than they have been in describing examples of success (8).

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) laments the resulting cynicism among teachers and administrators from a continual focus on what is broken. And in response, she calls for a methodology that will “characterize and document health” (9). While a traditional definition of *goodness* (or *spark* in the case of this study) may be subjective, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) calls for the researcher to embrace “the counterpoint and contradictions of strength and vulnerability, virtue and evil... [that] are central to the expression of *goodness*” (9). She also emphasizes that

the portraitist does not impose her definition of “good” on the inquiry, or assume that there is a singular definition shared by all (this is not the case of the expert researcher defining the criteria of success or effectiveness and using that as the standard of judgment)” (9).

In addition to the search for *goodness* that sets portraiture apart from other qualitative methodologies, Hackmann (2002) explains in his overview of the application of portraiture in educational leadership research that

Portraiture differs from traditional forms of qualitative research because the investigator's voice purposely is woven in to the written document, called a portrait, which is created as a result of the researcher's interactions with the actors in the research setting (54).

Hackmann (2002) also describes the search for *goodness* through portraiture as "choosing to expose and describe the story from a framework of strength rather from deficiency" which he lauds as particularly appropriate for the field of educational leadership in which greater learning comes from studying success rather than failure.

While Lawrence-Lightfoot's books *The Good High School* (1988) and *I've Known Rivers* (1994) serve as important models of portraiture, a number of researchers have utilized portraiture in their studies on teaching and educational leadership. For example, Gregory Michie (2005) utilizes portraiture in his book; *See you when we get there: Teaching for change in urban schools*. In this text he highlights the transformative teaching practices and experiences of five teachers of color in urban schools. Each chapter - - or "portrait" - - is a product of multiple interviews and classroom observations with the goal of,

craft[ing] rich, detailed descriptions that would convey something of the meaning these teachers give to their experiences...[with] elements of the teacher's life history, her reflections on her specific classroom issues, and her beliefs about the purposes of her teaching... (Michie, 2005, p. 200-201).

For Michie (2005), "the finished portrait, like that done by a painter, does not convey a literal image of its subject but one that is nonetheless rich, multidimensional, and interpretive" (p. 197).

I create similarly multidimensional portraits using the stories of the three white university faculty members challenging whiteness in this study.

Bottery, Wong, Wright, and Ngai (2009) examine a variation of portraiture as a methodology with a unique potential to impact professional development in educational leadership - - “a reflective tool which professionals may use for their own personal and organizational benefit...” (p. 85). Different from a traditional life history approach, they claim that portraiture allows for a primary focus on the present and a specific present-tense context which frames their research on secondary principals in Hong Kong and England. They also emphasize the importance of listening *for* a story rather than *to* a story throughout the research process.

Ruben Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009) uses portraiture to reveal the experiences of students and institutional culture at an elite boarding school in his book *The Best of the Best: Becoming Elite and an American Boarding School*. He describes that the goal of portraiture is to develop rich descriptions based on data collected through qualitative research methods, such as participant observations and interviews. Portraiture focuses on ‘goodness’ through an ‘intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections.’ Portraits are descriptive accounts of particular institutions or people in which the analysis of the data is embedded in the richness and aesthetic dimensions of the descriptions. (p. 249)

In this dissertation I am listening for *spark* and “critically hopeful” stories (Boler, 2004) in the experiences and the interactions my participants have with their students in the specific context of race and privilege - - and I know that *spark* will not mean perfection. I struggle with

portraiture's concept of *goodness* in a similar way to Patti Lather's (1995) troubling of the angel in her research on women living with HIV/AIDS, a way that troubles the very meaning of *goodness*. This struggle reaffirms my decision to rename portraiture's *goodness* as *spark*. Far from sentimentalizing, *spark* in these portraits that follow is the embodiment of that dialectic - - that tension - - between being inextricably part of the culture of power and simultaneously trying to disrupt it.

Understandably, the methodology of portraiture is not palatable to all researchers. For example, Fenwick English (2000) critiques the way Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) conceals the "politics of vision" in her writing process. He remarks that,

What remains shrouded in portraiture is *the politics of vision*, that is, the uncontested right of the portraitist/researcher to situate, center, label, and fix in the tintured hues of verbal descriptive prose what is professed to be "real." Admitting that such an activity is subjective does not come close to dealing with the power to engage in it. It is that power that remains concealed in portraiture. It is a tension within all educational research, but even more so within an approach that professes to be emancipative, open, and ultra-sensitive to such issues. (21-22)

His argument reflects the classic criticism of qualitative research - - that it is too subjective. He is concerned that it would be impossible for a reader to recreate or even question the "truth" of a particular portrait because the scaffolding and creative writing process is not revealed in the finished portrait. He comments that he does not think Lawrence-Lightfoot is explicit enough in explaining that there are multiple possibilities for "truth" depending on what the portraitist brings to the table. However, in her description of being the subject of multiple portraits by different artists, she highlights the uniqueness of each and the different things they reveal - - based on the

different lens [researcher/portraitist] involved. The beauty of portraiture is that it is unique to the portraitist. The product and its creator cannot be extricated. English sees that there is “no doubt” that Lawrence-Lightfoot is asserting that a portraitist aims to find *the truth* as opposed to *a truth*. I simply do not find this to be true. Lawrence-Lightfoot does *not* assert that she is “the final arbiter of what [is] the ‘central story’ in the portrait” (F.W.E.), but rather that

At the heart of the aesthetic experience...is a conversation between two active meaning-makers, the producer and the perceiver of a work of art. This conversation results in a co-construction of meaning in which both parties play pivotal roles. Through the internal symbols or representations that are the vehicles of thought, the producer of art constructs a worldview. Through external symbols or representations - - embodied in the work of art - - the artist shares a worldview (29).

Lawrence-Lightfoot is comparing the methodology of portraiture to the process of creating and interpreting artwork. The portrait represents *a* worldview - - not *the* worldview. I simply do not see where English (2000) is getting the idea that portraiture rejects the possibilities of “multiple stories and multiple truths” when she explicitly describes the process of listening for a story and discerning how to tell that story - - which to me means that there are an infinitesimal number of stories or truths to be told - - depending on who is telling and who is listening. While examples of the application of portraiture in higher education contexts are limited, the progression from its valuable application to K-12 teaching and leadership to higher education teaching and leadership is natural.

Data Collection

For this study, I collected data during three in-depth, 90-minute, semi-structured interviews and three classroom (or student interaction) observations with each of the three

participants over the course of an academic year. Each in-depth semi-structured interview was tape recorded and transcribed. I also took detailed field notes as I made observations during the interviews and classroom observations - - making note of non-verbal communication, physical surroundings, and the overall environment. Each participant selected three class sessions (or student interactions) for me to observe. I also collected relevant artifacts such as course syllabi, student nominations, and (for one participant) newspaper articles. These artifacts allowed me to fill in some details in each participant's portrait that the participants and I may not have discussed during the interviews. Since one of my participants was nearing retirement and was not teaching courses during the semester of my observation, I spent several hours observing him during his interaction with students in his roles as a student group advisor and leadership retreat coordinator. Transcriptions of the interviews, artifacts, and detailed field notes from my encounters and observations with each participant fueled the creation of each portrait.

I followed a "three-interview series" model (Schuman, 1982; Seidman, 1998, p. 11) in my approach to these in-depth interviews. While Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) does not outline a specific timeframe required to produce a richly-crafted portrait, the three-interview series model is very commonly used by qualitative researchers when collecting life stories. In her book, *I've Known Rivers*, which exemplifies portraits of individuals, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) "explore[s] the life stories of six women and men using the intensive, probing method of "human archeology" which she defines as the collection of life-stories within a particular context. According to Seidman (1998), "people's behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them" (p. 11). The three-interview series allows for this contextualization by beginning with life history in the first interview, moving to present experiences in the second interview, and finishing with reflection

on the meaning of these experiences in the third interview (Seidman, 1998, p. 11-12). This interview structure served as a strong scaffold from which I built each portrait. If I were to have engaged in institutional portraiture or complete life histories, my time in the field might have been much more extensive (Larence-Lightfoot, 1983; Larence-Lightfoot, 1994; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009). Using the three-interview series, I embraced portraiture's philosophies of deep engagement and "listening for *spark*" and focused on very specific aspects of three individuals' life experiences. Whereas deep engagement and the search for *spark* are defining criteria for portraiture, a prescribed time in the field is not.

While the interviews were semi-structured, and thus open to some participant-directed conversation, some of the questions I asked in order to guide our conversations included:

1. What is your earliest memory of being white or knowing about race?
2. What does being white mean to you?
3. How do you think your whiteness impacted you growing up?
4. What is your understanding of white privilege?
5. Tell me about some experiences that you believe have led you to want to challenge white privilege.
6. What does it mean to you to be perceived by your students as an antiracist "white ally" faculty member?
7. What impact do you perceive your antiracist actions and words having on college students, faculty peers, and the overall campus culture?

In addition to asking these questions, I listened to their experiences, juggled the "multiple voices" in my head (Dilley, 2000), and probed for further details based on each participant's responses. As I engaged in dialogue with the participants in this study, I listened for stories like

that of the impact of G. Pritchey Smith's (1999) "white trash" naïveté toward the relationship he had with T.J., his first African American classmate in college, and the simple choice he faced - - whether to stand in the "right line" or the "wrong line" by joining the theatre boycott or supporting the status quo (p. 161). I listened for the stories of people for whom "just living" means "challenging racism and other forms of oppression" (Thompson, Schaefer, and Brod, 2003, p. 1). I listened for stories like that of Horace Seldon whose life was changed while driving on the highway in 1968, who "heard no words, saw no vision, but suddenly knew that [he] was to use the next years of [his] life to work on the 'white problem'" (Thompson, Schaefer, and Brod, 2003, p. 45). Or like that of James O'Donnell (1999) who realized the fear that overcame him when he opened the door to three black men was rooted in racism and from that moment "wanted to understand what racism was and how to change" (p. 139).

Data Analysis

While the process of writing a portrait *is* analysis, it's important to consider some of the essential components of that analysis. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), three of the key elements to creating a portrait include: (1) establishing context, (2) engaging in reflexivity, and (3) looking for [*spark*]. In this study I establish context by describing in detail the university setting in which this study takes place and the circumstances surrounding each of our meetings. Each individual participant's story and sense-making of their experiences challenging white privilege, in addition to my own experiences, adds depth to that context. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) write that, "the interpretive *bricoleur* understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting" (p. 6). The process of including my own context and perspective allowed me to engage in critical reflexivity throughout the study. Engaging in critical

reflexivity means, for example, I included my thoughts, feelings, and reactions to my interactions with each participant in each portrait, sometimes comparing my own lived experiences of benefitting from and challenging white privilege to the experiences of the participants. By writing myself into the process or the brushstrokes of each portrait, I become linked to the portraits which bolsters the transparency and validity of my research process. Krefting (1991) writes that, “research situations are dynamic, and the researcher is a participant, not merely an observer. The investigator, then, must analyze himself or herself in the context of the research” (p. 218). A good portrait reveals a story between the written lines and behind the relationship that develops between the “artist” and participant. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) writes that “portraits are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image. The encounter between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and is crucial to the success and authenticity of the rendered piece” (p. 3).

I establish context and engage in reflexivity by conducting careful in-depth interviews and writing my thoughts and observations that reveal the ways my participants and I both benefit from and challenge/combat the privilege of whiteness. In addition to incorporating context and reflexivity, I look for *spark*, which is one of the unique elements that distinguishes portrait-writing from other forms of qualitative data analysis and presentation. On the surface, it may seem like a stretch to reconcile the use of portraiture - - a methodology that includes a search for *goodness* (which I rename as *spark*) - - with the framework of critical pedagogy, a philosophy that aims to expose the damaging power of privilege and at the same time, encourages white educators to take responsibility by confronting the status quo “white = normal and good” perspective. In this study, looking for *spark* means *not* glossing over racist histories and bad

experiences of these participants, which again reinforces my decision to rename *goodness* as *spark*. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) emphasizes that,

In supporting the expression of strengths, the portraitist...seeks to create a dialogue that allows for the expression of vulnerability, weakness, prejudice, and anxiety - - characteristics possessed to some extent by all human beings, and qualities best expressed in counterpoint with the actors' strengths. By *goodness*, then, we do not mean an idealized portrayal of human experience or organizational culture, nor do we suggest that the portraitist focus only on good things, look only on the bright side, or give a positive spin to every experience. Rather we mean an approach to inquiry that resists the more typical social science preoccupation with documenting pathology and suggesting remedies (p. 141).

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) goes on to describe *goodness* as “a complex, holistic, dynamic concept that embraces imperfection and vulnerability; a concept whose expression is best documented through detailed, nuanced narratives placed in context” (p. 142). So, it is not so much the strength of being a white ally, or the taking credit for antiracist action that I capture through the portraits. Instead, these portraits capture the ways these individuals make sense of their whiteness, their efforts to challenge white racism, the ways in which they are critically hopeful, and the experiences that have shaped them to become who they are. Throughout the process I did not assume that the participants had reached some pinnacle of perfection in practicing critical whiteness, but I did seek to understand the experiences and highlight the strengths - - the *spark* - - that led their students to identify them as white allies and subsequently that led each participant to agree to be a part of my study. For example, the familial bond with his students that Ben describes is an extension of the deep care he has for his students. Family,

though imperfect, is an element of *spark* that permeates Ben’s story. Likewise, the visceral reaction Sarah has as a young girl toward the abuse of her classmate and the way she responds to racism in her current academic context sheds light on her *spark*. In her article on using portraiture and critical race theory in education research, Chapman (2007) describes how a research portraitist must embrace the “messy, contradictory nature of human experiences and behaviors” in order to “present an overall picture of determination and agency,” which I see as *spark*. The portraits that follow are critically reflective collages that bring synthesis to the participants’ stories about their own whiteness and their experiences challenging racism and shedding light on the *spark*.

