


7-10-2018

Teacher Talk: How Many White, Middle-class, Female Educators Perpetuate White Privilege in School

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TEACHER TALK: HOW MANY WHITE, MIDDLE-CLASS, FEMALE EDUCATORS
PERPETUATE WHITE PRIVILEGE IN SCHOOL

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education with an
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August, 2018

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to a number of people who pushed my thinking, believed in me, and my work. The first person I dedicate this work to is my wife. Carrie, I didn't understand upon entering this program, three years ago that I would be asking to take on so much. You are my best friend, my loudest cheerleader, my sounding board, my shoulder to cry on, the mother of my children, and my greatest love. You are constantly the voice of perseverance in my ear and written in outrageous emoticons on my phone. You took on so much, trying to be both of us to our girls, organizing our life, keeping things running, and my head above water. I love and respect your equity lens and the work you do both in schools and with our daughters to dismantle white supremacy and fight for a better world.

To my sister, Kim. The universe must have known we were meant to be sisters. I am so lucky to have you as one of my best friends. Your heart for equity is amazing. I love you. To my loving friends Katie and Jade. You encourage me and inspire me to do better every day. Thank you for being vulnerable with me and lifting me up when I didn't have the strength. Thank you, all, for fighting in your respective jobs and lives, the systems of white supremacy. I love you all.

To my amazing UMSL cohort/friends. I have learned so much with you and from you. It was the value each of you added to the conversation, which eased the pain of being away from my family. We pushed and supported each other. We celebrated together and cried together. You all have touched my heart and shaped who I am becoming in ways I cannot describe.

To my committee members, Dr. Hassler, Dr. Makubuya, Dr. Hoagland, and Dr. Davis. Thank you for spending so much time with me and with my work. We have wrestled with big ideas and I have learned tremendously from you. Dr. Hassler, thank you for reading every word and every comma so diligently. You constantly pushed and encouraged me in ways which shaped this work in ways I hadn't anticipated and have grown tremendously in my thinking. Dr. Davis, I never could have imagined a white, middle-class male could teach me us much about race and systems of white supremacy. You are a scholar and teacher who puts his own heart and vulnerabilities on the line and made all of us better for it.

To my daughters, Colette and Marcella, you have brought joy, laughter, and love into my life that I had never imagined. While I feel immense sadness for missing so much time in the last years as I studied, I feel hope when I look in your eyes and see a glimpse of a world which might be.

Abstract

This paper examines the ways middle-class, white, women, who comprise more than eighty percent of the teaching force in public schools perpetuate white supremacy in public schools, explicitly at looking at how and what middle-class, white teachers say to and about their students of color. I interrogate and analyze my own beliefs and experiences, using autoethnography, revealing my journey from learning about my white privilege to understanding how I perpetuate white privilege in schools.

Using the theoretical framework of Critical Whiteness Studies, I will interrogate my own whiteness as I confront and wrestle with whiteness in myself and in five composite characters. I recollect these vignettes in cornerstone stories as they are the foundation to how I have come to understand race in the world around me. I detail and analyze these experiences in four cornerstone stories: *But I'm Not a Racist: Colorblind Racism in America*, *Us and Them: Otherizing Students of Color in Schools*, *Do Black Lives Matter? The Impact of the Murder of Mike Brown on White Lives*, and *The Criminalization of Black Youth*.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

I grew up in a crooked room; a room which worked to my advantage affording me every opportunity, but in a crooked room I never knew was crooked (Harris-Perry, 2011). I was raised in white skin, in a white community, where we could name, on one hand all the people of color. Unlike people of color who saw the world from racial eyes, I, like so many white people, I did not conceptualize I was racial, had a culture, or ethnicity (Frankenberg, 1993; Howard, 2016; Irving, 2014). Community members, people I saw on television, voices I heard on the radio, all validated my belief that being white was normal and typical (Sleeter, 1994; Frankenberg, 1993). Swallowing every drop of whiteness and white privilege, I was created to be the perfect perpetuator of the crooked room where white was normal and white was good (Harris-Perry, 2011).

When I decided to attend college in Seattle, Washington, my parents helped by giving me a tour of the good part of Seattle. Mahoney (1997) delineates, "...good neighborhoods were defined as white and whiteness was defined as good, stable, employed and employable" (p. 273). I learned where all the best restaurants including, Italian, coffee cafes, French bistros, and pizza establishments were located. I learned where to shop the good department stores, where the best parks were, and of course the neighborhood to avoid. Mahoney (1997) details how in denoting good neighborhoods, whites were also instructed to stay away from black neighborhoods, which were associated with sin and darkness.

I learned to stay in areas where people looked like me, wore clothes and listened to music similar to my taste, as well as how to avoid black people, Latinos, gays, and poor people. The message I received on these tours, similar to messages given to other

white kids, affirmed by belief: white is good, middle income is good, European-American heritage is good—African American or Latino culture, is different, bad, and dangerous (Frankenberg, 1993; Howard, 2016; Irving, 2014; Mahoney, 1997).

Upon being hired as a teacher in Seattle, Washington, my white, middle-class, college educated, parents were worried. They did not understand why I would even consider working in a dangerous community, with people with skin that did not look like mine. The indoctrination of white supremacy, similar to those of other white families, was simple—black families, and kids were dangerous and to be avoided. Mahoney (1997) describes, “...the close correlation between employment opportunity and residential segregation meant that black was increasingly linked with inner-city and unemployed or unemployable in white consciousness” (p. 274). My white, middle-class parents were convinced I would face discrimination; hardships I did not have to face. They much preferred me getting a job in Bellevue, Redmond, or Kirkland—nice little suburbs across the lake—home of Microsoft, Bill Gates, and Costco foods—with people who looked like me, worshiped as I did, and had good, white decent values. The indoctrination of racial ideology equating white with good and black with bad caused me to believe in their ideology and proceed with caution in a black neighborhood (Mahoney, 1997).

I was my second year teaching first grade, when six-year Daniel, renamed for the purpose of this research, stole my heart. Daniel, a black, young man, was bussed into a suburban part of Seattle from Seattle’s central district. The central district of Seattle is a largely black part of Seattle’s segregated city. As true of many black neighborhoods, due to redlining, economic and social racism, Daniel, like forty-six% of black children in

America, live below the poverty rate and are forced to wrestle with the hardships, which often accompany it (State of Working America, n.d.).

Daniel spent over an hour on the bus, to and from school, was academically behind his white, middle-class peers, received free breakfast and lunch, and often was getting himself into trouble. Daniel stole my heart through his tight hugs, big eyes, and mostly because, I, with my unchecked white messiah complex toward children of color, felt I could save him from his family and community—a community, I saw to be impoverished, dangerous, and lacking of anything of value.

In Woodson's seminal work, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (1990), he depicts the proclaimed martyrdom and heroism of white people who believed they could save black children by indoctrinating them in the ways of being white. As well, my white deficit beliefs about children of color permeated the way I thought, interacted, and talked about him. This deficit belief is prevalent among middle-class, female educators. Research depicts (James, 2012; Pollock, 2017) many young, white, middle-class educators and their misconceptions and negative stereotypes about black and urban communities are formed out of ignorance. Too often, these stereotypes are left unchecked or even unnoticed and instead are used to reinforce ill-informed conclusions about people or groups of people (James, 2012; Pollock, 2017).

I took Daniel under my wing, attended his after school soccer games, and taught him how to belly breathe when he became angry or frustrated. I believed, as James (2012) depicts many middle-class, white, females, believe, that I had to be the mom he obviously didn't have, and desperately needed. This conclusion, drawn from deficit beliefs about Daniel's home life and what I believed was or was not happening, led me to

believe I was his only hope. I daydreamed how I would rescue Daniel, and his little sister, when he was taken by the Department of Family Services—something my perspective of white privilege and deficit beliefs had convinced me was going to happen.

Throughout my extra effort and care, I was continually receiving praise from my white colleagues who viewed my dedication to this poor black child as being above and beyond. The extra time I spent out of school with Daniel at his games, or taking him and his sister to the zoo, proved I cared and could be a better mother to him than his own mother. The concept of care, illustrated by scholars, is misconceived by white middle-class women, who do not invest in getting to know the families' needs, but instead assert white, middle-class deficit thinking and racist stereotypes while being lauded as a white messiah (James, 2012; Matias & Liou, 2015).

During my time teaching in Seattle, I met regularly with a fellow teacher friend on Monday nights at local coffee shop. I remember with clarity, the thoughts and feelings, if not the exact words, of that afternoon coffee in the balcony which allowed us some privacy to delve into the depths of our souls.

“Daniel was tired again today. He’s always so tired. I bet he doesn’t have his own room at home. He might share a room or maybe sleeps in the living room” I thought out loud.

“So many of those kids are tired all the time” I continued. In the phrase—those kids—I grouped Daniel and all kids who looked like Daniel, into a deficit stereotype. Pollock (2017) names racist stereotyping groups of kids, using terms such as, those kids, as group talk.

I had a pit in my stomach, like I always did when I talked and thought about those kids. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) depicts the racial stereotyping embedded in the language when white educators use phrases as those kids as othering kids of color through a lens of white supremacy.

I am just now beginning to understand the weight of the words, and intended deficit beliefs spoken to my friend, and see how they were a lens, magnifying my position of white privilege and deficit ideology on students who were not like me. Looking back, I see, and am troubled by, my ability to form theories about Daniel based on deficit beliefs and racial stereotypes. Never did I ask him why he was tired—perhaps it was waking up early enough to catch the bus for his hour long ride. Perhaps his baby sister cried in the middle of the night, like babies often do. I never asked. I formed a theory based on a deficit stereotype and thought I could care for him better; I thought I knew better I trusted my thinking, my upbringing, and experiences. I trusted my beliefs were like everyone else's.

Implicit biases unchecked and unseen, Daniel was a child I was convinced I could save and I loved it. I loved feeling like the white messiah and missionary to children of color (James, 2012; Matias & Liou, 2016). I loved, I had a purpose. I loved, I felt I was making a contribution. I didn't see I was trying to assimilate Daniel to be white like me (Wise, 2008).

It was then I decided I would save black and brown children—poor black and brown children—from bad families. I believed I was going to save the world. I was a twenty-three-year-old white woman with no standpoint on the world but my own middle-class, white, female perspectives, and others who thought just like me. I thought I knew

better; better than other educators, better than the brown and black students and better than black mothers raising their children. (Pollock, 2017; James, 2012, Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Problem Statement

Hollywood sells visions of the great white messiah in movies where young white, middle-class teachers save black children whose families and communities abandon them in movies including *Freedom Writers* (2007), *Blind Side* (2009), and *Dangerous Minds* (1995). Hooked on these feel-good movies, society grows up believing in the goodness, and innocence, of white female teachers, who, from their point of privilege, judge people of color as needing help and step in to do so. Leonardo (2009) reminds us, “This misappropriated use of innocence relieves the white middle-class female of all responsibility of perpetuating white supremacy and instead encourages people to focus on the goodness of the white teacher” (p. 107). If we are to think critically, we must shine a light on the glorification of innocent, middle-class white females as they take a less desirable job in the inner city to save the children (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006; James, 2012).

Reflecting twenty years later, I’m saddened at my lack of seeing and understanding—now beginning to understand how I am part of the problem of perpetuating white privilege and white domination in schools. White scholars (Frankenberg, 1993; Howard, 2016; Irving 2004; Wise, 2008a, 2008b) detail their journey and wrestle with opening their eyes to their own racial identity and sadness at their complicity. King (1997) names this lack of seeing, dysconscious racism and defines

it as "...not the absence of consciousness but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness" (p. 128).

Scholars have made many assertions about whiteness and its connection to white privilege and domination (Leonardo & Boas, 2013; Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon and Galindo, 2014; King, 1997). Leonardo & Boas (2013) assert whiteness is a powerful tool used for the purpose of reproducing white privilege and domination. Matias, et al. (2014), grounded in the thinking of Allen (2001), define whiteness as "...a social construction that embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions and experiences, epistemology, emotions and behaviors. Unlike blackness, whiteness is normalized because white supremacy elevates whites and whiteness to the apex of the racial hierarchy" (p. 290). Whiteness is the totality of systems built and perpetuated, both hidden and named, which ensure the survival of white supremacy (Leonardo & Boas, 2013; Matias, et al, 2014; King, 1997).

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) interrogate the role of whiteness in being racially white—its unnamed privileges, complicity, the unearned power and the act of perpetuating whiteness (King, 1997). CWS probe the invisibility of whiteness, "...problematizing the normality of hegemonic whiteness, arguing that in doing so whites deflect, ignore, or dismiss their role, racialization, and privilege in race dynamics" (Matias, et al., 2014). In interrogating whiteness, one is able to identify the systems in which whites are ignorant of, or deny participation, which in schools may include racial deficit thinking, group stereotyping, inequitable funding and biased disciplining (Matias, et al., 2014).

Often researchers have used the art of weaving theory and research to interrogate personal narrative to find deep understanding (Tochluk, 2010; Frankenberg, 1993; Wise 2008a, 2008b, 2010). This process is called autoethnography (Ngynjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010). I argue in this research, that if one was to use traditional data and study to interrogate whiteness, one would yield superficial findings. One must, instead use divergent methods to begin to understand the complex nature of how whiteness is perpetuated by well-meaning educators in schools. I contend that the method to interrogate whiteness must link research, theory, and personal experience. Ngynjiri, et al., (2010) depict autoethnography as “...a qualitative research method that utilizes data about self and its context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others within the same context” (p. 2).

The Department of Education depicts the profile of public school teachers in the United States as eighty-two percent white (DOE, 2016). Research indicates one’s race alters the way individuals are perceived by society, the resources they have access to and their opportunities (Wise, 2008; McIntosh, 1989; Singleton & Linton, 2006). With the racial demographics being so over-abundantly white, and the research around how race affects perception and resources, one must interrogate the role of white teachers in public schools.

I am a white, middle-class, female educator affected by my white skin. My white privilege and deficit thinking surrounding Daniel, and other students of color put in my care at school, are exposed in my words to Daniel and about Daniel. To dismantle inequity, white, middle-class, teachers must begin to interrogate their role in the perpetuation of whiteness in schools. However, as I continue to interrogate my whiteness,

I do harm. As I interrogate my role in the perpetuation of white supremacy, I do harm. I struggle to open my eyes to race, white supremacy, and inequity in educational pedagogy and still I socially reproduce white privilege. I want to facilitate liberation. Yet, I am a cog in a wheel designed to use white, middle-class, female educators, for the purpose of maintaining white supremacy through the perpetuation of whiteness. This paper will interrogate whiteness by deconstructing the how I, and many white middle-class female educators, talk about our students and to our students, resulting in the perpetuation of whiteness and white supremacy in schools.

Rationale for Study

Howard (2016) and Leonardo (2009) have argued perpetuation of whiteness is a pandemic, pervasive problem. In my journey to understand how I have been socialized as identifying myself as white messiah to black children, I have had to own my complicity in perpetuating the systems of white supremacy which provide privilege to white people while oppressing black and brown people. I have come to believe white people must work to deconstruct how whiteness is taught.

This paper argues it is in the way educators talk to and about their students of color which propagates whiteness and white privilege while continuing the oppression of black and brown people.

Significance of Study

I am not the first, nor the last, to yearn to become the white messiah to save black children. I am not the only white, middle-class, female educator who yearns to mother black children, who in my whiteness and deficit thinking, I perceive to be unmothered.

Wanting to take kids home, assuming deficit mothering, assumes we, as white, middle-class, female educators, could do better at mothering and raising other people's children (Matias & Liou, 2015).

Matias and Liou (2015) detail how countless women like me—white, middle-class women are socialized to serve as a teacher and to mother those they perceive to be in need. However, scholar James (2012) questions the "...responsibility and capability of teachers to develop genuine caring relationships with their students" (p. 166). What does it take for white, middle-class, females to really show care and not act from a standpoint of white privilege and power? Because eighty-two percent of teachers are just like me—white, middle-class females who perpetuate white supremacy in our teaching and in our relationships with students of color (Department of Education, 2016)—white, middle class, female teachers must interrogate their whiteness.

Male and female white scholars, educators, and writers (Frankenberg, 1993; Howard, 2016; Irving, 2014; Pollock, 2004, 2008, 2017; Wise 2008a, 2008b, 2010) have chronicled their journey of discovering and wrestling with their whiteness, white privilege and white domination. Among the voices, some are white female (Irving, 2014; Tochluk, 2008), some are educators (Howard, 2016), while many are white researchers at the collegiate level (Pollock, 2004, 2008, 2017; Frankenberg, 1993). This research's unique perspective interrogates whiteness by deconstructing the how we, white middle-class female educators, talk about our students and to our students, resulting in the perpetuation of whiteness and white supremacy in schools.

I must add to the voices and canon, until inequity, deficit thinking, and racial stereotyping is a thing of the past. As long as the permanence of racism exists, middle-

class, white, female educators need to continue to interrogate their whiteness, and their active role in perpetuating white supremacy.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Whiteness Studies, is a theoretical framework which interrogates whiteness from cultural, economic, legal, biological, and historical lenses (D'Souza, 1997; King, 1997). Critical Whiteness Studies stands on the shoulders of theoretical frameworks, namely, critical race theory, and critical legal theory, both generated due to the glaring inequity in racial, legal and social transformation (D'Souza, 1997; King, 1997). Matias, et al. (2014) argue a foundational ideology to Critical Whiteness Studies is understanding "...whiteness is the underlying mechanism that maintains a racist system, and not acknowledging whiteness contributes to the permanence of race and racism" (p. 291). When we as white, middle-class, female educators fail to acknowledge how we are perpetuating white privilege through our teaching—when we disregard problematizing the normalization of whiteness—then white, middle-class, female educators are the problem. We are the ones spreading whiteness in schools (Matias, et al., 2014).

By interrogating whiteness, we, as white, middle-class, female educators begin to make visible that which was once invisible to our white eyes. By interrogating whiteness, we, as white, middle-class, female, educators begin to dismantle how we are cogs in the wheel of white supremacy. By interrogating whiteness, we, as white, middle-class, female educators can begin to disassemble it.

Research Question

How have I, and many white, middle-class, female educators, talked to and about our students of color, perpetuating whiteness and white privilege in schools?

Definitions

Autoethnography—Ngunjiri, et al., (2010) define autoethnography as “... a qualitative research method that utilizes data about self and its context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others within the same context” (para 4).

Colorblind Racism—Bonilla-Silva (2014) defines colorblind racism as the belief that racism is over and we live in a post-racial society as well as the explanation of current inequalities “...as the outcome of nonracial dynamics” (p. 2).

Composite Characters—Martinez (2013) define composite characters as “...fictionalized persons composed based on available information offered in statistical data, existing literatures, social commentary, and authors' professional/personal experiences concerning the topics addressed and encountered by the character” (p.17).

Cornerstone Story—Stories from my life, foundational to my current understanding of how I have perpetuated white privilege to students of color in schools.

Critical Whiteness Studies—Applebaum (2016) defines Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) “...as a growing field of scholarship whose aim is to reveal the invisible structures that produce and reproduce white supremacy and privilege” (para. 2).

Critical Race Theory—A philosophy for white people to begin to understand themselves as racialized and contributing to the systems of white supremacy (Matias, at el., 2014).

Discourse Theory—Haviland (2008) defines educational discourse theory as the “...collection of ways of speaking, interacting, and thinking...” (p. 41).

Race—a socially constructed ideology based on melanin in the skin, privileging whites over people of color.

School Talk—Mica Pollock’s (2017) theory on how educators group, stereotype, and communicate to students of color and their families.

White Privilege—Peggy McIntosh (1989) describes white privilege as “... an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious” (p. 10).

White Supremacy—the systemic and individual mechanisms in society which create and maintain power differentials with power and privilege for whites at the expense of people of color.

Whiteness—for the purpose of this study, whiteness is not one’s race but is instead defined by Picower (2009) as “the ideology and way of being in the world that is used to maintain White supremacy” (p. 198).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Whiteness, white privilege, and race, are socially constructed. It is not our white skin, but the unearned privileges associated with the white skin, on the backs of others, which the perpetuate white supremacy and white domination in society. Amos (2016) alleges "...whiteness systematically operates to the advantages of whites and to the disadvantages of people of color" (p. 1003). Leonardo and Boas (2013) assert whiteness' role is to perpetuate white domination in society. White people, not needing to understand race and its usage for gains in power and privilege see whiteness as normal, typical, good. Whiteness is foundational in our schools, businesses, employment policies, health care practices, politics, and relationships. Picower (2009) depicts whiteness as "... the ideology and way of being in the world that is used to maintain White Supremacy" (p. 189). Whiteness's sole purpose is to perpetuate white privilege through systems of white domination and white supremacy (Leonardo & Boas, 2013; Picower, 2009).

Critical Whiteness Studies

Authors Matias, et al. (2014) describe Critical Whiteness Studies, as a philosophy and tool for white people—used to facilitate understanding of themselves as racialized beings and contributing to the systems of white privilege, power and domination. Matias, et al. (2014) argue "...CWS adds the normative script of white supremacy is an exertion of whiteness that refuses to acknowledge how whiteness is historically, economically, and legally produced" (p. 291). CWS demands systems be interrogated through the lens which details white supremacy as the foundation to every system which has been built.