In addition to considering three key elements of portraiture (1) establishing context, (2) engaging in reflexivity, and (3) looking for [*spark*], Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) describe five “modes” of analysis essential to discovering emergent themes within each portrait. They include,

- (1) identify[ing] the visible and audible refrains spoken and enacted by actors over and over again in various contexts;
- (2) [hearing] the resonant metaphors voiced by the actors, capturing in a few words a wide angle of experience and deep meanings shared by many;
- (3) triangulating data from a variety of sources and
- (4) underscoring the points of convergence;
- [and finally] (5) reflecting on the dissonant strains, through discovering the order in the chaos, through finding the coherence in what often seems inchoate and scattered to the actors in the setting (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 213).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) also suggest that a portraitist must strike a balance between using a strict coding formula and allowing for the “reality of incoherence and instability” that emerges during the research process (p. 192). My strategy for data analysis for

this study includes each of the elements listed above: identifying repetition by coding, “hearing” meaning-making as it happens through stories, triangulating data from multiple sources (interviews, observations, artifacts, etc.), highlighting ways I see the data coming together, and paying special attention to elements of the data that may be “outlying,” all while simultaneously engaging in a deliberative self-reflective process. As I read each set of transcripts and observation notes, I highlighted and color-coded themes as they emerged from the data in order to best incorporate the themes into each portrait. For example, one of the participants mentioned multiple times in his conversations with students that he wanted them to feel like they were “part of a family.” In one of our interviews I asked him to describe his role in that “family.” Images of comfort and his desire for students to “feel like family” emerge as a theme of his portrait.

Participant Selection

I used “community nomination,” (Foster, 1991, p. 239) to create a population from which to select participants for these portraits. This method of participant selection helped me to provide depth to the study by situating these participants within their social and cultural context - - specifically, a large Midwestern university community which boasts an African-American population that mirrors the population percentage of African-Americans in the United States. Using Ladson-Billings’ (1994) selection process for her study of “successful teachers of African-American children” in which she “[relied] upon community members and community-sanctioned vehicles (for example, community newspapers and organizations) in order to judge people, places, and things within their own settings” (p. 147) as a model, I sought nominations of participants - - both formally and informally - - from the university’s student-leaders. I sent an email to students on the Registered Student Organization president's listserv and participants in the McNair Scholar's Program (a selective program that supports the pursuit of a Ph.D. among

first-generation, low-income, and minority students) requesting nominations of white antiracist faculty. In the email I provided Tatum's (1999) definition of "White ally" as a guide to the qualities I was looking for in a nominee. I asked nominators to describe the capacity in which they have observed their nominee as a "White ally." I used the open-ended responses from the student nominators of my participants as part of the data that contextualizes my participants. See appendix A for the email to students. From the email request for nominations, I received six student responses and a total of nine non-repeated nominations from those six respondents. Next, I sent an email describing my study and the requirements of participation to all nine nominees. See appendix B for the email to nominees. While several nominees reluctantly declined for various reasons, three responded willingly. Those three became the participants in this study.

Setting

This study took place on the campus of a large predominantly white Midwestern university, nestled in a forested rural community with an abundance of natural resources. The small surrounding towns bear histories and remnants of Jim Crow-esque practices merely a generation ago, while the university itself boasts an early commitment to integration and inclusion. In fact, some of the Little Rock Nine attended this university. One of the participants describes our setting by saying that, "we are on the edge of the south - - the northern part of the south - - that's where we live. And there's, you know, Ku Klux Klan-ers around and Black Power students and these are part of our issues."

Turning Data into Portraits

I combine the raw data from each participant (transcripts, field notes, and artifacts) to create three separate Word documents - - one for each participant. I read and re-read each participant's Word document keeping in mind a framework of critical pedagogy and looking for

key elements of portraiture. I also look for emerging themes. I do not pre-determine the themes, rather I employ “emergent analysis”. This kind of analysis “is less like a pre-specified process of testing and verification and more like discovery” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 64). As a theme or theoretical element emerges, I name the theme and assign it a particular highlighted color. After color-coding and highlighting each document based on these themes, I re-arrange the Word document so that the highlighted themes are clustered together by color allowing for some duplication as themes overlap. For example, I highlight each mention of family or a family-related story in green. I highlight each mention of racism (sometimes within a family-related story) in yellow. As I write, I begin each portrait by describing in great detail my first interview with each participant so that the reader might imagine meeting him or her for the first time in the same way that I did. I then further introduce each participant by describing his or her family of origin. From there, I allow the individual stories and experiences of each participant to shape the portrait narrative while keeping a mostly chronological structure in terms of my relationship with each participant from first to final encounter.

Data Presentation

My data presentation consists of three portrait chapters. In each of the three portrait chapters (Chapters 4 through 6), I use pithy quotes as section headings to emphasize to the reader the meaning the participants and I are making. In the telling of their stories, each participant is making meaning of his or her experiences and in my final interview with each participant I asked them directly about how they made sense of the experiences we discussed during our time together. Their responses helped to clarify some of the themes that emerged from our conversations. Lawrence-Lightfoot describes that, “[i]n portraits, the girders are usually not hidden very well. They are most often visible as bold subheadings that reflect the emergent

themes - - sometimes as the punch line of stories, or as metaphors that thread their way through the piece” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 253). In a final discussion chapter (Chapter 7), I make the intricacies of my analysis transparent. I include my reflection on the data collection process, thoughts and observations left out of the portraits, analysis of my notes and observations, and my perspective on the three portraits as a collection. I highlight ways these individuals’ experiences are alike, different, and how they might speak to one another. I end the chapter with conclusions and implications that I draw from my study.

Trustworthiness

An important element to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is triangulation. Triangulation “is based on the idea of convergence of multiple perspectives for mutual confirmation of data to ensure that all aspects of a phenomenon have been investigated” (Krefting, 1997, p. 219). The type of triangulation I employ is called “‘triangulation of data methods,’ in which data collected by various means are compared (e.g., data from structured interviews, participant observation, life histories)” (Krefting, 1991, p. 219). This kind of triangulation adds depth, richness, and trustworthiness to a qualitative study. For this study, I triangulate the student nominations, artifacts, interviews, observations, and my own reflections.

In addition to triangulating my data sources, I demonstrate through each portrait that I have spent quality time with my participants - - enough time to establish a level of trust and enough time to reveal a snapshot of what being white and challenging white privilege means to each person. Krefting (1991) warns, however, that there is a risk to becoming too close to my participants. She writes that, “although close researcher-informant relationships are critical to the research enterprise, it is possible to lose the ability to interpret the findings” (p. 218). She

recommends intentional reflexivity - - making transparent the identity and position of the researcher - - to counterbalance this risk.

I believe the *way* a person tells a story about themselves is as important - - or maybe even more important - - than whether or not the specific details of the story happened in a particular way. Titon (2005) describes this distinction well in his reverence for the fiction of life stories. He writes that,

the most interesting life stories expose the inner life, tell us about motives. Like all good autobiography, as opposed to mere chronicling, the life story's singular achievement is that it affirms the identity of the storyteller in the act of the telling. The life story tells who one thinks one is and how one thinks one came to be that way" (p. 290)

It would be virtually impossible for me to capture each participant's story in a way that reflects exactly how the story happened. The way a person talks about personal experiences reflects the meaning they are making about that experience. While the portraits that follow are not traditional life stories in the sense that they are not the "complete narrating of one's entire experience of life as a whole" (Atkinson, 1998), they do include key stories that have helped to shape the participants' understanding and experiences of whiteness. To help ensure trustworthiness, I utilized the process of member-checking by presenting each participant with the transcripts of our conversations and giving them the opportunity to clarify or expand on any of the issues raised (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009, p. 239). Each participant verified the accuracy of the transcripts with minimal grammatical corrections.

Limitations

In this study, I make no attempt to generalize about experiences of all white-ally faculty members from my findings based on three individuals. Instead, the portraits that follow are in-

depth inquiries into the experiences of three unique white faculty members at one predominantly white Midwestern university who happen to have been identified by their students as white allies committed to antiracist action. Nora Hyland (2005) comments on the limits of her critical qualitative and interpretive analysis of the practices of white teachers teaching students of color. She writes that, “in life, unlike the written word, people are fluid and changing. Therefore, these representations must be read as partial and incomplete, merely snapshots of teachers that are useful to understanding the difficult task of becoming a successful White teacher of students of color” (438). Likewise, I can only capture a limited representation or “snapshot” of my participants’ stories. This study is also limited by the scope of my own inquiry. The questions I choose to ask or perhaps omit from my interview protocol most definitely impact the end product of each portrait.

CHAPTER 4

THE STRATEGIC DIPLOMAT

I have to admit I am more than a bit intimidated as I approach the office of my first participant - - a professor of journalism and person with high-level political connections. I offer him my assurance of confidentiality and he makes it clear at the beginning of our first meeting that there is nothing he will say to me that he would not be willing to share publicly. I give him a pseudonym anyway, just to be consistent with all my participants. Since he asks me to call him by his first name only, I will call him Ben.

Initially, I am afraid to expose my green interviewing skills to this man who is well known at least regionally for his intense investigative reporting expertise.

Before our first meeting I read an article I find online that features him as a government watchdog complete with images of growling and barking up trees. Not very comforting images, but they hint at what I come to know as his tenacity for standing up for that which he believes.

It is early summer when we first meet - - and all the trees on our thickly wooded campus are launching their pollen as evidenced by the thick yellow haze on my car and the annoying presence of my must-have-Kleenex-at-all-times allergies. As soon as I walk into Ben's office building, I am enveloped by the dark walnut paneling and low-hung ceilings. Even though Ben's office is situated in the center of campus, it is somewhat hidden by the trees, nestled in the campus woods, and generally off the beaten path away from most student traffic. In the reception area of his office, I am first greeted by a student who I happen to know from one of my advising roles. We chat and she lets Ben's secretary know that I am here and asks if I want anything to drink. The welcome feels oddly formal, especially since I know the most often casual nature of this particular student-worker, but friendly and distinctly different from the usual institutional

feel of most other offices on our campus. After just a few minutes I am greeted by Ben's wide smile and lanky Lincoln-esque stature. His closely-cropped wavy white and gray hair and slightly larger than average nose and ears give me the impression he is older than what I find out later to be his age, 66. "Hello! How are you doing? Come on back." His deep smooth voice reveals a slight slurring of his r's which somehow makes him seem more approachable, less intimidating. He is wearing wire-rimmed glasses, a bright yellow tie, white shirt, and dress slacks. He invites me to sit at the little conference table in his office for our first interview.

We had only briefly conversed via email prior to our meeting regarding the fact that he had been nominated by one of his students as a "white-ally" and that our interview conversations would be about his experiences as such. We sit diagonally across from one another at the small table in his office. As I set up my voice-recorder, he slides down in his chair and puts his right foot on his left knee. He is relaxed and comfortable in this space. Despite my annoying allergies, I gradually start to feel more at ease with him. I take a deep breath and remind myself that I am the interviewer, not the interviewee. I notice that the walnut paneled walls surrounding us in his office are far from empty. These walls are not made of your typical manufactured plywood paneling. There is a little gold plaque labeling the wall "Genuine Walnut." One wall is filled with books, another with windows, and the walls adjacent to Ben's desk are covered in framed snapshots of over two dozen of his personal encounters with dignitaries and famous types. My instinct is to downplay his status and not to gawk over these pictures because I want to know who Ben is in *this* moment. But I regret not paying closer attention to who is in the pictures because I imagine if he took the time to take these pictures and hang them on his walls, these people most likely represent some of what and whom he values. I could have easily spent half an hour looking at everything on his walls and shelves, but I am aware that we have limited time

and I am armed with questions to ask. The one picture he does point out to me toward the end of our first meeting is the one of him with his Leadership Weekend (a program for inner-city high school boys) boys from the previous year. I can tell he is proud and that he sees stories behind each of the boys' faces.

“I’ve been, polluted by racism.”

Ben tells me about his growing up in the 1950’s in a small Midwest college town which I envision to have looked exactly like the town in *Pleasantville* or *Leave It to Beaver*. The ladies would all be wearing belted floral-print full-skirted mid-calf-length dresses, the men would be wearing black suits and fedora hats. Ben’s parents were New-Deal Democrats and outspoken about racial equality. He tells me, “My parents were active in improving race relations in our small town. I grew up in a home where it was clear that prejudice was wrong.” He remembers discussions at the dinner table on Sunday afternoons that usually centered around the efforts his parents were making to challenge racism in their small town.

I mean my parents didn’t sit around and talk about sexual orientation. And they really didn’t talk a lot about Hispanics because they weren’t a big factor in... [Me: In your area?] ...yeah, but, they did talk about African Americans and they also talked about judging people as individuals and recognizing that there are differences in individuals and respecting differences.

Even as he describes his upbringing as modest middle-class, his family was well-off enough to employ a housekeeper - - a beloved Black woman whom he perceived to be his mother’s good friend. It is with her in his home that Ben recalls his first experience encountering racism.

I was about eight years old and I was playing with some of the neighbor kids. For some reason we came in the house and one of the boys used the “n” word in reference to our

housekeeper. She overheard him and immediately stormed to wherever my mother was and exploded, saying, ‘I *never* thought I would hear *that* word in *this* house!’

Ben remembers being extremely embarrassed and angry with the kid. And despite having equality-minded parents, Ben does not deny that he was impacted by racism growing up.

“Racism is like second-hand smoke,” he says,

...and I think that there’s a phenomenon in my mind of second-hand racism. I think there is, that racism is so pervasive in our society that we are poisoned by it to varying degrees and I find in my own case that I’ve been polluted by racism. It’s like a cancer that [if] you don’t address - - if you ignore it, the chances are it’s going to consume you. And racism has been a cancer in this country (pause) and it continues to be.

I ask him what he thinks we should do about “second-hand racism” if it is unavoidable and he says,

I think the only way that you overcome [second-hand racism] is to be somewhat aggressive in exposing yourself to other people who are different than you are. You learn. And the more that you interact - - In *my* experience, the more I have interacted with African Americans, the less impact this second-hand racism has had on me.

“You learn.” Ben’s statement is matter of fact. Exposure leads to learning. If you are exposed to racism, you learn it. If you are exposed to understanding difference, you learn it. Ben admits that he has been exposed to both - - so while citing the enlightenment of his parents he does not deny that racism is a part of his fabric. Some folks who want to appear to be “colorblind” or one of the “good” ones (Moon, 1999) might say things like, “I’m not racist,” or “Don’t think I’m racist, *but...*” Ben does not. In addition to admitting being “polluted by racism,” Ben goes on to claim some of the ways in which his whiteness has afforded him privilege.

“I had opportunities that he did not have.”

Growing up in a college town, Ben had the privilege of taking college classes even while he was in high school. His father worked his way through college and highly prioritized education for his family which made it possible for Ben to be a full time student, only having to work during the summer.

In the 60s I was very involved with the civil rights movement. I was a marcher. I was not one of those who went to the south - - I really respect those who did - - frankly I worked during the summers. And as editor of the college paper I was very much involved in racial issues on campus.