Furthermore, CWS maintains that systems are created, perpetuated, and maintained as the status quo of normal and typical (Leonardo, 2009; Matias, et al., 2014).

A paramount system, unmentioned by Matias et al. (2014) is public schooling. Leonardo (2013) problematizes whiteness in schools as he describes "...we are tempted to surmise that when educators draft goals that meet the needs of all students, this audacity does not include Black, indigenous, or Latino kids" (p. 608). According to this point of view schooling is for white people, and by white people (Matias et al, 2014).

This paper investigates the ways white, middle-class, female educators talk to and about their students of color, and how these ways perpetuate whiteness ergo white privilege in schools. To fully interrogate this questions, one must understand the current research on white privilege and its intersection with white supremacy, discourse theory, and the structural advantage whiteness provides.

Whiteness

White Privilege. Peggy McIntosh (1989) describes white privilege as "... an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks" (p. 10). White privilege can be difficult to unpack. White people are capable of hard work. It is natural to assume that if you work hard you deserve compensation, rewards and benefits afforded you for that hard work.

It is difficult to describe and quantify white privilege when you are seeking to understand it. However, much of society, even those in education, isn't seeking to understand it at all. McIntosh (1989) describes most of the educational field as void of

“...training in seeing [ourselves as White people] as oppressors, as unfairly advantaged people, or as participant[s] in a damaged culture” (p. 10). We, as white people are not taught to see this as racism. Instead as McIntosh (1998) depicts “...: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow ‘them’ to be more like ‘us’” (p. 10).

To be white and understand your forefathers were culpable in this manipulation for power and privilege can bring about feelings of shame and guilt. White anti-racist researcher, Gary Howard (2016) states, that at this point in his journey toward cultural competence, “...he had learned what it meant to be white in America, and didn’t want to have anything to do with it. [He] had broken the seal on [his] own cultural encapsulation, blown away many of the old images, and didn’t want to be identified with white folks anymore” (p.17). Countless other researchers, including Frankenberg (1993), Howard (2016), Irving (2004) Wise (2008) detail their wrestle with shame and culpability in the perpetuation of racism.

This temptation to feel despair is expounded on by white scholar, Tim Wise (2008) as he details his realization at his complicity:

I was faced with a reality I had never anticipated. I began to realize that despite my activism, despite my good intentions, despite how “down” I perceived myself to be with the cause of justice, I was still part of the problem. I was actively receiving the perks of whiteness, and collaboration with the system of white supremacy, whether I liked it or not” (p. 229).

White understanding of unearned privilege is a journey in shame, self-doubt, hopelessness and despair. However, if white people are to confront their privilege and work to debunk the system, they must get past the shame and guilt (Wise, 2008).

Leonardo (2004) argues white people need to move beyond white privilege as something which happens passively to white people. White people, while maybe ignorant to privilege, must come to confront their complicity in the historical and current reality of oppression of black people for personal gain. Leonardo (2004) explains, “[Whites] set up a system that benefits the group, mystify the system, remove the agents of action from discourse, and when interrogated about it, stifle the discussion with inane comments about the “reality” of the charges being made” (p. 148).

Leonardo (2009) contends white privilege can only be understood by understanding white supremacy and its historical and present role in the building and maintaining of structures in American society (2004). Leonardo (2004) argues “...a critical pedagogy of white racial supremacy revolves less around the issues of unearned advantages, or the state of being dominant, and more around the direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it” (p. 75). He critiques scholar, James Scheurlich, who spoke of white privilege being synonymous with a person walking down the street and people putting money into their pockets and instead argues whites’ complicity in the structural advantages (Leonardo, 2004). Leonardo continues to critique Scheurlich (2004) arguing, “... the cost of downplaying the active roles of whites who take resources from people of color all over the world, appropriate their labor and construct policies that deny minorities full participation in society” (p. 76).

White Supremacy. As scholar Robert Jensen (2005) states “The United States of America at the beginning of the twenty-first century—a century and a half after the end of slavery, four decades after the passage of the Civil Rights Act—is a white-supremacist society” (p. 157). Jensen (2005) continues by detailing the unearned privileges whites possess including higher quality schools, higher graduation rates, and higher rates of college completion (p. 158). All these unearned privileges because of white skin.

Systems of white privilege, supremacy, and domination are taught to our students in our schools. Leonardo (2009) states “The hidden curriculum of whiteness saturates everyday school life...” (p. 83). Leonardo (2009) continues “...white supremacy is legislated by rules and laws dictating where people can and cannot live, who is deemed white, who can attend which schools, who can be a citizen, who is granted a living wage for a day of work and others” (p. 86-87).

Racism isn't a result of only extremist white supremacists. Instead, it is perpetuated by everyday whites who are complicit in the white supremacist laws and norms which oppress people of color and advance whites. Leonardo (2009) writes, “...whites enjoy privileges largely because they have created a system of domination under which they can thrive as a group” (p. 88). It is not merely the hate groups on the corner spewing racial slurs. It is all white people, engaged in racist systems who contribute to the oppression of people of color.

While this paper interrogates and exposes whiteness in American schools, it is important to know white supremacy is a global paradigm and injustice. Charles Mills (1997), first sentence in his seminal book, *The Racial Contract* states “White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today” (p. 1).

World-wide, citizens of our planet, have used white supremacy to enslave, colonize, re-educate people of color into places of subordination.

Deficit thinking. Informing the ways we talk to, and about, students are the stereotypes and implicit biases we socialized within ourselves. These biases often, for white teachers consist of low expectations, deficit understandings of students' abilities and culture (Ferguson, 2007; Delpit, 2006). The culture of poverty is the classic example of deficit thinking (Bomer, Dworin, May & Semingson, 2008).

Conceived by Oscar Lewis (1961), the term culture of poverty, was derived from ethnographic studies Lewis held in small Mexican communities outside of Mexico City (Bomer et al., 2008). In his book he constructs stereotypes which readers base deficit theories and thinking (Lewis, 1961; Gorski, 2008). Payne (2005) reclaimed the term culture of poverty in her book, and teacher professional development series, namely *The Framework for Understanding Poverty*. As Bomer et al. (2008) explain "Payne describes the poor as a homogenous group, with the same ways of using language, interacting with others, and employing strategies to survive in the culture of poverty" (p. 2504). According to Bomer et al., (2008), Lewis (1961) and Payne (2005) detail the culture of poverty as

...in brief, that poor people, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or geographical location, all live within a definable culture. This culture includes a self-perpetuating dynamic in which a poor individual re-creates his/her social position as a member of a family so that subsequent generations remain in poverty. (p. 2504).

Lewis' (1961) and Payne's (2005) work has drawn much criticism (Bomer et al., 2008; Gorski, 2008), for reasons including but not limited to, grouping people together as one like-minded entity based on their socio-economic status, the negation of race or ethnicity as a contributing factor, the lack of recognition of the structural barriers which exist for some and not others, profiting on the creation of deficit ideology, as well as other explanations (Bomer et al., 2008; Gorski, 2008). Still Payne's books and professional development remain immensely popular with teachers and school districts. Bomer, et al., (2008) found "suburban districts such as Orange County in California require teachers to attend the program, as do Native American tribal schools, urban districts such as Buffalo, and many rural districts" (p. 2499).

Deficit thinking remains a prevalent theology for teachers of America's children (Delpit, 2006; Leonardo, 2013). Every day, people of color send their children to schools, entrusting the schools to care for, educate and liberate their children. Instead, children of color find themselves in alienating situations with teachers who do not look like them or act like them, and underestimate their value or future contribution to the world (Delpit, 2006; Leonardo, 2013). These biases create a power dynamic in schools where the white teachers dominate over students of color (Delpit, 2006).

Slavers dehumanized Africans to justify enslaving them and using their bodies for their own purposes (D'Souza, 1997). Dehumanization exists today. Scholar Lisa Delpit (2006) has found that while teachers lean heavily on research, research itself has been culturally racist, finding black people "genetically inferior, culturally deprived, and verbally deficient" (p. 31). This culture of low expectation and deficit thinking drives

instructions, academic goals and daily interactions within the classroom (Delpit, 2006; Haviland, 2008; Pollock, 2017).

Deficit thinking is often reinforced in teacher education programs where students correlate poverty with race, single-family homes, and cultural differences (Delpit, 2006). Teachers form stereotypes of groups, perhaps to make sense of data, but then use these generalizations and stereotypes to understand students, families and cultures, rather than to get to know the students, families, and cultures on an individual basis (Pollock, 2017). This type of cultural racism or assumptions about intellect come across in teachers' conversations with and about students (Pollock, 2017).

Despite attempts to create culturally relevant curriculum, or involve families in schooling decisions, whiteness is still disseminated to black and brown students by their white teachers (Ladson-Billing, 2014). A prominent way white educators recreate racial imbalance in the classroom on a daily basis is by the ways teachers talk to and about black and brown students (Pollock, 2017).

We live in an age currently where racism persists without the existence of racists (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). White privilege is not perpetuated through extremist acts of the Ku Klux Klan or other white extremists. Instead, it is perpetuated by everyday whites who close their eyes to unearned privileges which benefit them (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). While many white people do not want to be seen as racist, many fail to do the work to close the achievement gap, the housing gap, wage gap or health care gap. Saying one is not a racist in certain circles, lets one off the hook, for surely a racist would claim they were such (Ahmed, 2004). When race is brought to the table, white people often respond defensively, claiming they didn't personally own slaves or out of guilt, both intended to

let them off the hook in the perpetuation of white supremacy (Leonardo, 2004). This act of distancing oneself from what is seen as racists, allows whites to deny their participation in the continuation of white privilege.

Invisibility and neutrality of whiteness. In an interview in the Guardian in January of 1992, celebrated writer Toni Morrison said, “In this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate.” Morrison communicates that white means normal, typical, human. Everyone else is other. Scholar Tim Wise (2008) has equated whiteness and white racial privilege to the water a fish is swimming in. The fish doesn’t know anything different than the water. The fish was born in water, raised in water; it is something they cannot see and cannot describe. The fish at being asked this has no idea how to describe water as “...it surrounds [the fish] every minutes of the day [so] explaining what it is becomes virtually impossible. It simply *is*. It’s taken for granted” (p. 239). This invisibility of whiteness is a tool of whiteness to ensure is perpetuation and position of power (Frankenberg, 1993).

Frankenberg (1993) contends whiteness is cultural and unnamed, thereby marking whiteness as the right way to do things. Whiteness is invisible. Dyer expands (2016) describing that white people don’t see themselves as racial, instead see people of color as racialized. The invisibility of whiteness as racialized allows white privilege to be overlooked when race is studied or examined. As Sue (2016) argues, white privilege will persist “...as long as whiteness remains invisible and is equated with normality and superiority” (p. 26).