Ben describes how he used his role as newspaper editor to push the envelope with his college's administration regarding inclusion and integration practices on campus. When I ask him to tell me about a time when he became aware of his own white privilege and perhaps what led him to become a marcher, he tells me about one of the most searing moments he recalls from his college days. He tells me that he distinctly remembers when he became aware of his own privilege in contrast to the racist exclusion experienced by his dorm hall-mate, Mike, - - one of the few African American students attending his college at the time - - when it came to pledging a fraternity. As he talks about Mike I notice that Ben moves forward in his chair and seems almost angry, regretful that he did not choose to do something more, something different back then.

I still feel bad about that, I think I told you. That was a traumatic experience for me. It was really a searing experience, it's still with me. And maybe in some ways, you know part of my drive to promote diversity and part of my strong feelings of inclusiveness today and my feeling that there needs to be action, you know, comes from that experience in large measure, because you know Mike lived right across the hall from me. He was a

top-flight student, an engaging individual and he later became president of his fraternity. And *I* had opportunities that *he* did not have. *He* had *one* opportunity at that time. There were six fraternities on campus and there was *one* he could join. I, if they would accept me, *I* had the option to join all *six* of them.

Ben claims his privilege, but also blames himself for inaction. I can tell Ben is still deeply moved by his connection to Mike and the disparity of opportunity he witnessed. We pause for a few seconds. Ben sits back with his elbows on each arm rest of his chair, his fingertips touching those on the opposite hand forming a diamond shape in front of his face. His eyes well up and I can feel my own throat tighten. Ben breaks the silence.

You know, one of my friends talks about affirmative action. [Me: What does he say?]

Well, what he says about affirmative action is that we've had [affirmative action] in this country since its founding, except it's been for white males! Many of the African Americans who I would regard as good friends are *amazingly forgiving* of the way they've been treated by whites...*amazingly forgiving*.

I sense that Ben wonders if he could have been as forgiving as Mike was back then. I ask Ben if he feels some kind of responsibility to prevent spreading the pollution of racism among our students here at the university. He tells me about what he typically encounters here on our campus.

[There are] white kids who have attended all white schools or schools where there are very few African Americans. They have certain images of black kids and those images don't change just because they happen to land on the same campus. And some, you know, never ever change their views, particularly if they don't have meaningful interactions with kids of other races while they're on campus. And this is, you know, it's

a very, the racism is a very, is so pervasive that it's, it may be impossible to eradicate....

We ought to encourage interaction among [our] students.

Ben's strong feelings against racism stem from his childhood Sunday dinner conversations at home and his exposure to social justice ideals. His education was and still is experiential. For Ben it is exposure that leads to learning. He believes that facilitating exposure to diversity for his students is paramount to combating racism.

I find myself overwhelmed by emotion toward the end of our first conversation. Ben's deep-seated passion for challenging the status quo resonates with me, but I am cautious about getting too excited. This guy is not perfect. Just before I leave his office after our first interview he says to me, "You know, based on your email, I thought you might have been Black." Like me, he has grown accustomed to seeing people of color initiate dialogue about race. Ben invites me to come back to his office the next day when he happens to have a scheduled meeting with one of the student groups he advises. "Reverend Jones is catering," he tells me, "and if you've ever eaten soul food before, you'll know his is the real deal!"

"I have a special interest in you."

The next day, I arrive for the luncheon a little earlier than most of the students. As soon as I walk in I can smell the tender, juicy baked chicken, seasoned collard greens, sweet carrots, and peach cobbler. I am not usually a big fan of cobbler, but this cobbler was perfect - - fresh baked peaches, flakey crust, delicious. Once we are all sitting around the table in his department's conference room, I count 17 people - - five white female support-staff and of the students, there are two white men, three white women, one black woman and six black men. I am sitting on the opposite side of the room from Ben so that I can observe his interaction with students rather than monopolize his attention. I notice a strange intersection of formal and casual

in this space. Ben is wearing his usual white shirt and tie. Most of the students are wearing what I would describe as business-casual dress. The students are business, journalism, and political science majors who seem to have caught on to the idea of “dressing for success” - - or at least to impress. I think the thing that makes this unusual for me is that most students I see on our campus dress very casually. Most students wear jeans and t-shirts - - and even occasionally flannel pants to class. So, we are all sitting around eating southern-style comfort-food dressed in nice slacks and dress shirts. But underneath the surface of our business-like attire, there is a feeling of family. Ben does not have to say that he cares about his students. I can feel that he does and he treats them like family.

During lunch I overhear Ben chatting with the students around him about their classes or their internships. I recognize several of the students from my involvement with the McNair Scholars Program and Student Government and it seems natural for me to be among them. I hear him ask one student, “How are things going...because I have a special interest in *you*...” The main goal of this gathering appears to be connecting with the students he advises and creating a comfortable family feeling around the table. I notice Ben is engaged in deep conversation with the students sitting next to him. He is listening carefully to the students’ thoughts and concerns. While we are still eating, Ben eases us into the meeting portion of our gathering. He reminds students of various upcoming speakers and events and solicits volunteers to help give campus tours for the upcoming Leadership Weekend. The students really do seem comfortable with Ben and despite the “business-casual” dress - - which for me evokes a feeling of formality and distance - - they interact in a relaxed, close-knit, family kind of way.

“I do want these kids to feel like they are a part of a family.”

Several months after our first meeting, I arrange to observe Ben with the 50-plus attendees and leaders of the Leadership Weekend (a leadership program for inner-city high school boys) he has been instrumental in coordinating. Because Ben is retiring later this year, he is focused on wrapping up his directing and advising roles and not teaching any classes this semester. So, my opportunities to observe Ben with students are limited to encounters outside the classroom. I must admit I am not too upset that these encounters also involve food. When I enter the student-center dining room on a Saturday afternoon (this is where faculty and staff usually dine during the week) I again feel an intersection of formal and casual akin to the luncheon in Ben’s office. All of the tables are covered in white linen with full place settings. I cannot recall a previous time when I have ever eaten barbeque sandwiches on white linen tablecloths. High school boys and white linen tablecloths already seems a little mismatched to me - - much less barbeque and white linen. It occurs to me that maybe I am observing a part of the code of privilege (dining etiquette) being exposed to these inner-city African American high school boys. Then, I remember Ben telling me about the enlightening Sunday dinner conversations he had with his parents growing up. Perhaps Ben is re-creating the same opportunity for learning at the table he had as a kid. Ben explains to me that this weekend event is designed to be an experience that will help these inner-city African American boys see themselves in college - - and to see themselves in positions of leadership. By being instrumental in the coordination of this event, Ben is taking action to make deliberate changes in the exclusionary practices of the university.

Since Ben is sitting at the head table with the board of directors and the guest speaker, we chat briefly and then I sit at a small empty table adjacent to the head table. As the boys and leaders arrive, I am suddenly conscious of the fact that I am one of three white folks in the dining

room including Ben. I am reminded of the demographic ratio in the Black Film class I took a few semesters ago and I am struck by the rareness of this experience of being in the minority for me. One of the privileges of whiteness that Peggy McIntosh (1988) identifies is that as a white person I can most often be reasonably sure that I will be surrounded by people who look like me unless I deliberately choose otherwise. Today I am deliberately choosing otherwise. While the room fills up, I am joined at my table by Jonte and Tyler - - both high school juniors who I find out attended the same weekend event last year. We introduce ourselves and I ask them about their college aspirations and what they think they might want to study. Jonte wants to go into medicine and Tyler thinks maybe engineering. I ask Jonte and Tyler if they are planning to come to this university and they seem to realize that this weekend event is a not-so-subtle recruiting effort on the university's behalf. They have not decided yet whether to come here. "It's in such a small town," Jonte says. We laugh a little about whether or not to use our utensils to eat the barbeque sandwiches. It turns out Jonte and Tyler think eating barbeque on white linen is weird too. We decide to eat our barbeque with our hands. As we eat, we listen to Ben inviting us to feel like we are "part of a family" during this Leadership Weekend experience. His evocation of "family" solidifies for me the connection I made earlier to his own learning experience around the Sunday dinner-table with his family. Ben challenges the boys to accept the torch of leadership that is being passed to them and introduces us to our speaker, a Tuskegee Airman and retired minister, who spends the next hour telling us to set lofty goals for our lives. Our speaker tells us that whatever we do, we should strive to make the paths for those who follow us easier.

The next time we meet I ask Ben about his mention of wanting the boys at the Leadership Weekend event to feel like they are "part of a family." He says,

I'm an old white guy...and I'm around [the boys] a good part of the weekend. I can feel it, even as a white male, you know, they bond with me. Not all of them, but a lot of them do.

I remind Ben that he also talked about “family” with the student group he advises.

I do want these kids to feel like they are a part of a family. For a lot of the African American kids, they don't come from traditional families and I hope this doesn't sound you know conceited, but I know for some of those kids I am a father figure in their lives. I have become a father figure, because their fathers are absent. You know, most of them have some strong figure - - whether it's a mother or grandmother, but with a lot of the males, these are maternal figures... If you're willing to put yourself out there, show that you really care about them, that you want them to do good, then follow that up by setting high expectations and then helping them get there, I think you make a significant difference in their lives.

Ben is deeply engaged in facilitating student success and he is engaged in action to eradicate racism - - and he does these things based on his own experience - - family-style.

“I thought I had things to do - - more important things to do.”

I ask Ben about whether he has had the opportunity to share some of his convictions about equity and diversity with any of his white colleagues. He says that if he has, it has not really been intentional. He does not want to be perceived as proselytizing. Here is part of our conversation:

Ben: I mean, I have not done a lot of proselytizing one on one around here, but I am hoping we invite faculty to our lunches, white faculty, and uh, I'm hoping that they see the benefit of the diversity, I mean that's a little more subtle. But the other thing - - I

don't know what you do about the attitudes of some white faculty who have low expectations, uh, and don't think they're racist, but they sure act like it. And I don't mean overtly, uh, they have no patience for the special needs of these kids and [pauses]...

Me: And no acknowledgement of their own privilege either probably?

Ben: Right, right, exactly - - and I don't know what you do about that. Unless, you know, because we have a situation where the faculty controls the hiring essentially and *they hire people who are like them*. I mean I ran into this when I was [with a particular department] and I - - the subject came up about minority faculty and you know, I said there ought to be room on this faculty for diversity and there ought to be room for people who got to this point without maybe not the same way you did.... We say [diversity] is a key to [the] heritage [of our university], we talk about the fact that African Americans were in the first graduating class. We talk about it...

Me: We claim it!

Ben: Yeah, we claim it, but in many ways we do not walk the walk. We don't. I'm not saying other universities do walk the walk - - maybe I hope some do. And there are a lot of good things about [our university] when it comes to minority students generally and the tradition of the university, but there's a tremendous amount that needs to be done. And I really think the key is - - how do you connect in a real way with these students? And how do you recognize their special challenges and deal with them? And I've had [pause] many situations where I have been an ombudsman and I'll tell you what, sometimes it takes persistence! Because...[students] can be stubborn, academic departments can be stubborn, and individual professors can be stubborn. And unless you are willing to make people real angry at you, it doesn't get done for these kids.

I notice that Ben mentions during several of our conversations his idea about having ombudsmen available for students - - especially for minority and first-generation students as they navigate their way through college. Ben does not just listen to his students' problems, but he seeks opportunities to help them. He makes an effort to perceive their needs and is driven to be that ombudsman - - to take some kind of action on students' behalf when possible. Deep empathy moves him to try to "make things right," but he is humble about his efforts.

In some ways I'm even uncomfortable talking about it because I don't want this to be seen in any way as boasting or inflating my role. The fact of the matter is that I didn't envision a role like this for myself when I came to [this university]. I really didn't envision a role like this in my life because I - I was very interested in civil rights, I was interested in making a difference on social issues, but I thought I would do it by being in journalism and later by being in government. It was more on a macro basis than on a micro basis. Until I got down [here], I didn't have a lot of patience for nurturing...I thought I had things to do - - more important things to do. What I realize is probably the most important thing I've done in the last eleven years is this mentoring. This connection with kids you know, it's - - I've gotten fulfilled at every stage of my life, but this is a different fulfillment - - it's a more personal fulfillment.

To follow up with him about specific things a mentor or ombudsman might do, I ask him to give me some examples of interactions with students where he found himself serving in that role.

I'll give you an example. Two weeks - - three weeks ago, I hadn't seen one of the students I care about a lot. She had - - this is a female and she's a minority, I think part African American, not sure she may be part Hispanic too - - not that it matters, this is a kid I had been paying attention to. I hadn't seen her for a while, but the last time I talked

to her there was something I was a little concerned about. She seemed to be down, so I called her up and I said, "How are you doing?" I could tell - - I mean it wasn't depression or anything - - I could just tell, so I said, well let's go to lunch. We go to lunch - - and I'm not saying this was the cause of why she was feeling down, but it couldn't have helped. She tells me over lunch that her father [is going] to move in with her because he has lost his job... Why did he lose his job? Because he lied on his employment application about his felony record. He'd been employed she told me for four or five years by this company, so that tells me that there was probably some episode that made them go back and check - - okay, so he's moving. And her other problem was her brakes on her car were not right. They were making noises they shouldn't make. Well, you know, I went back to the office. I called a friend of mine. Well, first thing - - I said, "Well, do you think your father is going to work around here? Does he have any leads?" She said, "Well, he'll probably have to lie on his application." I said, "NO. That - - you can't be any part of it and that, it's not good for him." So, I said, "I'm going to call somebody who deals with ex-offenders trying to get them jobs." But I said, "I can't promise you anything - - the one thing I can promise is I'll call, I'll tell them you're going to call, and I believe they'll help you - - try to help you." And then I called my garage you know, I say, "It's important to me - - I trust you guys - - this is a poor college student, you know, please do what you can..." Now, there needs - - you know those things affect these kids. They - - they affect them academically, I mean, how is she supposed to focus on her Spanish when she's got this situation coming upon her?

Ben sees this gap in meeting student needs like these as a retention issue - - especially among minority and first generation students.

You know I hear university people from the President on down talking about the importance of enrollment and retention. Well, one of the keys to retention is when you get these kids here you have to deal with them. And you have to deal with many of them in an extraordinary way. Now, there is a tremendous payoff from this. It not only keeps kids at the university, it helps them to realize their potential and it helps society because these are productive, creative people going out into society, but, you know, it's going to take more than... It's going to take some dramatic kind of things on a university campus and it's going to take dramatic changes throughout the education system, you know, and as I indicated earlier, it's going to take some serious intervention at the earliest possible stage in these kids' lives - - the earliest possible. But at the university I think one of the keys is the ombudsmen.