It is because whiteness claims to be neutral, and typical, that frameworks are needed to shine a light on flaws in the way people understand society (Leonardo, 2009).

White people assume they don't have a culture, everyone else does. White people are assumed to be normal and typical while people of color are ethnic, exotic, and different. Ahmed (2004) contends "...whiteness studies makes that which is invisible visible: though for non-whites the project has to be described differently: it would be about making what can already be seen, visible in a different way" (p. 2).

Leonardo (2009) disputes "...the myth of white ignorance..." arguing white people's ignorance can be "...taken too far, [and thus] has unintended, but problematic consequences, one of which is that it promotes the "innocence" of whites when it comes to the structures of race and racism" (p. 107). Leonardo (2009) insists the invisibility of whiteness must be confronted, and problematized, if we are to confront white privilege and white people's role in privilege.

Sue (2016) argues "Racism hides in the background of whiteness and its protected through a conspiracy of silence that aids in making it invisible" (p. 19). Without understanding white people's role in white privilege and domination, they are reproducing it and its systems of inequality. Using their privilege white people silence conversations about power and domination as a tool to perpetuate it.

White privilege is evidenced in conversations about race and equity. In attempts to study equity and race, whites focus their attention on others—black and brown people—instead of focusing any efforts or attention on whiteness (Leonardo, 2009). Race knowledge often uncovers knowledge of other cultures and how white people, in their whiteness, can reach those others.

Author, bell hooks (2016) asserts, "in white supremacist society, white people can "safely" imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have

historically asserted and even now collectively assert over black people, accorded them the right to control the black gaze” (p. 30). This confirms white people’s belief that the problem of racism is the people of color--not the white people.

Discourse Theory

Researcher, Victoria Haviland (2008) articulates educational discourse “...as a collection of ways of speaking, interacting, and thinking” (p. 41). This understanding of discourse will be used for the purpose of this research. Every day, students engage in a multitude of interactions with teachers, school administration, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and other educational staff. These discourses tell students what to think of themselves, society, their communities, and their hopes and aspirations for the future. Haviland (2008) argues these systems of discourse are a powerful tool in the perpetuation of white supremacy and white privilege in schools. Researchers argue there are discourse moves educators make in order to teach and maintain white power and privilege in education (Haviland, 2008; Pollock, 2017).

Silence. Silence is a discourse tool used by the privileged to maintain power and privilege. In many situations, because whites already possess the power, there is no need for them to cause problems and bring up race. Doing so, will not benefit them and saying nothing can be easier. Whites are not harmed personally by racially discriminatory practices. It is easier and safer to maintain the status quo and stay silent. Haviland (2008) writes “One of the outcomes of silence in discussions of race, racism, and White supremacy can be a lack of challenges to dominant perspectives. This lack of challenge, in turn, can reinforce the status quo that Whites enforce and from which they benefit” (p. 44).

As well, people may silence others, thereby maintaining the status quo of white racial superiority. Disallowing students to speak their truth, be it omitting racially relevant curriculum, shutting down hard conversations started by students, or by changing the subject can have peace as an intent. However, Leonardo (2009) argues, racism is violent. It has a violent physical presence but also emotional and intellectual presence. Leonardo (2009) states, “In other words, the higher goal of understanding and fighting racism is exchanged for creating a safe space here whites can avoid publicly ‘looking racist’, which then overwhelms their reasons for participating in racial dialogue. This approach ironically still leaves intact what bell hooks (2016) has called the ‘terrorizing force of white supremacy’, even within the context of safety (p. 30).

School Talk. Mica Pollock (2017) details different discourse methods and interactions between students and educators. She includes inequity talk, group talk, smart talk, and cultural talk. These harmful ways of interacting with students are rooted in deficit thinking and stereotyping of individual students based on those negative stereotypes. Pollock (2017) examines group talk and asks educators to “...consider when labels for “types of kids” enable student support and when they get in the way” (p. 31). Everyday educators use labels for kids, such as free and reduced lunch kid, special education kid, Bosnian kid, behavior kid, smart kid. The list goes on. With one word or phrase, students are lumped into a group which supposedly defines them in their entirety. These labels are reductive and harmful. People cannot be summed up in one phrase and not all students in a group fit the stereotype. Yet educators do it every day and it provides harm, misunderstanding and a concept of making those people others (Pollock, 2017).

Structural Advantage

Racial permanence. Bell (1993) presents influential ideology in arguing the permanence of racism. Racism isn't only historical ideology to be confronted. Racism is embedded in our structures and our thinking in ways that recreate racist ideology on a daily basis.

Systems have been utilized to create and maintain power structures on the backs of black and brown bodies. Whiteness is a point of structural advantage (Frankenberg, 1993). For five hundred years, while black and brown people in America have been enslaved and oppressed, white people have been accumulating wealth through access to jobs, health care, housing, and quality education. White people operate in a position of domination and control with rare reflection of the disparity of resources over black Americans (Hayes & Jurarez, 2009; Kelley 1997; Mills, 1997). White people frequently assess their own hard work, goal setting and achievements and ignorantly believe in American meritocracy—those who work, succeed. In actuality the cards are so brutally stacked against people of color, it would take hundreds of years to accrue the wealth and status the average white person possesses today. This myth of meritocracy is a tool of whiteness reproduction which secures white people's position of power and control (Haviland, 2008).

Structural advantages lead to reproduction of whiteness in schools. This starts with the teaching force, of whom, over eight-two percent, are white. This is significantly out of proportion of the fifty-one percent of white students (DOE, 2016). Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, (2016) argue a driving factor in a white teaching force is that educators seek and hire people who look and act like themselves and "...this lack of diversity and critical perspectives allow dominant ideologies, especially those of

Whiteness, to center itself as the core of the curriculum, pedagogy, ethics and teaching emotions—a process that renders this hegemonic operation seemingly invisible, yet in plain sight” (p. 2).

Standpoint. Whiteness and white privilege, although a new ideology to white people, has been examined and discussed at large by black scholars for over a century (Leonardo, 2009). Black scholars including Audre Lorde (1984), Richard Wright, W.E.B DuBois started the conversation but it took white scholars (Frankenberg, 1993; Howard, 2016, Irving, 2014) writing for white people to listen (Leonardo, 2009). With seminal writing on the work by McIntosh (1989), white people were introduced to the concept of white privilege. White privilege, while ground breaking to many has been criticized for the passive nature of domination White people have in society. White people are not innocent in white domination because we are complicit in actively recreating and reinforcing structures of whiteness and white privilege.

Leonardo (2004) argues race talk needs to supersede conversation of white privilege and instead address the structures and attitudes of white supremacy foundational to our institutions and interactions. He argues “...in order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of color” (p. 137). He further discusses the problematic nature of racism perpetuated by nice whites; white people who have good intentions, who believe slavery is wrong, but contribute to the continuation of white supremacy on a daily basis. Leonardo (2009) continues “These are processes that students rarely appreciate because their textbooks reinforce the innocence of whiteness” (p. 76). Leonardo (2009) asserts

There is the other half of domination that needs our attention: white investment. To the extent that racial supremacy is taught to white students, it is pedagogical. Insofar as it is pedagogical, there is the possibility of critically reflecting on its flow in order to disrupt them. The hidden curriculum of whiteness saturates everyday school life and one of the first steps to articulating its features is coming to terms with specific modes of discourse (p. 83).

The term white supremacy has been, as Applebaum states "...appropriated to refer to the continual pattern of widespread, everyday practices and policies that are made invisible through normalization and thus are often taken for granted as just what is" (para. 15). While it is this researcher's belief that white privilege is white supremacy, she has chosen to use the term white privilege in this research, strategically, in order to gain a wider readership. Regardless of the synonymous terminology of privilege or supremacy, it should be the ethical responsibility for teachers to reflect on their role in racial domination, how it is played out in the classroom, and make steps to become an anti-racist educator.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This research seeks to interrogate the ways I, and many middle-class, white, female educators, talk to and about their student, and how those ways perpetuate white privilege in schools. This chapter delves into, and details, the methodology utilized in researching this question, and how the information is collected and analyzed. The methodology is broken into key components including research design and method, participant description, data collection and analysis. This section concludes with discussion of trustworthiness and limitations to the research.

The purpose of this research is to interrogate how the ways I, and many white, middle-class female educators, talk to and about kids, and how these ways perpetuate white privilege in public schools. This research is significant for two separate purposes. This research is personally significant as a white, middle-class, female educator of children of color. I entered education believing education to be a great equalizer in an unequal America. In an attempt to unravel how white privilege is perpetuated in schools, using autoethnography, I realize I have more of a role to play than just researcher as I myself am also complicit in the continuation of oppression of people of color.

The second significance to this research is much broader in nature. Eighty-two percent of the teaching force are people just like me—white, middle-class, female educators—we are all responsible for the perpetuation of white privilege in schools (DOE, 2016). It is the purpose of the research, in interrogating my own white privilege, that I extrapolate new understanding of how I perpetuate white privilege to students of color in schools.

Whiteness and white privilege go unexamined and unaccounted for in American schools. In class, students learn Columbus discovered America, was friendly to the Native Americans and in return the Native Americans were friendly and helped them (Bigelow & Peterson, 1991). Little to no discussion is given to European colonialism and oppression in North America. Leonardo (2009) states, “These are processes that students rarely appreciate because their textbooks reinforce the innocence of whiteness” (p. 138). Furthermore, students are taught white privilege happens through no fault of their own. It is described as something that happens to white people, rather than understanding whites actively perpetuate the systems of white supremacy and domination to their advantage (Leonardo, 2004).

Lipsitz (1995) writes where there is advantage there is disadvantage. Understanding advantage and disadvantage mandates consideration of the resulting inequitable playing field (Lipsitz, 1995). Peggy McIntosh’s (1989) influential work of white privilege, while seminal in nature, doesn’t take the discussion far enough. Privilege, while we may be born into it, is something we rebuild and contribute to, to ensure its continuation. Many white people are complicit in the reproduction of white privilege—we are the ones who must deconstruct what it is and how it is maintained in order to dismantle it (Wise, 2008).

Research Design

The research design for this study focuses on interrogating the culture of whiteness, and more specifically, how the words I, and many other white, middle-class, female educators say to and about children of color perpetuate white privilege in schools.

I will use Critical Whiteness Studies as the theoretical framework interrogating the data which I retrieve.

The lens and methodology I will use to retrieve this data is autoethnography. Autoethnography stands on the shoulders of ethnography—a tool using storytelling and reflection to interrogate a specific part of a culture (Clark & Creswell, 2015). Clark and Creswell (2015) reason “An ethnographic research design is a set of qualitative research procedures for describing, analyzing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group’s shared pattern of behavior, beliefs, and language” (p. 294). By adding the root, auto, to create autoethnography, one is using oneself as the tools and reflection to interrogate a specific part of culture (Clark & Creswell 2015).

I grew up an avid reader and writer largely in part to my grandmother, who would sneak contraband books into my fundamental Baptist household, including Sidhartha (1951) and say, “Don’t show your mother...but read this.” In stories, I learned about myself and about others. Stories change people and the world. Among the detailed conceptual framework for autoethnography, Chang (2016) details “...the reading and writing of self-narratives provide a window through which self and others can be examined and understood” (p. 13). If through this research, I can begin to examine and understand, through self-narratives, how we as middle-class, white, females spread white privilege through our words and actions, then I can begin to affect change.

Chang (2016) cautions readers that “...telling one’s story does not automatically result in cultural understanding of self and others, which only grows out of in-depth cultural analysis and interpretation” (p. 13). Autoethnography weaves theory and research into personal narrative, and extrapolates foundational understandings. For the purpose of

this research, I will use the body of knowledge of white privilege to interrogate words, to and about, students of color, found in my scenarios in order to seek an understanding of how I perpetuate white supremacy in schools.

Seminal researchers on autoethnography, Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010) describe autoethnography as “...an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experiences (auto) in order to understand cultural experiences (ethno)” (para. 1). For the purpose of this study, the researcher conceives autoethnography as a set of experiences and writings which extrapolate understandings and nuances from past lived experiences. (Adams & Manning, 2015; Ellis et al., (2010); Chang, 2015).

Both male and female white scholars, including Tochluk (2010), Frankenberg (1993), and Wise (2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2012) have used data and theory interwoven with aspects of auto-ethnography to interrogate their white privilege. Renowned educator Gary Howard (2016) has detailed the uncovering of his white privilege, yet from a white, male perspective. While white, female educators, such as Pollock (2004, 2008, 2017) and Sleeter (2011, 2016) have interrogated their white privilege, they’ve done so from collegiate levels. Little has been published to the professional canon from white, middle-class females who work in the schools every day. My contribution to the canon of white scholars interrogating their white privilege, using autoethnography, will be my unique perspective of being a white, middle-class, female educator who has spent her entire adult career working in kindergarten through twelfth grade schooling.

In 2016 the Department of Education reports the profile of teachers in the United States to be eighty-two percent white, middle-class, female. This group of eighty-two

percenters must begin to interrogate and share their journey into racial consciousness. In this research, I will detail my journey of beginning to understand myself as white, female, educator. I will examine how I, and eighty-two percent of teachers in America, are perpetuating white privilege through the ways we talk to students and about students. (DOE, 2016). In doing so, I will extrapolate themes and common ways we spread white privilege and will use my learning to impact my leadership of other white educators.

Cornerstone Stories

For the purpose of this research, I will unearth personal cornerstone stories, with the intention of seeing with new eyes how I, and many like me—white, middle-class, female, educators—have promoted white privilege to students of color in schools. The term cornerstone story derives from my childhood. Growing up in a strict Baptist home, I was rooted with the image of Jesus’ crucifixion and rising from the dead, as the cornerstone to my life. All understanding about the world, my family, current events, science, and myself was to be grounded in Jesus—the cornerstone to my being. While I am no longer a Baptist, or perhaps a Christian at all, I do believe there are experiences, beliefs, and principles which root me to who I understand myself to be, and how I interact with the world around me. These cornerstone stories are experiences which moved me emotionally when I lived through them initially. As I interrogate them with the new eyes of new knowledge, from theory and research, I am moved again, at my lack of seeing and understanding.

Participants

There are five participants for the purpose of this research. The first is myself, and the second, third, fourth, and fifth are composite characters, who, for the purpose of

this research I call Angie, Mrs. White, Trina, and Miss Betty. DeCuir and Walker-DeVose (2013) describe composite stories as those which are created from “...a variety of sources of data ...in order to create a group story regarding experiences with racism” (p. 252). Martinez (2013) continues by adding composite characters are “fictionalized persons composed based on available information offered in statistical data, existing literatures, social commentary, and authors' professional/personal experiences concerning the topics addressed and encountered by the character” (p. 17).

The researcher. I am a white, female, middle-class administrator at in a suburb of St. Louis, MO. I have eighteen years of kindergarten through eighth grade public education experience as a classroom teacher, special education resource teacher, academic coach, literacy specialist, and administrator. I have spent my educational career in Seattle Public Schools, St. Louis Public Schools, a St Louis charter school, and now am in a St. Louis County school. I started my teaching career in a white Seattle suburb, whose black and brown student population was entirely due to the Seattle Public School busing program. I changed schools to Seattle’s Central District after seven years, where I instructed eighteen black and brown middle school students in a room for students with special education. Convinced over half of the students had no disability, but rather, subpar instruction, I moved to an elementary school to try to close the racial academic achievement gap while students were young. Following several years of teaching, my family moved to St. Louis, where I taught middle school language arts to black and brown students in a St. Louis charter school, and then supported learning as an instructional coach to black and brown bodies in a kindergarten through sixth grade building. I currently work in a suburb of St. Louis with a diverse student group, including

students from twenty-five countries, speaking twenty-seven languages. I consider myself to be a seeker, and strive to be a liberator, and anti-racist educator. I struggle with identifying as a white person, as I witness so many white people, not willing to even talk about white privilege. In an effort to examine the white people I push away and vilify, I have been humbled, myself, in seeing it is not only the bad unreflective white people who support systems of white privilege and reproduction, it is in fact, those who seek to be anti-racist, who are perpetuating these systems. I was born white. I have lived white experiences and will never fully uncover all the implicit biases, nor the ways these implicit biases negatively impact people of color.

Miss Angie. The second participant is a composite character called Angie. She is a white, middle-class, female educator who always wanted to be a teacher. Angie's parents helped her pay for college, she secured a job right away in the district she grew up in, and was able to start teaching at the young age of twenty-two. Angie grew up in a white, middle-class suburb of a larger city. Both of Angie's parents work. Angie is married to white, middle-class, white-collar, professional. Angie's friends and family are all mostly all white. She does consider her family to be diverse because her cousin married a man of Asian descent. Angie voted for Barack Obama. She believes his presidency served as evidence of a current post-racial America. She believes race played a role in the history of America, but believes everyone now has fair opportunity to succeed. Angie teaches an African American History Unit, once a year, where she details African American history in three stages: Slavery, Emancipation, and Freedom. Angie is very proud she is a teacher and believes in the difference she is making. She is

often saddened by perceived deficits in her students' families and is often heard saying she wants to take the kids in her classroom home with her.

Mrs. White. Mrs. White is a white, middle-class woman, who grew up in the rural Midwest. She grew up in poverty and remembers dreaming of escaping poverty and having an important job. Her boyfriend dropped out of school in order to support her as she finished college. She married her college sweetheart and started her education career in the district whose population consisted of students of color, 90% of whom qualified for Free or Reduced Lunch. This experience seemed to reinforce deficit theories she had formed about students of color. She dreamed of getting experience and then fleeing to the suburbs.

Mrs. White believes in a meritocracy, namely, people have what they strive for an earn. Haviland (2008) names meritocracy as a tool white people wield to maintain power and privilege (p. 42). Bonilla-Silva (2014) refers to this thinking as the "...crème rising to the top..." (p. 80). Mrs. White operates the school to cater to the middle-class, white community members. She often rolls her eyes when discipline and achievement data are disaggregated as she states she doesn't see color.

Miss Trina. Miss Trina is a sixty-five-year-old, white, middle-class teacher who, like many teachers in the school started as a teachers' assistant in our building, forty years ago, while she was finishing college. Upon her completion she was hired right away. She has watched the school demographics change from majority white, middle-class, blue-collar union workers to a school with twenty-eight languages and twelve percent black students. She has proudly outlasted many initiatives, educational fads, and principals.

Miss Trina and I have a good relationship. Although I am her supervisor, she likes to play mom to me and shows me genuine care. I admire the time and effort she puts into her teaching. I have a high regard for the love she has for her students although she often times mistakes pity for care. There is often deficit thinking in her statements of wanting to take kids home with her because she is confident they are not being given the attention they deserve (James, 2011).

While Miss Trina doesn't subscribe to colorblind racism, she, along with many white, middle-class teachers (Sleeter, 2011) is very uncomfortable talking about race. She knows talking about race, as a current reality, would benefit her students but is more comfortable talking about racism as a thing of the past, so she has started talking about the American Civil Rights movement.

Miss Betty. Miss Betty is our school secretary. Elementary school secretaries have to have a specific mindset. They have to manage students who have never been away from their parents as well as older students who think they know it all. They organize the adults, pick-up and drop-off schedules, all which change at a drop of a hat. It can be a challenging position for some and in year three of my position of assistant principal, we had an administrative assistant go home for the night and never come back. The next week Betty arrived at our school—a transfer from the school up the street.

Betty has lived in our small suburban community for her entire lifetime. She raised her kids, sent her children to school, and worked in this community for her forty years as a working person. In these forty years she has watched as it's changed from white, blue-collar, union people, to one of ethnic, racial, and religious diversity; and as she says it, it was fine the way it was and all those people should move somewhere else.

Researcher' Role

My role is one of autoethnographer. I seek to research the ways I can generalize my experiences to those like me, namely white, middle-class, female educators. In this research I seek to interrogate the ways middle-class, white, female educators, such as myself and Angie, talk to and about their student, and how those ways perpetuate white privilege in schools.

Data Collection & Analysis

Ellis (2004) claims when utilizing autoethnography, one's personal narratives are one's data. Throughout my research process, I will be collecting personal narratives which I believe are cornerstones to understanding my own role in perpetuating white privilege in schools. Because researcher Chang (2016) argues "...self-narratives can be used as cultural texts through which the cultural understanding of self and others can be gained" (p. 13), I will be selecting cornerstone stories which can provide some cultural understanding from what I've lived, seen, and read. I boldly seek to, as an eighty-two percent—nameless, middle-class, female educator—to find cornerstone moments which might help others interrogate their own perpetuation of white privilege, through reading this research.

Trustworthiness & Limitations

There are several limitations, ethical considerations, and issues of trustworthiness associated with writing autoethnography. Although, I have made efforts to eliminate ethical issues which could arise in this work, changing the names and identifying markers of students, families, and colleagues presented in my autoethnographies, there are other risks to be considered.

Researchers, Adams and Manning (2015) discuss the risk of outing people about whom we are including in our writing; because we are often writing about experiences which include other people, we risk outing those people in our writing. I attended to this risk by creating the composite characters Miss Angie, Miss Trina, Mrs. White, and Miss Betty intended to protect the privacy of those mentioned. I did not intend to interrogate anyone personally, with the exception of myself and white privilege.