This is the kind of deliberate change Ben hopes for - - seeing faculty connect with students and meet their needs on more than just an academic plane. It's not enough to deliberately recruit minority students, but in order to retain them, we need to perceive and meet their needs - - needs that we may overlook if we are not willing to listen.

“The more you interact, the more of a comfort level you have.”

Comfort is so personal. It's a state of being that is different for every individual - - it's just something that you know when you feel. Ben describes himself as comfortable with African Americans - - and in some cases more so than with whites.

[My friend] said, you know, he paid me what I think is a great compliment of saying, “You are comfortable around African Americans” he said, “A lot of whites are not and we know. We know the difference.” And it wasn't that he was condemning people that don't have that comfort level. Even with my background and the enlightenment of my

parents, I think that one of the ways that I've reached that comfort level - - and I do have it, I know it internally - - is by interaction. The more you interact with African Americans or Hispanics, or frankly, gays and lesbians, the more of a comfort level you have.

Ben goes on to explain:

There are whites I feel comfortable around and there are some African Americans who I don't particularly feel comfortable around - - overall though, I find myself probably being more comfortable with the African American faculty and students...and I'm not excluding some of my good white friends. I think it's because there's a sense of common purpose and common outlook. I would say by in large, the African American administrators and students with whom I've dealt here are more student oriented than the overall white faculty population. I think I'm more student oriented, so it isn't just about race - - it's really about "Why are you here?" and "How do you perceive your role?" ...in terms of interacting with faculty and students, I see my role as helping all students, but particularly students who have special challenges to realize their potential. And I think that the African American faculty and administrators who I relate to, they share that. And I really think that's the bottom line.

Ben's empathy, deep concern for his students, and desire to help them are part of what he believes makes him comfortable and able to identify with his African American colleagues.

So, I'm not the only one, we have African American faculty members who deal with [helping students with non-academic issues] even more than I do - - *far* more than I do, because the kids, you know, they watch...[Me: They come to them...]...They do! And they get no credit - - and I'm going off my main point here - - they need ombudsmen, but also the faculty members who help them who are tenure track, they get no credit. And, it

takes - - the time they're giving to these kids detracts from what they're supposed to do to get tenure - - publication and research.

Ben is passionate about what he perceives as a need for there to be more African American and minority faculty and administrators on our campus in addition to recognition for the service demanded of them. Just as many female faculty members are expected to mentor female students, African American faculty are often called upon to serve the needs of African American students. Since the number of minority faculty is not reflective of the demographic of the student population, this expectation is clearly overwhelming.

I treasure the relationships I have with African American students on this campus ... but I also know that for the students, for me to walk into that classroom for the African American - - it will not have the same impact. Now they can be comfortable-I hope they are comfortable around me, I hope they look at me as someone who is on the same page with them, who shares their values, but I also know it's not the same. And part of that is, they don't see, they don't see as many ... people who look like them in positions in front of classrooms or heading up in key administration (and that matters), they don't see enough of those.

“This is not acceptable!”

“So, tell me about a time when you have encountered racism here on this campus,” I ask, “...and how did you react?” Ben pauses and gets up to show me something on his computer. “Two things come to mind...” He navigates his web browser to the university homepage and after a few clicks he shows me the announcement for the coming year's Presidential Scholar recipients. Without saying anything, Ben scrolls through the pictures of each of the incoming top merit scholarship students. They're all white. To him it says something about the administration

and the “powers that be” that someone would not have looked at that and said, “This is not acceptable!”

The key really is a pool that you generate too. Because of the networking, historical networking, you’re not going to generate pools where you have qualified minority candidates if you go through the normal process.

Ben tells me that when he first saw the announcement on the website he called the Chancellor’s office to ask how this oversight could have occurred.

And you know what the answer was?! The explanation was, “Well, there were African Americans who we were interested in, but there was heavy competition for them.” Well, I imagine with those white students, do you think [our university] was the only place that was after them?! *Come on! Give me a break!*

And the other thing? Ben pulls up an email from his inbox archives. “Now this,” he tells me, “you cannot quote directly.” He prints the email, hands it to me, and steps out of his office for a minute as I read. The email is about a page long and is from a college dean responding to a request to re-admit a student to a particular college within the university. The dean’s decision is not to re-admit the student. When Ben comes back he exclaims, “Now, do you see what I’m saying?!” He respects that the dean had to make a tough decision, but his hackles are raised by the commentary that went with the decision - - especially the dean’s description of the student as lazy. He goes on to say,

“I’m becoming more convinced everyday that there are too many white professors [here] and I’m sure at other universities who don’t get it. *They just simply don’t get it.* And I don’t know whether it’s ‘cause they don’t want to get it or they don’t want to take the trouble to get it, but they don’t get it.

“But it doesn’t just happen.”

One of the things I have learned over the past six years about the small towns surrounding our university is that this area has a deeply rooted reputation for being overtly racist. Several of the area towns have a history of sun-down laws and lynching dating back only three decades. In his book, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, James Loewen (2005) notes that many of these racist communities are located in the Midwest, exactly where we are. Many of my own white students are not aware of this local history, but I have heard several of my black students talk about avoiding these towns at all costs for fear that their car would break down and they might get stranded. And they speculate, “Who knows what would happen then...?!” My white students seem shocked by this sentiment. “Surely that sort of thing is all in the past,” they say. One of the nearby town names is often used as an acronym - - the gist of which (so as not to give away the town name) states: [Blacks] are not welcome here.

At some point while Ben and I are talking he tells me about taking a friend to that particular town for lunch. They were driving nearby and Ben recommended that they stop at a particular barbeque restaurant - - and then second-guesses himself as he remembers that it’s located in a historically racist area. He recanted his suggestion, “You know...that might be actually a little bit out of the way, we could, you know, there’s some place in [another town]...” They ended up eating there without any trouble, but Ben tells me, “I wouldn’t have had a second thought about it if I had had a white friend with me.” Ben is concerned for the “comfort” of his friend. He is conscious of the elephant in the room called racism that neither of them have to name to understand. Ben’s story reminds me of a recent encounter between one of my own students from that same “racist” town and the same friend Ben just mentioned.

Me: I'll tell you something that [your friend] said this week with the Leadership Institute. A student from [that town] stood up, and she was in my small group and she talked about - - she's a white student - - talked about how she was apprehensive about being there because she was afraid that she would be perceived as racist right off the bat, so I was proud of her for asking questions and bringing it up, but she asked [your friend], she said, "You mentioned that you, went to an historically black institution, high school (Ben: "High school and elementary, yeah.") ...right, and then found yourself coming to a predominantly white setting [here at our university]. How did you adjust to that," she asked. And he said, um, "Well, it wasn't so much about *me* adjusting, because I was already familiar with the white folks. They weren't familiar with me."

Ben: See! There was a place where you could have that dialogue where you brought a diverse group together. And it didn't necessarily mean that that dialogue was going to happen, but it could. [Me: "Right,... there was the potential for it."] And it, I'm sure it was a learning experience for everybody who heard her question.

Ben makes a consistent effort to create "a place where you could have that dialogue," to organize occasions for that "Sunday-dinner dialogue" to happen by bringing diverse groups together. He shares with me about a time when he first realized that he needed to be intentional about who he invites to speak and attend the events he coordinates.

My first year I came here I had this guest speaker line-up [as in a list of speakers], and I think I told you about this very polite young African American student who wrote me and she wrote me an email she said, "You know I've enjoyed your guest speakers and are you planning to have an African American?" and I wrote her back and I said, "You've raised an excellent point here..." I was thinking okay you know somebody from government,

somebody who does this, and usually when you are thinking that way, even in today's world, you're going to end up with a disproportionate number of whites and in this case it was *all white* - - my speaker line-up was *all white*. And blatantly, since that happened, that has never been the case or even close to it. Because I, first of all, I recognize that that was a legitimate, I mean that is a problem. That was a failing on my part...

Since his realization, Ben has made a conscious, even aggressive effort to make diversity happen in the speaker-lists and groups he coordinates. "But it doesn't just happen," he says.

"I've learned that you have to be a strategic diplomat."

For our final meeting, Ben agrees to meet me at a large conference hotel in the town where I have just recently moved - - a few hours away from campus. He would be in town anyway to accept an award, so he generously agrees to arrive a couple of hours early in order for us to meet. It is one day after his official retirement reception. I wait for him in a formal sitting room just off of the main lobby. The room has wing-backed chairs next to a marble-mantled fireplace. An old manual typewriter is perched on a side-table. Ben arrives wearing a full suit with a dark orange tie. During our final conversation he takes two phone calls, but he makes them short. One call is from his wife and the other is from a reporter asking for a brief interview - - so he takes a brief interview within an interview. After catching up on what has happened since our last meeting I ask Ben to describe his thoughts about being nominated as a "white-ally" for this study.

Well, I consider that a great compliment. And I have to say, I was chosen to be the speaker at the Black graduation ceremony - - you know the Black graduate association has a ceremony now, maybe they've just had it the last several years, but this year I was the speaker. I was really honored by that. And I had a student who I mentored here who's

gone on to great things now..., I'm very proud of him. He gave me the best introduction I've had anywhere and I've given a lot of speeches. He was at my reception yesterday.

You know, it means a great deal to me.

It means a great deal to Ben to see his students succeed. The fact that he has made a difference in a student's life through mentoring is a humbling reminder of the impact his students have had on him - - Ben is perhaps as greatly impacted as his students are. We spend most of our last moments together chatting about Ben's retirement plans and the upcoming presidential election, but before we part ways, I ask Ben what he's learned from his experiences as a white ally. He says, "I've learned that you have to be a strategic diplomat."

CHAPTER 5

THE CULTURAL CHAMELEON

When I arrive for our first meeting, I hear voices coming through the crack of Sophie's office door. So I sit in the nearby waiting area until one minute becomes ten. The voices keep steadily droning but I cannot really make out what's being said. When we set up the meeting, Sophie told me that her students often come to her office after class. My heart sinks as I wonder if she has forgotten about our appointment. Finally, I knock on her door. "Oh, come in," she says, "I thought you'd forgotten!" The voices are still coming from some kind of news-talk program on her radio. She sits behind her desk, bird-like in her tropical print scarf and bright yellow blazer. She turns off her radio but the fountain in her office provides a constant background gurgle. She begins interviewing me. "Where are you from," she asks. I tell her that I have lived in the South more than anywhere else. "Do you consider yourself a Southerner?" Maybe - - but not really. I am a "military brat." I do think my early experiences moving frequently and living in Montgomery, Alabama and San Antonio, Texas including exposure to racism in those places have shaped my outlook and struggle to understand my own white privilege. Am I a Southerner? I had not really thought about it - - not recently anyway. Sophie keeps asking me questions and I later realize that she is the only one of the three participants who frequently queries about how I am doing during our time together. As we talk, her speech pattern is fast and song-like with a French-British accent. She speaks passionately. I can tell she is passionate about life, about the things she studies, about her students - - and I hesitate to interrupt her - - even when her answers wander far away from the questions I ask. She is a professor, my senior, and perhaps out of habit I find that I am more comfortable allowing her to hold the reigns while we talk.

Looking around her office, I notice the walls of her office are covered with Asian decor. A bamboo plant sits by the window, a green and white ceramic tea-pot is perched at arms-length, and a red lantern hangs from the ceiling behind her desk. The clutter on and around her desk is a visual cacophony, but as we sit there talking, her energy and charisma remind me of one of my favorite undergraduate English professors - - red-haired, intense, scattered, brilliant.

“So, you become a chameleon.”

As we dive into our first interview, I make note of the confluence of cultures Sophie describes from growing up in the then-French colony of Algeria in the 1940s and 50s. I ask her to help me picture what Algeria is like. “Sicily, really, think Italy,” she says. “There is a common theme to all Mediterranean cultures - - it’s noisy, it’s lively, *the colors are very in your face*,” she tells me. “And in the Mediterranean culture, you don’t have trust if you don’t have contact. So, either you get touched or move on.” Part survival mechanism and part exercise of privilege, Sophie describes the way she navigated the different groups she encountered as a child by becoming a “chameleon.”

I was born in France, I was raised in Africa, I have taught in England, one of my degrees was British, I have taught on the East coast, I have taught on the West coast, I have taught in Vietnam, and I have taught in Thailand. [This explains the Asian-theme in her office.] And so, I sometimes tell my students that I was baptized a Catholic, raised by a Jewish grandmother and lived in a Muslim country. For the Jews I was not Jewish, for the Catholics, I was not Catholic, [and I lived] in a culture where I wasn’t born...and so there were things that I got away with because I did not represent a particular group. And so right off the bat, there were three competing ideological groups, and as a child, what you

do is you try very hard not to antagonize any one of them, so you become a chameleon.

You become very good at adopting the color of the particular group you're with.

I hear Sophie describe herself more by who she is not than who she is. I also notice that she uses the second person "you" - - "you become a chameleon" when describing her childhood self. Distancing herself from her own white privilege by becoming a "chameleon" and embracing multiple cultures - - like code switching - - has been a survival mechanism for Sophie.

I have to reschedule our next interview because of an unexpected surgery on my back. The week after my surgery, Sophie mails me a book through campus mail. The note stuffed inside the book is written on the back of a departmental copy request. "Hope you're better. This may help. Cheers, [Sophie]." The book is *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, by Asia Djebar. I imagine she intends for the book to help provide a glimpse into what it was like to live in Algeria and witness the terrors of the War of Independence that took place in the 1950s. The book is also an emblem of her link to the colonial French (barbaric) presence in Algeria toward which her feelings have completely changed during her lifetime.

"You learn to navigate segregation without thinking about it."

When I ask her to tell me about when she first became aware of her white privilege, Sophie tells me about segregated beaches in Algeria - - and the way white French children would ask her why she was not Black when she came to stay with her grandmother on the French/German border during the summers. She tells me that Algeria,

... was supposed to be a French territory. But it wasn't quite French because there were these, what Americans would call multicultural aspects to the social life that were very strange. Was it segregated? Yes. Was it segregated formally? No. It's more like everybody knew their place. So, you go to the beach and the Arabs would be swimming

at that end and you didn't have - - as a child, nobody had to tell you. And as a child, you saw it. And as a child, you noticed they were all male. It was not until you were out of it that you would think back on that and say, okay, you have a social distribution of space which is the visual equivalent of the segregation in the culture. But it didn't have to be spelled out. On the other hand, I would spend my summers with my mother's family which is on the German border. I remember walking through the village going from my grandmother's house to my aunt's who lived at the other end of the village and there were people on their doorstep and somebody saying, "Who are you?" and I would say "I am so and so's granddaughter" and they would say, "don't you live in Africa?" and I would say "yes" and they'd say, "Why aren't you Black?" And it was a complete disconnect. In part, because the Africa I lived in did not have Blacks. Well, I suppose they were colored, okay, if you really want to be technical about that, but they didn't look any different from the Sicilian or the Spaniards who are half Arabs anyway - - and so on and so forth...

The above passage is an example of how Sophie's answers to my questions flow like an internal dialogic waterfall - - my questions having opened the dam. For Sophie, it is not until someone asks, "Why aren't you Black," that she realizes that she is in fact white, that it might be strange for her to be a white person living in Africa, and at the same time she finds herself caught between cultures as an outsider to both. She goes on to describe to me that as a child, she navigated segregation, and racism without thinking about it - - like a fish unaware of the water around her.

Sophie is French-born and therefore unlike the other two participants in this study who are U.S.-born. However, my criterion for participant selection was that each person should be "white" and not necessarily U.S.-born. While her non-native U.S. experiences certainly make her

unique, as a white woman currently living in the U.S., she is experiencing and benefiting from the privileges of whiteness. As a young girl living in Algeria, she also benefitted from the privileges of her French nationality and her whiteness. Because of her national origin, she worries throughout our time together that she does not fit the mold of who I am looking for. She warns me,

Well, my general history is so complicated that I think it's going to throw your entire data into turmoil...unless your ... [participants] each have a fairly unusual biographical and intellectual profile, so you'd suddenly find yourself with saying something like, 'People who try to promote race awareness in their classes tend not to be like the rest of the pack'...

I assure her that I am not really trying to generalize an experience, rather I am more interested in individual experiences and I might or might not find similarities across experiences. As a seasoned academic she is naturally empathizing with my research process.

“They went this way, but I’m going that way.”

In spite of her unique intercultural upbringing, Sophie admits that she was raised by her parents to have an explicitly racist perspective. Sophie describes her family as “little people,” more like “poor whites...hard working, poor, and honest.” Honest, but racist. She says her family,

...could never see how they were oppressing the local Arabs. Because they were living at the same level financially, they were living at the same level educationally, they were really, they were not the same culture, but they were very parallel cultures. So to them, the idea that the non-Arabs were oppressing the Arabs does not make any sense and they were much more likely to understand a Marxist, class argument. That it was not one

ethnic group or one religion oppressing the other, but it was the upper classes who tended to be French-born and absent landlords who tended to run the place from a distance, uh making use of something that was tantamount to a plantation system I think.

When I ask her about when and how she became aware that she and her family were racist or at least unaware of their white privilege, she describes for me her sense of entitlement throughout her early educational experiences growing up in Algeria and that it was not until much later in her adult life - - after she was married - - that she came to understand her own privilege and developed a desire to combat racism.

Did I imbibe non-prejudiced behavior and feelings? Absolutely not. [The French school in Algeria] was a very competitive place where you got to the top of the heap by being very selfish and there was the subtext was well, if the next person was not there at the top of the heap with you, then it was probably that that person did not deserve it. And so, at that point in time, I had very little compassion for any number of young men and women who did not get the fellowships I was getting. And since I was living in a colonial country, absolutely zero compassion for the colonized. Uh, because if they were colonized, it must be because they let themselves be. I don't know who or what changed my position, maybe simply seeing the world and rethinking the values that were given to me by my upbringing. I can read you chapter and verse as to the despicable set of values with which I was raised.

Sophie tells me that even today her Jewish family of origin criticizes her dramatic value-shift by calling her "Americanized." And she responds to them by saying, "You are doing to the Arabs what the Germans did to the Jews," and "if I've become 'Americanized,' maybe I needed to be!" She adds,

You don't, you don't question the values of the group that you're raised with until much later I think. And I think you don't question it until you can see them from the outside so that you can detach yourself from the group and see them as they are. See yourself with them as they are, and then perhaps think, *okay they went this way, but I'm going that way.*

Sophie tells me that now as an adult she finds that she feels a kind of "natural comfort" with Arabs - - despite her family's racist roots. Even though her family was racist, they spent a lot of time surrounded by Arab culture. She also tells me that because of her immersion in the Arab culture of Algeria, she currently has a high level of comfort with her Arab students. She exhibits the proper decorum for example, inquiring about her male students' mothers in a way that allows these students to open up to her.

I don't know, that's the way it works! And you know I didn't even think about that. They would come and we would never have a session where they would not bring some sweets and we would talk about their mother and we would talk about their spouse, we would talk about their children...you cannot say to an Arab student, "What do you want? What's your point? What's your problem?" No...because you would be dismissing them as a person.

Sophie is very in tune with where each of her students [and colleagues] are coming from intellectually and culturally. She describes to me in great detail all about the cultural backgrounds of each of her faculty colleagues and department staff and how that informs her interactions with them. Her observations sometimes come across as judgmental, but she also seems to me to be more able than some professors to empathize and meet students where they are.

“A lot of the people with whom I was living did not have a chance no matter what.”

The context of Sophie’s education as a child was within an atmosphere of competition within a culture stratified by race, religion, and gender. For Sophie, when it came to understanding her privilege, it was after many years of education, “seeing the world,” and after she met her husband that her ideologies shifted. Throughout our conversations Sophie continues to reflect on her experiences coming to understand her privilege. She wonders if “perhaps it was education, pure and simple.” Whatever it was, she acknowledges how deeply she was impacted by seeing a colonial war up close - - including “torture and disembowelment and all of that” - - which was made normal for her as a part of her growing-up experience. She mentions it as casually as I might mention going to football games on Friday nights when I was in high school.

Even in graduate school when she met her husband, she remembers how deeply ingrained her colonial perspective was. “My husband would tell you that when we met, I was the most unremitted colonial person you could ever hope to meet. I was to the right of the right and he just couldn’t quite believe that an educated person would say [the things I was saying].” She clung to the typical colonial argument - - assuming that those people to whom “we brought knowledge and hospitals and railways” and who we “taught to read and write” should be grateful. That was what she learned from her family and what she believed. She tells me that “a lot of the people with whom I was living and who were technically my compatriots did not have a chance no matter what.” Because she had been given the opportunity to escape her modest means through scholarships and fellowships, it was very hard for her to understand that.

I ask Sophie to tell me about the class, religion, and gender disparities in the community where she grew up - - and things which she took for granted as just the way things were as a child. She responds with a mini-sermon on justice.

Either justice is just, or justice is not. It's like being pregnant. You can't be a little pregnant. And you cannot be just in some instances and non-just in some others, which is what the society was, clearly - - it was *not just* all across the board. But children tend not to see that. And so it was not, really, it was not until I left and went to school abroad that I began to look back, and I began to think, well, okay, what - - what I ask my students to do all the time - - okay, what were the things I was taking for granted? So much so, that I was never asking myself about it.

For Sophie, it was not education alone that exposed her to her own privilege. It was the experience of leaving her family and country behind - - and becoming "Americanized," as her family criticizes, that opened her eyes to her own privilege.

"The way racism works: I blame you for not being who I think you should be."

The first time I observe Sophie in the classroom, I see that she is able to create a space that is unusual - - a space that challenges students to think differently, and to see the world through multiple lenses. One way she does this is by asking students to turn the lens inward and think about what it means to be an American - - which Jackson, Warren, Pitts, and Wilson (2007) might say is akin to asking what it means to be white. She frequently draws attention to the "American-ness" of her students. Until her students can understand the (privilege) perspective from which they view the world, they cannot understand the (oppression) impact they have on the world around them. Warren writes that

unlike being Black or Latino, for example, to be White is undeniably linked to what it means to be American. The result is an American populace that is defined by whiteness, and therefore characterized by an obsession with modes of exchange and unclear definitions of self (p. 70, Jackson, Warren, Pitts, and Wilson (2007)).

While Sophie identifies her own link to whiteness as a member of a colonizing group, I also hear her distance herself from whiteness by holding tightly to her status as a non-American. By frequently drawing attention to and mocking the American-ness of her students - - Sophie parodies American-ness and its associated whiteness (Warren, 2007) in an effort to help her students see themselves and the world differently. She intentionally creates opportunities for transformation by exposing them to their own privilege - - using the teaching of Caribbean literature as a catalyst.

“The rich, light are on top; the poor, dark are on bottom.”

Sitting in Sophie’s classroom I notice the warmth of the fall sun shining through the floor-to ceiling windows that face the campus woods, making this space feel like a three-walled room. It is actually quite warm for late October, and the natural light from outside bounces off of the maroon-flecked linoleum floors. All of the doors in this section of the building are bright yellow - - the same color of the blazer Sophie is wearing today. There are sixteen students sitting in chair-desks scattered around the room in uneven rows. Two of the students are Black women, four are white men, and the rest are white women. I sit in the far corner opposite the classroom entrance in order to have a decent view of the whole room and stay out of the way, although in such a small classroom my presence is hardly inconspicuous.

When class begins, Sophie takes attendance by collecting index cards from each student with their written questions about the day’s assigned reading. She sits on the edge of her desk and takes off her yellow blazer revealing a bright orange sweater and purple and gold scarf. Today, the class discussion in her Caribbean literature class is about *The Dew Breaker* (Danticat, 2004) a novel about a Haitian torturer and the people whose lives he has destroyed. Sophie opens with a brief matter-of-fact description of the characters in the book: “The rich, light are on top;

the poor, dark are on bottom,” she says. While she solicits and sounds plot questions from the class, I browse her course syllabus. The novels Sophie has selected for this course [*Annie John: A Novel* (Kincaid, 1985); *Abeng*. 1984. (Cliff, 1995); *Bruised Hibiscus* (Nunez, 2000); *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (Condé, 1992); *The Dew Breaker* (Danticat, 2004); *Unburnable* (John, 2006); and *Praisesong for the Widow* (Marshall, 1983)] implore a dialogue about race, privilege, and power. The authors of these books provide the overt images and language Sophie’s students need to name racism, but the settings and characters of the novels may also allow students to distance themselves from the problem. However, in her robust sing-song voice, Sophie presses her students to critically reflect about the role each of them plays in our own society by using the context of the reading. With emphasis, she asks, “*If* [the plot of this book] were to happen to you, how would *you* respond? *If* you are innocent, it is by accident. In other words, you are *not* innocent.” We could have “just as easily been born in another time, another place,” she tells us.

Being in Sophie’s classroom reminds me of my own classroom experiences as an undergraduate English major. There were some classes for which I was not always caught up on the readings or had skim-read in the wee hours of the morning. Some professors would ask for the students’ take on this or that and I would volunteer to speak up early so that I could comment on the part I had actually read. My most memorable classes, though, were the ones that I read everything for. The most memorable ones were the ones where professors asked deep questions and we all gathered around the professor after class to continue the discussion. Some courses - - some professors - - have a lingering impact more than others and I get the feeling from the lively discussion in Sophie’s classroom that this will be one of those courses - - and that Sophie is one of those professors for these students.

Back in her office, I ask Sophie to tell me more about how she designs the Caribbean Literature class. She chooses each of the novels and changes the reading list a little bit each semester. “We don’t do PC [political correctness] in this class. We talk about what we have to talk about and then we figure out what to do.” She tells me that usually this class draws a large percentage of Black students due to the nature of the material. And she tells me those students are often “self-assured late-20-something Black women.” She describes one time during a previous semester that one of these Black women was presenting her portion of a novel and a young white male student said to her,

‘You seem to be very angry...’ And the young woman kind of *unfolded* - - she was tall - - she *unfolded* her 6 feet, turned around and said, ‘You got a problem with that?!’ It was a wonderful moment.

She described that rather than shutting it down after that, she encouraged the class to talk about what happened. Sophie captured the teachable moment that was found in both the discomfort and anger of her students.

“American culture tends not to encourage confrontation.”

Sophie’s teaching style is blunt and confrontational and by design, not meant to be comfortable. Her teaching reminds me of the kind of teaching Kevin Kumashiro describes in his book *Against Common Sense*. “Learning to teach toward social justice, he writes, “involves constantly engaging with the things that make whatever we are doing uncomfortable... (Kumashiro, 2004, p. 46).” I ask Sophie if there is something specific she does to create space for dialogue about race in her classroom.

You know, it’s the kind of classes I have and because it’s the nature of the material that I teach and the Caribbean class...you’re [reading about] a culture which is not American.

So, [I tell my students to] ‘Just 180 degrees change the parameters of what you see.’ And they eventually do it and it’s a lot of fun because suddenly I don’t know that they become multi-cultural, but *they are not locked into one vision of the world* and that’s if you can do that, you know undergraduates are not very limber intellectually, so if you can do that and tell them it’s okay to do that and it’s alright to feel this way, and yes, yes, people can be disgusting pigs to each other and it’s alright to *say* that they are...Um, it begins to change the dynamics of the class.

Even though Sophie concedes to becoming “Americanized” in contrast to her upbringing, she regularly urges her students to resist their “American” perspective on the world. She seems energized by the task of challenging her students to be more “limber intellectually” and equates the accomplishment of that task with broadening students’ worldviews. She goes on to describe how she encourages her students to see beyond their own culture while embracing the fact that we can never actually see the world through someone else’s eyes. Sophie tells me more about intentionally creating dialogue about race in her Caribbean literature class.

There are some things we can see and understand and we have to make peace with the fact that there are other things we can neither see nor understand because we’re not African, we’re not Caribbean, we’re not part of this culture, we’re not part of that culture. From my standpoint, if [my students] are willing to concede *that*, they can get across the divide, but they cannot tell the other person what to think and how to be... there is a way in which cultures do talk to each other, but no, I cannot know what it is to be a black woman in the United States and I never will. If they can get to that point, given the fact that the majority of them have never been exposed outside of their own culture, their own

family, their own very small high school - - I think that's wonderful. If I got them there, fine, fine.

So, encouraging students to see outside of themselves is one thing, but I wonder if it leads them to reflect on the ways they participate in the system and possibly benefit from white privilege. I ask Sophie if she sees herself impacting her students' ability to understand their own white privilege. She answers saying,

I don't know that my main challenge is to teach them how to un-racist-ize themselves, I think my main challenge is much more to teach them to look at something without making it nice and cute and non-offensive. That it's okay to talk about something offensive until we understand why it is offensive, and then maybe we can say, 'Alright, what do we do about it now,' and 'How do I not promote this kind of behavior?'