A further consideration and caution is the personal nature of autoethnography. Allen and Piercy (2005) details “By telling a story on ourselves, we risk exposure to our peers, subject ourselves to scrutiny and ridicule, and relinquish some sense of control over our own narratives” (p. 156). Because the purpose of this research is to interrogate the white privilege which I perpetuate inside public schools, I do not expect to look like an anti-racist liberator, if I am researching honestly. Instead, I intend on uncovering white privilege and white supremacy in my own life—characteristics my community will not hold in high esteem. I seek to be vulnerable in this research and nervously, yet intentionally, exchange appearing anti-racist, with seeking truth and honesty. I rely on the truth of Yancy’s (2018) words “...candid and truthful speech creates a space for crucial opportunities for white people to engage in risking the self and the possibility for constructive transformation, something that is often painful” (p. 55).

Further attention needs to be given to the memories themselves. Researchers, Ellis et al., (2010) maintain, “Autoethnographers value narrative truth based on what a story or experience does—how it is used, understood, and responded to for and by us and others as writers, participants, audiences, and humans” (p. 9). I will offer my

autoethnography, with the caveat that they are biased with my perspective as a white, middle-class, female educator.

Ellis et al., (2010) offer "...autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research rather than hiding these matters or assuming they don't exist" (p. 2). In terms of discussing reliability, autoethnography is only as reliable as its narrator is reliable. The autoethnography are detailed with memories to the very best of my ability.

While I lived the moments, had the feelings, and sought after the understanding, I am authoring memories, some, from nearly twenty years ago. This sentiment echoes the words of Native American author Sherman Alexie (2017) who writes in his memoir he is the "...unreliable narrator of his own life" (p. 7). To this, I offer up Star Tribune's writer Kleber-Diggs (2017) words of Alexie's work that his fans "will understand that an unreliable memoirist can also have a great memory; those characteristics are not necessarily in conflict." My past memories, and my stories, as I remember them, have shaped my beliefs and paths. To that extent, I will interrogate my memories to the best I remember, trusting that the thinking and new beliefs, which come with living, reading, and researching will lead to new levels of understanding.

Chapter Four: Cornerstone Stories

But I'm Not a Racist: Colorblind Racism in America

“Brrrrrrrinnng” rang the bell for kindergarten morning recess. I sat down at my desk to finally prepare for a parent meeting I was to have later in the day when a small, loud, longwinded, kindergarten teacher named Angie barged through my door.

“Mrs. White is on the phone; so can I talk to you?” she barges in my office. Mrs. White is the head principal of the primary school where I serve as an assistant principal.

Without waiting for a response she continues, “You know I’m not a racist. I don’t see color, so I can’t be racist” Angie lectures, plopping herself on my chair.

“Actually, can I close the door?” she feigns asking as she stands to reach for the door without a response.

“Lamonta told a classmate today that he doesn’t like white people. When I asked him what he meant by that, he said his mom told him to be careful of white people. Lamonta told me his mom is going to be sure he is in a room with other black children next year. Like that matters.”

Lamonta is a bright, curious, observant six-year-old. He, and his middle school brother, are part of a voluntary transfer program which buses kids in from his city school district, to our suburban district. As is so often the case, he is the only black child in a room of twenty children. Racially, his classroom demographics are comprised of Lamonta, and nineteen white students, some of whom are first generation American, but who are white in race.

“I teach my students just like I teach my own children not to see color. I voted for Obama. I have books in my room about Obama” she continued to rage.

“Has Lamonta ever talked to you about his feelings being the only black student in your classroom?” I question, just now having the air space to enter the conversation.

“No!” she argues, “In my classroom, we don’t see color. I didn’t realize he was the only black child in his class until his mom pointed it out to me.”

“How do you think he feels?” I probe, trying to inspire some empathy and understanding.

“Look,” she says ignoring my question, “My own children go to a school with all white people except for one black family. The family owns a Chick-fila. I don’t care they are black. I didn’t even notice they were black until the dad walked in one day and I was like whoa, you’re a large black man. Race doesn’t matter to my children and it doesn’t matter in my classroom,” Angie insists.

“Could it matter to him?” I ask trying to find my footing.

“It shouldn’t. It doesn’t to me. AND he said he doesn’t like white people. That’s racism.”

“Well, it’s definitely not an inclusive thing to say, but what do you think he means by it?” I question.

“I just don’t want his mom to think I’m a racist.”

“Well, we might learn a lot this year from this little guy if we are open to it.”

Mrs. White pops her head in, “Angie did you need me?” Without saying a word, Angie follows Mrs. White around the corner to her office

“So, you know I don’t see color....” I hear her say.

Do I go in? I question. Typically, when I bring up race, or equity, my boss shuts down the conversation. She rolls her eyes when I disaggregate academic data by race.

“It’s fine. They came in low. It’s fine” is her mantra.

I know I need to advocate for this student, even though I don't want to stick my neck out again. I know it's not going to help. I should duck and cover, a part of me thinks. The gnawing in my stomach doesn't stop. My body telling me I have to act, even though I don't want to. I take a deep breath, put my shoulders down my back, and knock on the door.

"Can I come in?" I ask trying to find my voice.

I get a sideways stare from Angie and Mrs. White, as if I was interrupting, so I sit quietly.

"...so like I was saying" Mrs. White continues with annoyance in her voice, "...it sounds like Lamonta is being fed race talk at home. No six-year-old is conscious of race unless his family is teaching it at home" she states assuming she is preaching to a choir.

"I agree" Angie continues. "...and telling people you hate white people, is like white people saying they hate black people—it's racist."

"Lamonta is a perceptive, bright little boy. I'm pretty sure he figured out he's the only black child in the classroom. Did you ask him what he meant by saying he doesn't like white people?" I continue without taking a breath.

"He didn't perceive it on his own. That's adult language. His parents are feeding him this" Mrs. White repeats. "I'll call his mom; he can't be saying things like that in kindergarten. Our parents aren't going to like it."

Emotional response. I walked out of that room with a tight chest and a racing mind.

"How many kids at our school felt just like Lamonta?"

"Does he feel alone, isolated?"

No one looked like him in his classroom. No educators looked like him in the school. He was surrounded by a white, female, middle-class teacher and principal who didn't think race was an issue because they didn't see it or how it affected them.

“What if Mrs. White is right? What if Lamonta's family is blowing this out of proportion?” I question the logic.

“Jeez. Tracy!” I totter back in my mind.

Of course his parents are teaching him about race. He is a young black man in America. He has a one in three chance of going to prison. He is more likely to be shot by cops, suspected of shoplifting in a store, and more likely to be suspended than his white peers (Alexander, 2010).

I was stuck in my head and disappointed in myself. I knew I didn't push hard enough, I hardly said a thing. I didn't want to be seen as an outsider. I tried to ask the questions to spark reflection but I didn't ask the right questions. I tried to interject myself into the conversation and advocate for him, but either my words fell on deaf ears, or I didn't speak strongly enough; it was most likely a combination of both.

Moreover, I was frustrated that Angie both insists she didn't see color and didn't want Lamonta's mother to think she was a racist. Angie most likely positions racists as men on horses in white hats, or people in the Neo-Nazi movement. She ostensibly saw racists as bad people who are overtly racists, and not nice, good, middle-class educators in public schools.

I left the room sad and a little less hopeful for the emotional well-being of our black and brown students. I left the room less hopeful about my willingness to be a stronger force for change.

Connection to the Literature.

Students with white privilege. The students in Lamonta's classroom do not look like him, as he is the only black student in a classroom full of white students. The classroom teemed with students from countries who speak languages in addition to English, but as an outsider looking in, they all look white, barring Lamonta. Scholars have exposed the damage a poor racial climate has on students of color (Hope, Skoog, Jagers, 2015;). Leonardo (2009) discusses one aspect of white racial knowledge as being "...the ability to image oneself in any space, untethered by the concern, 'Will there be people like me (other whites)?'" (p. 113). Lamonta didn't enjoy this privilege of feeling comfort in a room where everyone looked like him. At six years old, Lamonta knew his skin made him different than everyone else.

Teaching structure. A key component in understanding racial school climate, noted by Hope, et al. (2015) is "...whether school structure, administration, and teaching encourages racial diversity and celebrate, rather than deemphasize, racial differences" (p. 86). As the case of many white, middle-class teachers and administrators, Angie and Mrs. White claimed not to see color., Bonilla-Silva (2014) assert color-blind racism "...serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-civil rights era" (p. 3). Colorblindness allows systems to remain inequitable and racist, all while asserting skin color doesn't matter.

What Lamonta learns about the world. Mrs. White contends that six year olds don't know about race. Hope, et al. (2015) postulate school acts as a mirror for larger society, a microcosm of the world. In this situation, Lamonta was taught he is an outsider, if he talks about his outsider-ness, he will be silenced, and even punished. His outsider-

ness, is reinforced when Mrs. White states “Our parents aren’t going to like it.” By using the pronoun, our, to denote the white, middle-class majority, she declares Lamonta’s other-ness.

Defensiveness and justification. Angie makes plain her agenda when she opens with “You know I’m not a racist” and promptly closes the door. Angie has the outward appearance of a liberal white woman, working in a public school with some diversity, and wants any suggestions she is otherwise to be private. Bonilla-Silva (2014) depicts the sentence starter, “I am not racist” ... as a discursive buffer before or after someone states something that is or could be interpreted as racist” (p. 105). Angie uses this barrier phrase to reaffirm herself before asserting her white, middle-class perspective of the situation is correct and not the one of her six-year old black student.

Bonilla-Silva (2014) posits most people do not want to be considered racists but have instead “...developed powerful explanations—which have ultimately become justifications—for contemporary racial inequality that exculpate them from any responsibility for the status of people of color” (p. 2). He continues to discuss how polite, covert means replaced Jim Crow laws as mechanisms to maintain white power (p. 3). Angie was the teacher and the person with the most power in her classroom. By shutting down Lamonta’s concern’s and instead making him the one in the wrong, she maintained her power and taught Lamonta and his family about the power dynamics at the school.

Lack of racial understanding. That Angie didn’t understand that Lamonta, as a black student, couldn’t be racist toward a white student, doesn’t surprise me. Many white, middle-class, female teachers are uncomfortable talking about race. Leonardo (2009)

describes “Admitting the reality of white racism would force a river of centuries of pain, denial, and guilt that many people cannot assuage” (p. 177).

Racism in the age of Obama. Voting for Obama is worn like a badge to white, middle-class people who want to prove they are not racist. “I voted for Obama. I have books in my room about Obama,” Angie cries. 43% of whites voted for Obama in the 2008 election. It doesn’t mean they are all anti-racist people searching for a more just world. Obama wasn’t seen as a radical. Bonilla-Silva articulates Obama wasn’t “...a ‘race polarizer (that is, that he was not Jesse Jackson-like) ...therefore, post-civil rights minority politicians like Obama are not truly about deep change, but about compromise” (p. 262).