Her approach is confrontational, but simultaneously indirect. She does not call students out as racist per se or demand that they change. She creates a space of discomfort in the classroom that leads students to seek that next level of equilibrium - - coming to terms with the fact that racism and "offensive" things exist and deciding what to do with that knowledge.

I visit Sophie's class again on Election Day, November 4, 2008. The leaves on the trees outside are orange, rust-colored, yellow, and clinging tightly to the trees as they dance in the brisk wind. The sky provides a solid blue backdrop and our view of the forest through the wall of windows stands in strange contrast to the buzz and hum of the fluorescent lights inside. The fluttering leaves reflect the energy I feel in the room. When Sophie enters the room, she is wearing a periwinkle sweater with a bright multi-colored scarf. Fourteen students are present to continue discussing individual and collective values in *The Dew Breaker* (Danticat, 2004), a novel about torture and oppression in Haiti. As the students are settling in, I hear a young woman

announce to her fellow classmates that there will be a Black American Studies gathering from 6 to eleven in the student center tonight to watch election results - - “Oh, and... white people are welcome!” she exclaims. Another student tells her neighbor that she is taking her daughter with her to vote tonight. The energy, the buzz, the excitement in the room on this day is palpable.

“In Europe, Obama is called *mestizo*. He’s called mixed,” Sophie tells me during our meeting after class. To the Europeans, Obama is not Black. To her family in France, the concept of the U.S. potentially electing their first Black president does not compute. He is not technically Black. She thinks having a *mestizo* president would do remarkable things to the image of the U.S. abroad. “But, we shall see,” she says, “we shall see.”

“It’s okay to be an American - - just not a stupid one!”

During our last interview, I ask Sophie to tell me how she feels about being nominated as a white ally by one of her students. She turns to her computer, pulls up her email and reads the following note she recently received from a former student:

Dear Sophie, this class has taught me just how American I am [Sophie laughs]. I used to think that I could only be *so* American while having the influence of another culture, but I learned that I was wrong. I took a trip to Toronto, Canada, and I remember this horrible couple from Texas that was on the tour with my sister and me. They were so rude to the Canadians. For the rest of the trip, we were tongue-tied when people asked where we were from because we didn’t want anyone to know that we were Americans and associated with them. One thing I’ve learned from your class is that it’s okay to be an American - - just not a stupid one! Thank you for the lesson, Sincerely...

“So, there you have it!” she exclaims. Sophie does not directly answer my question about being a “white ally,” but reads this email to demonstrate that she feels good about having made an

impact on her student's worldview. She is satisfied with the burgeoning transformation of this young student. While reading the interview transcript, I read the words of the student's email again to myself, inserting the word "white" in place of the word "American".

This class has taught me just how *white* I am [Sophie laughs]. I used to think that I could only be *so white* while having the influence of another culture, but I learned that I was wrong. [While traveling, my sister and I] didn't want anyone to know that we were *white* and associated with the rude *whites*. One thing I've learned from your class is that it's okay to be a *white* person - - just not a stupid one!

While not entirely synonymous, calling whiteness "American" turns out to be the more palatable - - less confrontational - - way for Sophie to teach undergraduates to embrace a critical whiteness perspective even in her efforts to create a confrontational classroom. And with this particular student, she has accomplished her goal. Depending on who is doing the naming, Sophie both embraces and rejects being "Americanized" and as a chameleon, she is copacetic with the ambiguity.

CHAPTER 6

THE LISTENER

Sarah's office is in a poured-concrete, riot-proof - - generally cold, hard building. Wait, riot-proof? Yes, that is what I said, riot-proof. The building that houses Sarah's office along with many other offices, several lecture halls, and some smaller classrooms is conjectured to have been built in specific response to the rioting and damage caused by Vietnam and Kent State shooting protesters on this campus in 1970. When I arrive for our meeting, she has a student in her office, so I wait for a few minutes on the surprisingly comfortable black leather couch in the waiting area adjacent to her office. I find that meeting someone for the first time can be slightly awkward - - especially in a somewhat formal research interview context. I have no idea what to expect. I am just hoping the fact that she agreed to meet with me means that the interview will go well.

After a few minutes, Sarah and the student she is with come out of her office and continue to talk as they walk by me and around the corner to another office in the department. When I see her walk by my heart sinks just a little. I notice her olive complexion and dark brown hair. Is she Latina? Did the student nominator misunderstand that my study is supposed to be on *white* faculty? This is awkward. And so I briefly imagine myself asking her that question I had been asked as a child - - "Are you white, or what?" I am ashamed that in that in that brief instant I am skeptical about the existence of another white faculty-member who could be outspoken and intentional about racial justice action.

“They were always certain that we were something.”

Sarah eventually comes back to her office and she greets me. Her subtle Minnesota accent and relaxed laughter help put me at ease as we prepare for the interview in her cozy, book-lined office. We talk for a bit about her general life history. Sarah is the youngest of six children, part of a conservative Lutheran “very very religious” and “very musical” family. Her father has a Ph.D. in microbiology and her mother never finished high school; her father a conservative Republican and her mother a liberal Democrat. Having both grown up very poor, her parents worked hard to climb the social ladder and provide for their family. When Sarah was sixteen, her family moved to Idaho and within 2 months, her mother died of cancer. Sarah methodically describes her experience as a depressed, struggling undergraduate, mentored by an English professor who eventually encourages her to pursue a graduate degree and academic career.

Knowing I will have to rely on the transcripts to help digest all the biographical information she just entrusted me with, I transition awkwardly to my interview questions. “Tell me about your earliest understanding of race,” I begin. As it turns out, she got the “white or what” question when she was growing up just like I did. Like me, questions from strangers regarding her racial identity turned out to be a part of the earliest foundation for her understanding of racial difference. Sarah’s mother was olive-skinned and French-Canadian, which contributed to the fact that she stood out among the many fair-haired, blue-eyed Scandinavian kids she grew up with in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Idaho, and Utah.

At a very early age I remember that during the summer, my brothers and sisters and I would get very tan and people would say, ‘Are you white,’ which made no sense to me. [Sarah laughs.] I’d say, ‘No, I’m brown!’ Or they’d ask, ‘Is your mother part Black?’ I

asked her about it once and she said we might have an “Indian” [Native American] somewhere in the background... But because my mother was so dark they were always certain that we were *something*; we were something.

People (including me) still assume she is “something” other than white as an adult. She tells me about a time when a woman in an airport began speaking to her in Spanish. “[The woman] was so shocked when I said I couldn’t understand her. She said, ‘Aren’t you Mexican?! I said, ‘I’m sorry, no I’m not.’ And it was strange to feel like I should apologize for not being Mexican.”

Partially owing to people’s urge to give her a racial label, Sarah was aware as a young child that she lived in a predominantly white community. During high school, Sarah moved to Idaho Falls, which she describes as “a very white place.”

We had an English teacher who was African-American and her two children were at our school. And then I had a friend who sang in the choir with me who moved to Atlanta as soon as she could. She was African-American and had been adopted into a white family.

That was it.

So, while Sarah continues to fill me in on her earliest life history, I find myself feeling relieved that Sarah is indeed white and eligible to participate in my study, but at the same time I absolutely hate that I have fallen into the trap of wanting someone to fit nicely into the label of whiteness.

“My mother was very racist.”

Just like Ben and Sophie, Sarah was exposed to racism early in her childhood and within her family. She tells me about her own racist mother.

My mother was very racist. She had a real streak and my dad and she used to argue about it over and over. I was too young when she passed away, but I have often thought that that was one reason why I'd kind of paid attention to [race issues].

Race came up a lot in family conversations. Sarah remembers her father often chastising her mother saying, "What are you thinking? What are you saying? Don't talk like that! Don't be like that!" Despite being racist, Sarah's mother was infatuated with Bobby Kennedy. Sarah thinks her mother was somewhat critically aware of her own racism, but "[racism] was so ingrained in her and maybe it was because people were always asking her what race she was because of her darker skin." I am thinking that there is something about being willing to name the racist part of one's identity that opens the door for embracing critical whiteness.

Sarah's father was a microbiologist who encountered dozens of ex-patriots from around the world in his lab. His closest friends were Indian, Egyptian, and Iranian. These are the family friends who came over to the house for dinner, and Sarah grew up playing with their children. Having so much direct exposure and experience with cultural diversity through her father's working community had a powerful effect on Sarah's understanding of race; an experiential understanding of race that most other children in the upper Midwest were likely not privy to. **"I can so clearly remember her grabbing him and whacking him with the ruler."**

Beyond being exposed to racism by her family, Sarah has a searing memory from her childhood of a little Black boy in her first grade class who was humiliated by the teacher. It was 1975 and this little boy always came to school dressed in plaid pants and a little sport coat. The little boy was spanked by their teacher with a ruler so often that it made Sarah sick. "I can so clearly remember her grabbing him and whacking him with the ruler. It made me sick. I mean, I got so nervous and so scared that I would wake up in the morning and get sick." She was so

nervous and scared for him that her mother kept her home from school. “I don’t know how long it went on - - maybe a couple of weeks. Finally, my mom said, ‘I think you’re afraid to go to school.’” Sarah finally told her mother about the little boy who was constantly getting hit and yelled at. When word got to her father who happened to be on the school board, the hitting and yelling stopped. “I remember my mother saying to me, ‘The reason the teacher was doing that is because he is a Black boy.’” So, by six years old, Sarah says she became aware that “something was going on in the world that wasn’t quite kosher.”

Since then, and in her professional capacity, Sarah has been told that she has a strong reaction to racism - - especially when it is so blatant that it “hits her in the face.” After observing a racist incident together on campus, one of her faculty colleagues said to her, “I am a very large Black man and you are reacting more than I am! You’re right, it’s really bad. Amen, sister!” She also described to me how she fumed throughout an entire semester of a class she took in graduate school. She tells me that the professor would say things like, “All the indigenous people in Brazil are leaving the countryside because they see Coca Cola commercials and Baywatch and want a piece of the good life.” She would ask, “‘What about deforestation, mudslides, or having no place to live?’ ‘Well, there’s that too,’ he would say. That’s the neo-conservative mindset going on, you know.” She also describes to me an incident that happened while she sat in on a tenure hearing during graduate school. Sarah audibly gasped at a racist remark and her dissertation advisor had to reach out and grab her arm to shut her up and calm her down.

How about here on this campus? I ask Sarah how she helps students navigate encounters they have that might be fueled by racism here on this campus. She tells me about one of the students she is currently mentoring, Ashley, who brought to her attention some difficulties she was having registering for classes. Ashley is a McNair scholar who was trying to register for

independent study hours during the summer in order to qualify for financial aid. Sarah thinks it was because of her appearance - - as a young black woman with dreadlocks - - that the academic advisor was making the process so difficult. It was as if she assumed Ashley was trying to cheat the system or something instead of seeing her as an eager scholar going above and beyond to complete requirements outside of her major course of study. “I finally had to call the admissions counselor and confirm that this was indeed my student who should be allowed to take an independent study with me. My gut was saying that she was not giving her credibility because Ashley is from Chicago and is an inner-city African-American student. Meanwhile, Ashley is blaming herself for everything - - thinking she can’t get it together.” Sarah continually assures Ashley that she is doing exactly what she should be doing. These are the kinds of everyday race-related obstacles Sarah sees Ashley and other students of color up against on her campus.

“There [are] Ku Klux Klaners around and Black Power Students.”

Since she has such strong reactions and sensitivity to racism, I am interested to hear more instances - - overt or otherwise - - that Sarah has witnessed on our campus. When I probe for more stories, she lays out her perceptions of the student body. She describes that

There is a divide in the classrooms often between, it’s not always black and white, it’s often between rural and city. And then you get the racial things going on as well. And, you know, we are on the edge of the south, the northern part of the south, that’s where we live. And there's, you know, Ku Klux Klaners around and Black Power Students and this is part of our issue.

“Do you think the demographic of our student body impacts the way you teach,” I ask. She smiles and says she enjoys the challenge of working with what she has - - and meeting student where they are. She has very little patience for faculty who complain about the caliber of students at our

institution. Having completed a post-doctorate fellowship at an ivy-league institution, Sarah certainly has a range of experiences to compare.

Here [at our institution], you have to prep, you have to think, and a lot of the other [faculty] here don't want to have to work that hard. Some people only want to teach the best and the brightest because they're more fun and easier. So if you are not interested in teaching the students who are here - - which some people only want to teach elite students - - then find someplace else to be!

Sarah's empathy and passionate commitment to working with the students she has shines through her frustration with peers who complain.

In the first class of Sarah's I observe, Sarah teaches in an auditorium that could seat 200. There are 54 students in attendance on this day. I can both hear and feel the strong draft of cold air blowing from the air duct above: mildly distracting. Sarah's teaching attire matches the room - - grey slacks; black top::grey acoustic panels; black board. Out of 54 students, I notice 7 students of color. This is fairly typical of the racial demographic in most classes at our institution. While lecturing, Sarah paces back and forth across the front of the steep-seated room, projecting her voice well to fill the large lecture hall. She uses her hands for emphasis and interrupts herself to pose questions. She uses PowerPoint slides and a document image projector in tandem to hold the students' attention but her lecture veers artfully to and from the slides. A handful of the same students volunteer to answer her questions and she calls on them by name and we are only a few weeks into the semester. The most frequent question-answering students are also the ones who gather around waiting to speak to her after class is over. In this large, less-than-intimate setting, Sarah has established a community atmosphere ripe for dialogue. Her energy, though reserved, is positive and magnetic. She employs mandatory office hours to break

the ice with her students. She knows which students are looking for work, who has kids to care for, who is struggling with health issues - - and she tells me stories about several of them. Sarah tells me that once her students have spent ten or fifteen minutes with her in her office they are much more likely to speak up and answer difficult questions during class; and they are much more likely to come back to her for help. Now I know why there is a student in her office just about every time I stop by.

After class we walk across campus together. It is quite a trek from the lecture hall back to her office. It is a beautiful afternoon, though, and even though we are walking quickly, I cannot help but soak in the clear blue skies and fresh green on the trees. Sarah is only a few years my senior, so I feel like our connection is quickly becoming more natural and collegial than it did with the other two participants. While we are walking she tells me about her preparations for third-year review. She is on her way to meet with her department chair. The stress of becoming tenured weighs heavily even as she finds herself volunteering for committee service and mentoring opportunities. It is very hard for her to say no.