Silence to end the conversation. When Angie becomes discontent with my reaction not being automatically defensive of her point of view, she shuts down the conversation by starting with Mrs. White, a person who is more likely to agree with her. When Mrs. White silences my questions, with her conclusion that Lamonta is being fed ideas of feeling racially isolated and not safe with white people, she shuts down any opportunity for the white, middle-class, female educators to seek a different perspective, challenge the position of white privilege or change.

Colorblind racism. Angie doesn’t want to be seen as a racist but she contents she doesn’t see color and cannot take action when this is not accepted in her classroom. Leonardo (2009) discusses sociological findings that overall Americans believe in equality, integration, and disapprove of racial animus (p. 131). However, as he explains, “in principle whites believe in integration, but more than half are not willing to act on this principle” (p. 132). Leonardo (2009) contents, instead, whites view people of colors’

successes or failures as due to the individual's gifts or shortcomings. Lamonta isn't experiencing racial oppression, it is instead his parents who are filling his head with political propaganda. Leonardo (2009) asserts, "...within this discourse, [meritocracy] we are all humans and any attempt to use race as an analytical framework or interpretive lens for US society is itself racist because it is believed to be ensnarled in the white supremacist notion that race is a real form of difference" (p. 133).

Bonilla-Silva (2014) asserts Jim Crow era racism has been replaced with a new sophisticated racism with "...these practices are as effective as the old ones in maintaining the racial status quo...the evolution of these new structures of racial domination show how racial inequity is perpetuated in a color-blind world" (p. 25).

Americans have built systems to keep blacks in their place (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). A contributing factor is "...individual whites can express a detachment from the racialized way which social control agencies operate in America" (p. 53). Schools addressing issues of race or failing to do so, become one of those social agencies, government sanctioned to teach white people and black people their place in the world. When black children experience racism but are told their teachers don't see color, they are told their viewpoints are not valid.

A central tenet of colorblind racism is the minimization of racism, as defined by Bonilla-Silva (2014) is a "...frame that suggests discrimination is no longer a central threat affecting minorities' life chances (p. 77). It allows whites to continue acknowledging racism of blatant racists, without accepting any of responsibility and blame for the persistence of inequalities.

Mrs. White's whiteness. Perhaps the most disturbing part of the conversation was that of Mrs. White. "He didn't perceive it on his own. That's adult language. His parents are feeding him this" Mrs. White repeats. "I'll call his mom; he can't be saying things like that in kindergarten." Deficit thinking of the perception and aptitude of Lamonta is embedded in the phrase "he didn't perceive it on his own." Children's perception of race begins at a very early age. Hope et al. (2015) noted "...black youth begin to understand stereotypes as young as 6 years old, and they expect to experience racial discrimination as young as 8 years old" (p. 84). To assume Lamonta isn't intelligent enough gives him no credit. He is written off and his voice is not heard.

Later in the tirade, Mrs. White states "His parents are feeding him this." The fact is, we don't know. The parents hadn't been contacted and they hadn't been asked. Instead an assumption was made based in stereotypes without inquiry. Pollock (2017) challenges white, middle-class educators to make inquiries and assume less about a person based on the color of their skin.

As well, she, as well as other white middle class teachers according to Matias et al. (2017) "...expressed how learning about race and racism reinforced [her] normative beliefs of how race and racism is a non-white problem." (p. 299). When Lamonta expresses to his teacher and classmates he is experiencing racial discomfort, Mrs. White has an opportunity to reflect on her, and the school's, whiteness. Instead she problematizes Lamonta's black racial identity.

The deafening silence of whiteness. Several times in this cornerstone story I weigh what is right with what it will cost me. In a situation where asked to choose my beliefs over future advances, I sadly admit I have chosen both. I am an assistant principal,

working for a woman with whom we have few shared values. I don't want to be an assistant forever. My boss doesn't value opinions which diverge from hers and she wants this situation, expressly this student and family, shut down. I don't want to hazard my own self and risk I can ignore the situation and it won't be my problem.

As I write, I come to my own defense, for I cannot instill strategic change as an assistant. I am holding my tongue until.... Until I am principal? Until I am superintendent? There is not a right time. The justifications still come, but I made a choice in this situation, to not say enough, and I am not suffering for it, Lamonta and his family are the victims of my silence. Leonardo (2009) discusses the real costs of whites disinvesting themselves of whiteness as he writes "...the realistic appraisal is that whites do have a lot to lose by committing race treason, not just something to gain by forsaking whiteness" (p. 176). When given the opportunity to put my own neck out, I chose to be silent.

When in this conversation, I try to find my voice and remain quiet too long, I help maintain the status quo instead of advocating for justice. Sue (2016) argues "...racism hides in the background of whiteness and is protected through a conspiracy of silence that aids in making it invisible" (p. 19). Silence is a discourse tool white people wield to maintain power and privilege. A white person may shut down a conversation about race, arguing it is no longer relevant thereby suggesting those who bring up racial conversations are aberrant. This act perpetuates white privilege as it maintains the status quo.

Us and Them: Otherizing Students of Color in Schools

There are two ways to walk to my office. I can walk through the main office, past the laminator, mail boxes and copy machines, around the counselors' offices—whom I'm always tempted to stop and chat with, and past several classrooms. The short way, it is ten feet right out my door to the center of the school. The drawback? Betty. She complains. It's too cold, too bright, too dark, too busy, too slow. The negativity paired with her lack of desire to embrace our community makes her a hard pill to swallow. With the smallest look and a comment, she sucks the joy and replaces it with dread and gloom.

I, like many people, am a person of habit and to avoid Betty, had claimed the long route to my office as my path. However, there were plenty of times a day I couldn't avoid interacting with her; when I had a choice, I would walk around. Many of these times she required my assistance centered on helping her register new students to our community. One particular day in early spring, I heard over the walkie-talkie "Ms. Nomensen, please come to the office."

Betty headed me off before I could reach her desk, "Those people," she said. "I can't understand anything they are saying, they don't have the right materials to enroll, they have weird, foreign names. I can't do it."

I glance at the family sitting just twenty feet away from and pray they cannot hear her. I usher her to my officer and without hearing the rest of the story, I tell her I will handle it and go to meet the family. I return to the waiting room, and attempt to make them feel comfortable and welcomed. I shake the hands of the two adults and then put my hands on my knees to lower my body to meet the eyes of the two young children shyly standing behind their parents. They are the McCray family. They have just moved into

our community and two of their children, LaQuisha and LaVondre' are attempting to enroll in our school. I get them the forms they need to fill out and then pull Betty aside.

“What’s up, Betty? Their names will be written on the enrollment forms, so you should have all the information you need.”

“I just don’t understand. Why don’t those people just give their kids real names and not made up ones? I never had a LaQasha, or TaKeisha, or whatever, back in the day. Now I need a translator for all these names.”

At this, my stomach flipped but there wasn’t time, so I left her with, “Be patient. If you need me I will be close by.”

Later in the day I had a follow up conversation with her,

“What happened when you were registering the McCrays this morning?” I prompt hoping for some reflection.

“I can’t understand those people. They don’t speak clearly. I don’t know their types of names.”

“We’re going to need to learn to understand all people, Betty. Our school community is changing and we need to be supportive of all its members. We want all people to feel they belong and my fear is this morning, the McCrays didn’t feel they belonged.”

“It’s not my fault. I didn’t change. I’ve been the same. Those people have changed,” Betty snapped.

Emotional response. My mind raced as I left the conversation. My heart sought comfort from an ally with whom to seek shelter and to commiserate.

“How can I endure working with such exclusive and racist people? I can’t take it.” I fumed as I began daydreaming of escaping this job and working in a more inclusive place.

“This is too hard on me.” I thought. I immediately dove into my dance of feeling isolated, feeling ashamed, wanting to punch the school secretary in the face. I wanted to be comforted. I wanted to seek an ally who too could wallow in how racist my school is.

After a too-long period of self-indulgent, self-pity, and rumination of just how fraught with racism the situation was, I got outside of myself and realized,

“Gawd! I think it’s hard on me? I am not the person of color being discriminated against.” If the white privilege in the initial situation wasn’t enough, I was making the situation about me and not about systems of oppression or about the family who was trying to register their children for school.

I went to my office and attempted to dream and create an informal strategic plan of how to move the thinking of all the staff. It was all so overwhelming. How do you teach a woman who is content with who she is, and the values she holds, that she is exclusive of people outside her own experience? How do I reach people who don’t want to be reached? Betty is a sweet lady. She is old. This is a big change for her. Maybe it’s not fair to ask her to change so late in her life. Maybe I should just hide in my office and pretend I didn’t see this. Things are going to change. I am not going to change a school, let alone this person. Let’s face it, as a white, middle-class, person, I have the privilege to not have to address each issue of racism I see. It is ugly but it is the truth.

Connection to literature.

Standpoint. Bell (1993) asserts racism is permanent. It is built in the fibers of our country, the socializing of our youth, and the structures of the systems on which we depend. While fifty-one percent of the US school age population is white, over eighty-two percent of the teaching force is white (DOE, 2016). This difference contributes to lack of first-hand knowledge about race and culture. Betty is in a position of structural power as the registrar for the school. As the only elementary school in our district, the McCray family must meet certain requirements of registration, thereby enduring feeling like second class citizens being allowed to enroll in the school.

Otherizing. Betty speaks about the family registering in a reductive and pejorative way: “Those people,” she said. “I can’t understand anything they are saying, they don’t have the right materials to enroll, they have weird, foreign names. I can’t do it.” Lumping families into categories is cruel and harmful. When Betty distances herself from the family based on race and culture, she tells them they are outsiders and do not belong (Pollock, 2017).

Whites as victims. When confronted with an overtly racist situation, I did what many white middle-class people do—I took the victim stance, considering first, how the racism made me uncomfortable, leaving me to feel isolated and alone. I was left wondering, “Why is this happening to me?” Picower (2009) details a tool of white people to maintain white privilege is when white people “...attempted to show the ways in which they themselves, rather than the people of color, were the real victims of racism” (p. 204).

Deficit thinking. As described by James (2011), white middle-class female educators possess much deficit ideology about students of color. James (2011) depicts,

“...because the experiences of students and families are scripted differently than those of the [middle-class, white, female, staff] with whom they work, they are deemed lacking in important ways” (p. 172). Miss Betty looks down upon the McCrays because they do not fit into her white, middle-class, normative framework—they are not white and they do not possess white, European names.

White supremacy ideology. There is no doubt the McCrays felt uncomfortable and unwelcomed at our school. Only twelve percent of our student body are black, none of our staff, except one lady in the cafeteria is black. During the time it took to register, white teachers, parents and students paraded through the office, but none looked like the McCray family.

In addition, Betty was short and cold with this family. The side-ways looks, disapproving tenor conveyed contempt and judgment rather than inclusion and acceptance.