Before our next interview, I find myself waiting in the lounge outside of Sarah's office next to some caladium and palm plants. Again, she has a student with her. While I wait, I am thinking about the fact that today was my last day to teach *Schooling in a Diverse Society* to pre-service teacher education students. I was invigorated by the connection I made with several of my students in just a few weeks and I am sad to be leaving. After class today, two of my students, Dana and Jeanette, were eager to continue our conversation about Alan Johnson's book, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*. I am going to miss these chats with curious, thoughtful students. Teaching about privilege has helped me to be an active participant and transformative presence in the dialogue about race and racism. I can tell by the kind of genuine connection

Sarah has with her students both in and outside the classroom, that she is committed to doing the same. Her commitment, however, is not without some reservation.

“I tend to be a little nervous about people seeing what I do in the classroom as political action itself, even though it may be.”

I ask Sarah what it means to her to be identified as an ally and she expresses some nervousness about the label - - not wanting to alienate any of her students. She says that the day I introduced myself and explained my research she thought, “I hope that everybody in this classroom realizes that [being an ally] does not mean that I’m doing my own personal version of affirmative action.” She tells me that some of her hesitation stems from being in her particular field and some stems from her research topics, but that she “tend[s] to be a little nervous about people seeing what [she does] in the classroom as political action itself, even though it may be.” Though she does not say it, I think another factor may be that she is a pre-tenure assistant professor who is worried that any effort she spends outside the track toward tenure might jeopardize her future at the university.

My norms aren’t necessarily out there [in the open], but they are always informing what I’m doing. [I don’t want to] force students to agree with me, but they certainly are aware of [where I’m coming from] by the end of the semester. But I also think it should take a whole semester for them to figure that out a little at a time.

Sarah is cautious. I can tell on a number of occasions that she chooses her words very carefully, always aware that the voice recorder is on. I never actually ask her specifically about her political affinity. It never seems appropriate to ask and it probably does not matter, but I find it interesting that in an election year, it does not come up explicitly. We do talk some about the excitement and energy she feels from her students surrounding the election.

Students have been really fascinating, last semester, of course, I was teaching a pretty large class, as you'll recall and the day or the couple of days after the election, you could feel that... you could feel the energy change in that class and they were clearly... lots of the students were really excited about President Obama coming in the office and among my Black American Studies students, this has been huge. I mean, they talked about it all the time and even if they aren't necessarily liberal or progressive in their politics, just the idea of having an African-American man in that office clearly has them jazzed. So that part of it is really good. He gave us you know, in his "Non-State of the Union Address," a great line about being responsible to your community. You have to go to school because that makes you responsible. I know that almost ... I *bet* all my colleagues mentioned it in class.

I have the feeling that Sarah is intentionally moderate. She is a peace-maker who is able to understand multiple sides of a story. She admits as much when she describes to me her own scholarship. She tells me that some of her interview subjects once said to her, "We can't tell whether you are for us or against us!" And she also tells me that reviewers of her scholarly articles will call for her to claim a more critical or conservative angle, but the ones who "get" her appreciate the power in her subtlety.

Speaking of her research, Sarah comments about my research process and what it is like to be a research subject. "It's really weird to not just be a research subject but to be a research subject who actually teaches the [research method] that you're doing: three 90-minute interviews." Sarah also engages in meta-analysis throughout our time together. Several times I notice that after asking a question she pauses and draws her eyes to the side, thinking, pre-analyzing her answer before responding.

“When I am in the classroom I try to get students to ask questions instead of making statements.”

Since Sarah’s classes are so large, I ask her how she is able to engage students in dialogue about race. The foundation for the dialogue happens in the classroom, but deeper dialogue more often occurs during her mandatory office hours.

I just wear the fact that I don’t know [everything] on my sleeve and ask questions and everyone is fine with that. Not everybody can do that. When I am in the classroom I try to get students to ask questions instead of making statements. By being curious...and not afraid to ask questions of my students. I’ll say something like, ‘Forgive me, what do you mean by that, I’ve been living in Utah for ten years.’ I’ll usually get some laughter and a lot of education that way.

Once students figure out that Sarah is approachable and genuinely interested in learning from them too, the opportunities for deeper dialogue emerge. She not only talks to her students, she also listens. Sarah’s curiosity is something that anchors her dialogue with students.

“I think he just mentally blocks out the fact that there is a white woman in political science teaching diversity and politics.”

One of the classes I observe Sarah teach is cross-listed with the Black American Studies program. She has taught the course for three years and it bothers her that the BAS program director never can remember her name. “It’s as if he cannot fathom that a young white woman is teaching this class. I think he just mentally blocks out the fact that there is a white woman...teaching diversity and politics.” She is hesitant to tell me this. In fact, she does not until I probe. I know she thinks it makes her sound like she is looking for some kind of recognition or affirmation. She does not necessarily want recognition, but she does want to be acknowledged as a colleague. Experiences like this could potentially serve as a barrier to

persistent listening and participation needed to maintain dialogue about race. Sarah is committed to being an active ally because of who she is and who she is becoming and will not be thwarted by departmental politics.

CHAPTER 7

SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

Here again are the research questions with which I began this study:

- How do professors in this study who have been deemed by their students as white allies understand and experience their own whiteness?
- In what ways do the professors in this study act upon their commitment to antiracist action in their interaction with college students and colleagues?
- How do we (both researcher and participants) make meaning of these stories and experiences of being white and committing to antiracist action?

In this chapter I will answer the research questions above through a lens of critical pedagogy. As I described in the first chapter, critical pedagogy can be characterized as an approach to teaching and learning that recognizes the social construction of knowledge and that problematizes the inherent power dynamics of our society (Wink, 2005; McLaren, 2007; Kincheloe, 2005). Wink (2005) breaks critical pedagogy down into three key components. To engage in critical pedagogy is to **name**, to **critically reflect**, and to **act**: each of these elements occurs in the context of exposing and problematizing systems of oppression. As I have presented in the preceding three chapters, it is through education and exposure that the participants come to a place of “**naming**” their own privilege. Then, by empathizing with their students and colleagues, they enter a posture of **critical reflection**. Finally, I observe each participant taking transformative **action** by confronting systemic racism and engaging their students in dialogue about racism and oppression.

Education, Exposure, Empathy, and Engagement

Through composing each portrait, I discovered the answers to my research questions: how each participant came to know his/her own whiteness and privilege, specific examples of his/her antiracist actions among students and colleagues, and how each participant makes meaning of their commitment to antiracist action.

Ben, Sophie, and Sarah are each highly *educated* by both school and life experiences, *exposed* as witnesses to overt and systemic racism, *empathetic* toward others, and actively *engaged* in dialogue with their students about racial justice. Through formal education and informal exposure to racism, each participant comes to his/her own understanding of whiteness and privilege. They make meaning of their experiences by telling stories of becoming advocates and allies for their students and colleagues. Each are engaged in dialogue about race and anti-racist action both in and outside the classroom. The post-tenure participants are willing to fully embrace and prioritize their commitment to antiracist action, while the pre-tenure participant is fully committed personally but more hesitant to embrace what might be perceived within her department as politically risky behavior. While each of the three participants in this study is unique, I find four dominant themes emerging from their stories: education, exposure, empathy, and engagement.

Educated

Since a criterion for participants in this study is that they be university professors, it seems a little obvious for me to identify education as a common theme among their experiences. I do not, however, want to downplay the role that their specific educational experiences have played in the shaping of each participant's commitment to anti-racist action. These three are life-long learners. They are people passionate about the pursuit of knowledge in each of their

respective fields. Sarah envies the retired “community listener” in her classroom who is sitting in “just for fun.” While I did not ask explicitly, based on some of their comments, all three participants have most likely had exposure to critical theories and literature. Each also has had rich liberal arts educations, however it is the learning outside the classroom they cite as having the greatest impact on their embracing of antiracist action.

Exposed

These participants share more than impressive educational credentials. They each describe a kind of informal education that happens through life experiences and specific instances of exposure to varying ideas about race and racism. They learn so much in their earliest years from the attitudes and actions (or inactions) of their parents and friends. Ben’s mother taught him about race in the way she interacted with her housekeeper. Sophie learned from her parents and grandparents about the white colonial expectations for her and the way she should interact with “others.” And Sarah learned from her family’s dinner-time debates that even in one family, there can be disparate ideas about race. Like Ben, Sophie describes a childhood exposed to racism, but unlike Ben’s parents, her parents did not resist racist ideologies. Each of these participants has led deeply dynamic, culturally rich lives, which stand in contrast to the experiences of their mostly rural white students; many of whom have lived isolated, mono-cultural lives thus far. Whether intentional or not, the mere exposure to diversity these participants have experienced has shaped them and informs their ways of being in their current contexts.

Empathetic

Each of the three participants describe having a sense of comfort and identification that comes from direct exposure and time spent with people of color and in a variety of cultures. In

fact, Sarah describes being more *uncomfortable* when she finds herself in an all-white working environment. “I’m uncomfortable because I’m used to being around people whose English is not that good [in an international context]...” Because of her experiences growing up in Northern Africa, Sophie describes that she has a “natural comfort with Arabs.” At an early age, both Sophie and Sarah have had to navigate their identities in contexts where they were considered “other” because of their family’s religion, nationality, and appearance. Interestingly, however, both label at least part of their families of origin as racist. Ben, on the other hand, identifies his parents as civil rights advocates, but admits to being “polluted” by racism and claims that he now finds he is most comfortable spending time with his African American colleagues. I both observe and hear stories about each of the participants deeply empathizing with and listening to their students. Listening is another theme I hear among all three participants which provides a foundation for empathy and ally-status.

Engaged

In addition to being educated, exposed, and empathetic, I find that each of the participants is not afraid to ask hard questions: a quality which enables them to engage their students in difficult dialogue. They are naturally curious and willing to engage in the kind of dialogue that some might find too uncomfortable or not appropriate for the classroom. They are purposefully engaged in conversations that professors unaware of white privilege would not think to have. They are actively listening to their students and especially to the voices of students who are often marginalized. They are invested, they are all-in, and they are engaged. While Ben and Sarah strive to create a comfortable space for their students, Sophie’s strategy is to create an uncomfortable one. Ben, Sophie, and Sarah have the same goals in mind: they aim to create space for students to engage in dialogue about race and challenge students to use different lenses

than their own to see the world. They approach those goals from individual and unique angles. Of the three, Ben is most actively engaged and recognized (perhaps due to his gender, age, and position) in the community as an antiracist ally as is evidenced by his invitation to speak at Black graduation.

Answering the Research Questions

- How do professors deemed by their students as white allies understand and experience their own whiteness?

Each of the participants acknowledges experiencing whiteness as privilege. Through their stories I hear them make meaning of the way their whiteness reveals an *othering* of their peers as they navigate social and educational experiences. This understanding plays a large role in each participant's desire to do whiteness differently.

- In what ways do the professors in this study act upon their commitment to antiracist action in their interaction with college students and colleagues?

Sarah reacts strongly to instances of racism she observes by calling it out and naming it whether in the context of serving on departmental committees or helping a student navigate academic advisement. She is proactive in claiming a mentorship role with McNair Scholars. Ben sees the all-white faces of presidential scholarship recipients and reacts by making the university leadership aware of its glaring oversight. Ben is proactive through the creation of a leadership retreat for young Black men. Sophie disrupts the worldviews of her students by problematizing their American-ness and subsequently their whiteness.

- How do we (both researcher and participants) make meaning of these stories and experiences of being white and committing to antiracist action?

Each of the preceding portraits represents the collaborative meaning-making of the researcher and participants. Each answer, each follow-up question, and each part of the portrait composition process are snapshots of meaning. The narratives help us to make meaning of our experiences.

Strengths and Limitations

As with any research process, I encountered limitations while conducting this portrait study. Least of which includes the fact that “being White and working to challenge racism [can be seen as] both a contradiction and an obstacle” (Manglitz, Johnson-Bailey, & Cervero, 2005, p. 1258). Upon selecting my three participants, I initially felt somewhat disappointed that these three were not some of the more prominent coalition-building racial justice allies that I knew to exist at the university. On the other hand, I am reassured by the fact that these three were nominated by their own students on whom they have made transformative impressions. These participants did not self-nominate and do not seek recognition for their white ally status.

It would have been interesting to do a focus group interview with all three participants had our schedules permitted. Meeting together might have sparked the telling of more stories, provided encouragement for ally work among participants, or revealed more insight into the experience of being a professor and white ally on this particular college campus. I also would have liked to ask each of them about their exposure to critical theory or literature in as much as that knowledge might have an impact on our collaborative meaning-making.

While complete transparency on my part and a search for *spark* contribute to the trustworthiness and essence of portraiture as a methodology, I find that it is difficult to write myself into the research in a way that does not come off as completely self-centered and reifying of whiteness. My biggest fear is that reading this study will leave a taste of self-congratulation or worse, unacknowledged racism in the reader’s minds. I also continue to struggle with trying to

avoid the conflation of *spark* with some idealized non-complicit antiracist status held by each of the participants. Yet I paint the imperfect striving-to-be-ally reality of each participant as *spark*. This dialectic remains and brings me back to the paradox I mentioned earlier in this paper, which is the “place of active discomfort” that Warren (2001) describes when he writes about “doing whiteness differently.” Embracing the ambiguity that one can be racist and antiracist at the same time acknowledges the system of power that exists along with one’s agency to challenge it (Manglitz, Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2005).

Final Reflections

Why do these stories matter? How can this research inform policy and practice? Beyond bringing my readers to a place of critical self-reflection, one might think these portraits contain fairly mundane, non-earth-shattering life stories. However, it is possible that stories like these could change university culture and the expectations we have for university professors. The professors in this study are doing whiteness in a way that acknowledges and subverts white privilege while encouraging others to do the same. At the very least, I hope that these stories make accessible to the reader the reality of university professors doing whiteness from a critical whiteness perspective. For further study, in addition to telling more stories of professors understanding race-based privilege one might also examine stories of critical awareness as it interfaces with all under-represented groups. Tierney (1993) posits that within the university, communities of difference that are built around the organizing concept of *agape* (unselfish love), a blending of critical and postmodern theories, require faculty members to engage in praxis: not just theory building, but theory put into action. Whether it is for the sake of just *knowing* white allies exist at the university or knowing that *being* a white ally is possible, I hope the *spark* in these stories contributes to the literature by capturing critical whiteness.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alimo, C.J. (2012). From dialogue to actions: The impact of cross-race intergroup dialogue on the development of white college students as racial allies. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 45*(1), 36-59
- Allen, R. L. (2004). Whiteness and critical pedagogy. *Educational philosophy and theory, 36*(2), 121-136.
- Applebaum, B. (2004). Social justice education, moral agency, and the subject of resistance. *Educational theory, 54*(1), 59-72.
- Atkinson, R. (1998). *The life story interview*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Baxter-Magolda, M. B. (2003). Identity and learning: Student affairs' role in transforming higher education. *Journal of College Student Development, 44*(1), 231-247.
- Boler, M. (2004). Teaching for hope: The ethics of shattering world views. In D. Liston & J. Garrison (Eds.), *Teaching, learning, and loving: Reclaiming passion in the educational practice* (pp. 117-131). New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2003). The style of color blindness: How to talk nasty about minorities without sounding racist. Chapter 3 in *Racism without racists: color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States* (pp. 53-73). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bottery, M., Wong, P. M., Wright, N., & Ngai, G. (2009). Portrait methodology and educational leadership: putting the person first. *International studies in educational administration, 37*(3), 82-96.
- Broido, E.M. (2000). The development of social justice allies during college: A phenomenological investigation. *Journal of college student development, 41*(1), 3-18.

- Brookfield, S. (2003). Putting the critical back into critical pedagogy. *Journal of transformative education, 1*(2), 141-149.
- Case, K. A. & Hemmings, A. (2005). Distancing strategies: White women preservice teachers and antiracist curriculum. *Urban education 40*(6), 606-626.
- Chapman, T. K. (2007). Interrogating classroom relationships and events: Using portraiture and critical race theory in educational research. *Educational Researcher, 36*(3), 156-162.
- Chávez, A. F., Guido-DiBrito, F., & Mallory, S. L. (2003). Learning to value the “other”: A framework of individual diversity development. *Journal of College Student Development, 44*(4), 453-469.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Cliff, M. (1995). *Abeng. 1984*. New York: Plume.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). Toward a new vision: Race, class, and gender as categories of analysis and connection. In M. Adams, W. Blumenfield, R. Castaneda, H. Hackman, M. Peters, & X. Zuniga (Eds.), *Readings for diversity & social justice: An anthology on racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, & classism* (pp. 457-462). New York: Routledge.
- Condé, M. (1992). *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Danticat, E. (2004). *The dew breaker*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Delpit, L. D. (1995). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people’s children. Chapter 2 in *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom* (pp. 21-47). New York: New Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (1970). *The research act*. Chicago: Aldine.

- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2, 1-28.
- Denzin, N. K. (2014). *Interpretive autoethnography*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Diller, A. (1998). Facing the torpedo fish: Becoming a philosopher of one's own education. *Philosophy of education society*, Ed., Steve Toler.
- Dilley, P. (2000). Conducting successful interviews: Tips for intrepid research. *Theory into practice*, 39(3), 131-137.
- DuBois, W. E. B. (1982). *The souls of black folk. 1903. 14th Signet classic printing ed.* New York: Signet Classics-New American Library.
- Edwards, K. E. (2006). Aspiring social justice ally identity development: A conceptual model. *NASPA Journal*, 43(4), 39-60.
- Fine, M. (1997). A letter to Paulo. Chapter 5 in Freire, P. (Ed.), *Mentoring the mentor: A critical dialogue with Paulo Feire* (pp. 89-97). New York: Peter Lang.
- Foster, M. (1991). Constancy, connectedness, constraints in the lives of African American women teachers. *National Association of Women's Studies Journal*, 3(2), 70-97.
- Freire, P. (2001). *Pedagogy of the oppressed, 30th anniversary edition*. New York: Continuum.
- Garza, S. J. (2000). As if bereav'd of light: Decoding whiteness in my academia. In N. M. Rodriguez & L. E. Villaverde (Eds.), *Dismantling white privilege: Pedagogy, politics, and whiteness* (pp. 59-74). New York: Peter Lang.
- Gaztambide-Fernandez, R. A. (2009). *The Best of the Best*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture, in: *The Interpretation of cultures; selected essays* (pp. 3-30). New York: Basic Books.

- Giroux, H. A. (2004). Critical pedagogy and the postmodern/modern divide: Towards a pedagogy of democratization. *Teacher education quarterly*, 31(1), 31-47.
- Greene, M. (2003). In search of critical pedagogy. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R. D. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 97-112). New York: Routledge.
- Hackmann, D. G. (2002). Using portraiture in educational leadership research. *International journal of leadership in education*, 5(1), 51-60.
- Hill, D. A. (2005). The poetry in portraiture: Seeing subjects, hearing voices, and feeling contexts. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11, 95-105.
- Hinchey, P. H. (2006). *Becoming a critical educator: Defining a classroom identity, designing a critical pedagogy*. New York: Peter Lang.
- hooks, b. (1993). Transformative pedagogy and multiculturalism. In T. Perry & J. Fraser (Eds.), *Freedom's plow: Teaching in the multicultural classroom*, (pp. 91-97). New York: Routledge.
- Hyttén, K., & Adkins, A. (2001). Thinking through a pedagogy of whiteness. *Educational Theory*, 51(4), 433-450.
- Hyttén, K., & Warren, J. (2003). Engaging whiteness: How racial power gets reified in education. *Qualitative studies in education*, 16(1), 51-63.
- Jennings, M. E. & Lynn, M. (2005). The house that race built: Critical pedagogy, African-American education, and the re-conceptualization of a critical race pedagogy. *Educational foundations*, 19(3-4), 15-32.
- John, M. E. (2006). *Unburnable*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Johnson, A. (2006). *Privilege, power, and difference*, 2nd edition. Boston: McGraw Hill.

- Johnson, L. (2002). "My eyes have been opened:" White teachers and racial awareness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53 (2), 153-167.
- Kena, G., Aud, S., Johnson, F., Wang, X., Zhang, J., Rathbun, A., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., and Kristapovich, P. (2014). *The Condition of Education 2014* (NCES 2014-083). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved [January 15, 2015] from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.
- Kincaid, J. (1985). *Annie John: A Novel*. Macmillan.
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). *Critical pedagogy: Primer*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Kirshman, A. O. (2005). The journey toward understanding whiteness among student affairs professionals: An action research study in anti-racist education (Doctoral dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, 2005). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 66 (12).
- Kozol, J. (2005). Still separate, still unequal: American's educational apartheid. *Harper's magazine*, 311, no. 1864, 41-54.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1997). I know why this doesn't feel empowering: A critical race analysis of critical pedagogy. Chapter 7 in P. Freire (Ed.), *Mentoring the mentor: A critical dialogue with Paulo Feire* (pp. 127-141). New York: Peter Lang.
- Lather, P. A. (1986). Research as praxis. *Harvard educational review*, 56(3), 257-277.
- Lather, P. A. (1995). The validity of angels: Interpretive and textual strategies in researching the lives of women with HIV/AIDS. *Qualitative inquiry*, 1(1), 41-68.
- Lather, P. A. (1996). *Troubling Clarity: The Politics of Accessible Language*. Harvard Educational Review, 66(3), 525-45.

- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1994) *I've known rivers: Lives of loss and liberation*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1983) *The good high school: Portraits of character and culture*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. & Davis, J. H. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lawrence, S. M. & Tatum, B. D. (1997). White educators as allies: Moving from awareness to action. In M. Fine, L. Weis, L. C. Powell, & L. Mun Wong (Eds.), *Off white: Readings on race, power, and society*. New York: Routledge.
- Leonardo, Z. (2002). The souls of white folk: Critical pedagogy, whiteness studies, and globalization discourse. *Race, ethnicity and education*, 5(1), 29-50.
- Leonardo, Z. (2005). *Critical pedagogy and race*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Levine-Rasky, C. (2000). Framing whiteness: Working through the tensions in introducing whiteness to educators. *Race, ethnicity and education*, 3(3), 271-292.
- Lipsitz, G. (1998). *The possessive investment in whiteness: How white people profit from identity politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Loewen, J. (2005). *Sundown towns: A hidden dimension of American racism*. New York: The New Press.
- Manglitz, E., Johnson-Bailey, J., & Cervero, R. (2005). Struggles of hope: How White adult educators challenge racism. *The Teachers College Record*, 107(6), 1245-1274.
- Marshall, P. (1983). *Praisesong for the Widow*. New York: Putnam's.

- McIntosh, P. (1988). *White privilege and male privilege: a personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies / Peggy McIntosh*. Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, Center for Research on Women, 1988.
- McLaren, P. (1993). Multiculturalism and the postmodern critique: Towards a pedagogy of resistance and transformation. *Cultural studies*, 7(1), 118-146.
- McLaren, P. (2007). *Life in schools. An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education, 5th edition*. Boston: Pearson Publishing.
- Milner, H. R., Flowers, L. A., Moore, E., Moore, J. L., & Flowers, T. A. (2003). Preservice teachers' awareness of multiculturalism and diversity. *The High School Journal*, 87(1), 63-70.
- Michie, G. (2005). *See you when we get there: Teaching for change in urban schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Moon, D. (1999). White enculturation and bourgeois ideology: The discursive production of 'good (white) girls.' In Nakayama, T. & Martin, J. (Eds.), *Whiteness: The communication of social identity* (pp. 177–197). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nunez, E. (2000). *Bruised Hibiscus*. Ballantine Books.
- Park, J. J., & Denson, N. (2009). Attitudes and Advocacy: Understanding Faculty Views on Racial/Ethnic Diversity. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(4), 415-438.
- Parker, L. (1998). "Race is race ain't:" An exploration of the utility of critical race theory in qualitative research in education. *International journal of qualitative research in education*, 11(1), 43-55.
- Parker, L., & Stovall, D. O. (2004). Actions following words: Critical race theory connects to critical pedagogy. *Educational philosophy and theory*, 36(2), 167-182.

- Reason, R. S., Scales, T. C., & Roosa Millar, E. A. (2005). Encouraging the development of racial justice allies. *New directions for student services* no. 110 Summer 2005 Chapter 5 p. 55-66.
- Scheurich, J. J. (1993). Toward a white discourse on white racism. *Educational researcher*, 22(8), 5-10.
- Schniedewind, N. (2005). "There ain't no white people here!": The transforming impact of teachers' racial consciousness on students and schools. *Equity & excellence in education*, 38, 280-289.
- Schwandt, T. (2001). *Dictionary of qualitative inquiry*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sleeter, C. E. (1993). Advancing a white discourse: A response to Scheurich. *Educational researcher*, 22(8), 13-15.
- Sleeter, C. E. (1996). Multicultural education, social positionality, and whiteness. Chapter 7 in *Multicultural education as social activism* (pp. 118–143). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- spark. (n.d.). Dictionary.com Unabridged. Retrieved January 06, 2015, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/spark>
- spark. (n.1.) OED Online. Oxford University Press, December 2014. Retrieved January 06, 2015, from OED.com website.
- Tatum, B. D. (1999). Lighting candles in the dark: One black woman's response to white antiracist narratives. In C. Clark & J. O'Donnell (Eds.), *Becoming and unbecoming white: Owning and disowning a racial identity* (pp. 56-63).
- Thompson, A. (2003). Tiffany, friend of people of color: White investments in antiracism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(1), 7-29.

- Thompson, C., Shaefer, E., & Brod, H. (2003). *White men challenging racism: 35 personal stories*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Tierney, W. G. (1993). *Building communities of difference: Higher education in the twenty-first century*. Westport, Conn: Bergin & Garvey.
- Tierney, W. G. (2014, December 12). Christmas 2014 [Web log comment]. Retrieved from <http://21stcenturyscholar.org/2014/12/12/christmas-2014/>
- Warren, J. (2001). Performing whiteness differently: Rethinking the abolitionist project. *Educational theory*, 51(4), 451-466.
- Wink, J. (2005). *Critical pedagogy: Notes from the real world*. Boston: Pearson.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Email to Students

Subject: Request for Nominations

Dear Student:

My name is Melanie Stivers and I am a doctoral candidate in the department of Education Administration and Higher Education at SIUC. I obtained your email address from the [university] Registered Student Organization president's listserv or from the Director of the McNair Scholar's Program. There will be no future emails regarding this research.

I am conducting a qualitative portrait study of white faculty members on this campus who are identified by students as "white allies." In Beverly Daniel Tatum's (1999) chapter "Lighting Candles in the Dark" in the book *Becoming and Unbecoming White* (Clark and O'Donnell, Eds.) she defines the "white ally," as "the actively antiracist white person who is intentional in his or her ongoing efforts to interrupt the cycle of racism" (p. 61).

Please nominate one (or more) of your professors who you believe personifies the above definition of "white ally."

Name of Nominee:

Your Relationship to Nominee (teacher/student, advisor/advisee, etc.):

Reason for Nomination (Please write a brief description of your observation of this person as a "white ally"):

If you would be willing to talk to me further about your experience with the person you nominated, please include your name and contact information below.

(Optional) Your name:

(Optional) Your email address:

Thanks for your participation!!

Melanie J. Stivers

APPENDIX B

Email to Nominees

Subject: Request to Participate in Research

Dear Dr. [Name],

My name is Melanie Stivers and I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Administration and Higher Education department at [university name]. I am conducting research for my dissertation entitled: Portraits of White Antiracist Faculty. The purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of white faculty members at [our university] who have demonstrated a commitment to antiracist action.

My criteria for participant selection includes that each participant must be a current faculty member at [our university], identify as white, and identify as being committed to racial justice. You have been nominated by a current registered student organization president or a current or former McNair Scholar at [our university].

I estimate the overall time commitment for participation in this study to be approximately 10 hours. I plan to interview each participant three times over the course of 8 months (May 2008-December 2008). The interviews will last approximately 90 minutes each. All interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. I will also observe at least three class sessions (as per each participant's choosing) during that same 8 month time-frame.

Please let me know via email at your earliest convenience if you would be willing to participate in my study. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Melanie J. Stivers

VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Melanie J. Stivers

mjstivers@gmail.com

Baylor University
Bachelor of Science in Education, English, May 1997

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Master of Science in Education, College Student Personnel, May 2004

Special Honors and Awards:
Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant, College of Education,
Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2007

Dissertation Title:
Capturing Critical Whiteness: Portraits of White Antiracist Professors

Major Professor: Patrick Dilley