Leonardo contends systems of white supremacy are taught in our schools (2004). I contend they are taught in situations just like these.

The white privilege of silence. Haviland (2008) argues “...one of the outcomes of silence in discussions of race, racism, and white supremacy can be the lack of challenges to dominant perspectives (p. 47). Once again, in a racialized situation demanding an ally, I do not say enough. I instead concede to Betty’s feelings, inability to change, and self-preservation. I created a distance between the McCrays and myself, siding instead with Miss Betty.

I furthermore contend Betty was left unchallenged as ultimately my goal was to gently confront her but leave her feeling comfortable. In doing so I, as Haviland (2008)

suggests, protected her from feeling “...uncomfortably implicated in racism and white supremacy” (p. 49). By leaving her comfortable I gave her no reason to reflect on the whiteness or be convicted to change.

Do Black Lives Matter? The Impact of the Murder of Mike Brown on White Lives

I was a white educator in living in St Louis when Mike Brown was shot, killed, and left to die in North St. Louis. I am fearful, and cognizant, while writing, of it not being my place to tell the story of Mike Brown’s death. White standpoints have long been the perspective of historical reference as their stories have been told, again, and again, and again. I can, however, with authority speak to the white belief that Mike Brown’s death was not a white people problem as well as speak to the white fear which engulfed the white community in the wake of his death.

Mike Brown was shot by police on August 9, 2014 (McLaughlin, 2014). Millions watched the ghetto-ized porn, as Mike Brown’s unarmed, lifeless body lay in the street for hours, after having been shot by police officer, Darren Wilson. Not unlike watching commercials for Feed Africa depicting horrific images of emaciated African children dying in hospitals, Mike Brown’s death seemed thousands of miles away, captivating white audiences’ attention while looking at the internet or listening to the news.

In my close circle of friends, we were sadly surprised not by Mike Brown’s mistreatment and death, but that it actually received any media attention. We are very aware black deaths get less media attention and there is a disproportionate amount of black men killed by police officers than white men.

As well, it was painful, but not surprising, to hear in circles at school, teachers criminalizing the victim and defending the wrongful actions of the police officers. Such was the case when I walked into the staff room one morning to a conversation between Miss Angie and Mrs. White.

“Mike Brown was a criminal” Miss Angie stated as fact. “Police shoot criminals.”

“He was definitely a thief, and I heard he sold drugs. The police wouldn’t have shot him if he hadn’t run,” Mrs. White continued.

“With so much violence in that part of the city, the police are fearful for their lives,” Mrs. White continued. “I’m sure Mike Brown had a gun or something,” Angie said authoritatively.

The criminalization and thoughtless acceptance of omitting due process was not ever on the table. Automatic defense of the police, and condemnation of the black man was the norm. That it was the accepted response in this community hard to refute.

The grand jury decision to not indict Darren Wilson occurred on the evening of November 24, of 2014 in the evening. While many race conscious teachers were ready to hear, yet not accept, the inevitable decision to not indict that they knew was coming, others were ready to re-affirm their belief that black people are an angry group of destructive people and the city of Ferguson was a place to be feared and avoided.

I arrived at work early in the morning the day after the announcement and walked straight to my office. I knew the people I wanted to avoid and the conversation I didn’t want to have—conversations about Blue Lives Matter and about the justification of the murder of Mike Brown.

I checked my email and saw one from my head principal, Mrs. White.

“Stand up meeting in the library at 7:30 a.m.”, was all the email was headed. My heart tightened and I held my breath as I began to speculate regarding the topic. “Will she try and speak to the sadness of the grand jury non-indictment? Might she try and share some resources we could share with our community? Maybe she’ll share some teaching resources we could use with our students?” My heart felt a little lighter as I pondered findings some strength and sense of community at my new school through this sadness. I walked into the library and waited for the conversation to begin.

“As you know,” Mrs. White began, “The decision to not indict Darren Wilson was made last night. There have already been riots. As you also surely know, we have a lot of police officers’ children in the building. We suspect some of the rioters have found a list of officers and are targeting their children. We need to be prepared for rioters to come to our building today. We need to go back to our rooms, review our lockdown procedures with our students and...” her voice trailed away as I began instantly to be consumed by my own confusion and despair.

“Huh?” I thought. “We are thirty minutes from the city of Ferguson. We are worried about how this decision would affect the white people in our community?”

I left the room library at the conclusion of the meeting without a word, went straight back to my office, closed my door, and cried.

I attempted not to leave my office for the rest of the day. However, at lunch I headed down to the lounge to heat up my leftover soup. It was then I overheard Angie speaking loudly in front of the ice machine about how Ferguson was “...full of angry black people who are burning down their own businesses and spewing hate.” The city of

Ferguson, in the eyes of my white teaching staff became a topic of conversation as a scary place full of angry, black people we should all fear.

Emotional response. When Mike Brown was killed, I did what a lot of well-intentioned white people did. I cried. I Facebooked. I wanted to go and be an anti-racist comrade on the streets, and instead I stayed home, fearing my safety, as well as fearing being outed as a radical in my new job. I had coffee with other well-intentioned white people, read many books and articles, had some great conversations, and did, really, nothing. I hunkered down and waited for the pain to pass looking for my opportunity to contribute.

Still, my chest grows tight and I fight back tears of emotion when I think of Miss Angie's and Mrs. White's reactions to the grand jury's decision not to indict Darren Wilson. My sickness lies not in those two individual's thoughts and feelings, but instead because I believe those viewpoints to be shared by a bigger community.

Four months following the grand jury's decision to not indict Darren Wilson, I spoke with a white person who participated in what she called a protest in a nearby suburb. It was organized by community members for white people to show their solidarity with black people. She explained they had worked with the police who had explained the rules ahead of time for keeping everyone safe and out of jail. They explained protesters could walk on the sidewalk, but not the street; they could walk as a group, but not block traffic. If these rules were broken, people would be arrested.

This well-meaning white, middle class educator woman explained this seemed fair to her. For as she said, "We are walking to start conversations, not incite a riot." She continued that when the group reached the main intersection in the suburb some people

wanted to block the intersection. She, along with others, convinced most of the participants to instead walk in groups of three or four, with the intention of not making people mad but instead to read their signs and get them to think.

This, because to these well intentioned white people, like myself, it is not life or death. Metaphorically, this is exactly where I, and many other white people are situated. We are indignant at the pervasive mistreatment and are willing to say something... as long as we don't get arrested, or make anyone angry, or hurt anyone's feelings.

Connection to literature.

Critical whiteness studies. Critical Whiteness Studies probe the at the invisibility of whiteness, "...problematizing the normality of hegemonic whiteness, arguing that in doing so whites deflect, ignore, or dismiss their role, racialization, and privilege in race dynamics" (Matias, et al., 2014). In the case of the murder and aftermath of Mike Brown, Miss Angie and Mrs. White didn't consider interrogating whiteness as an answer to why the Ferguson protests were occurring. They instead personalized how the actions of the protesters were affecting them on a daily basis. If they had instead stopped to interrogate their own whiteness and privilege they might have been able to identify the systems of which they are ignorant, or deny participation, which in schools may include racial deficit thinking, group stereotyping, criminalization of black and brown bodies. (Matias, et al., 2014).

Whiteness was not problematized, as it was not even considered. When we as white, middle-class, female educators do not acknowledge how we are perpetuating white privilege through our teaching—when we do not problematize the normalization of whiteness—then white, middle-class, female educators are the problem.

Deficit thinking. Miss Angie and Mrs. White stereotype Mike Brown as a criminal, a thief, and worthy to die in the street. The magnitude of their beliefs resonated in their words about the value of his life. While Miss Angie and Mrs. White didn't pull the trigger, nor did they leave him in the street to die, nor did they choose to not indict Darren Wilson of murder; their words were representative of just how some white, middle-class, female educators perpetuate the systems of white supremacy. The way we talk to, and about, students are steeped in the stereotypes and implicit biases we socialized within ourselves. These statements reflect the low expectations, deficit understandings of Mike Brown's abilities and culture (Ferguson, 2007; Delpit, 2006). While I would hope this deficit thinking is limited to the beliefs of Miss Angie and Mrs. White, deficit thinking remains a prevalent theology for teachers of America's children (Delpit, 2006; Leonardo, 2013).

Criminalization of black and brown bodies. Miss Angie and Mrs. White made stereotypes about Mike Brown based on the limited information they had.

"Mike Brown was a criminal" Miss Angie stated as fact. "Police shoot criminals." I

"He was definitely a thief, and I heard he sold drugs. The police wouldn't have shot him if he hadn't run," Mrs. White continued.

When Mrs. White concluded "With so much violence in that part of the city, the police are fearful for their lives," she made a stereotype about Mike Brown based on the part of town he was from and assumed the police were innocent as they were scared. She insinuates the police are brave to venture into Mike Brown's part of the city as it is, in her words, violent.

When Miss Angie agrees with Mrs. White adding “I’m sure Mike Brown had a gun or something,” she is adding fuel to the already presumptive story being spun.

White privilege. White privilege is perpetuated by the unnamed systems which secure its place in domination. A better example cannot be had than when Mrs. White discusses the protections we must take to ensure the disruptions do not affect the white, middle-class people of the school community. When she states

“We suspect some of the rioters have found a list of officers and are targeting their children. We need to be prepared for rioters to come to our building today,” she is only considering how the actions affect the good white middle class folk. Instead of looking inward at her own white privilege or looking at the systems of domination which have secured her position of opportunity, she immediately seeks to defend the standpoint of white privilege.

I too, must uncomfortably confront my own exercising of white privilege when I chose safety and comfort over putting my body on the line. I physically and emotionally chose to stay at home and use my social media app of choice to talk to already like-minded friends rather than put my body on the line.

The Criminalization of Black Youth

Professors don’t tell you, when you are learning to be principal, that your time is never your own. It is a challenge to finish writing a report, complete a budget or attend a full meeting without being paged on the walkie-talkie, of feeling a tap on the shoulder for an emergency, and everyone feels that their problems, on the scale of one to ten, are a ten.

This is very true on Tuesday afternoon. I am sitting in the back of a classroom, ready to become fully immersed in third grade reading strategies when...

“Assistance is needed in room 205,” chimes over the walk-talkie. I jump. Although the walkie-talkie goes off four times an hour, I am never prepared. I ready myself and reply, “On my way.”

I rise up out of my bright orange child chair, close my notebook, pick up my walk-talkie and take off in a brisk gait toward room 205. I wonder what the emergency will be. A tantrum-throwing student? A fight?

I turn the corner and try to hide my feelings of judgement as I arrive to see Miss Trina, the teacher standing in the doorway with one hand on the shoulder of Kylea, who is looking angrily toward the floor, and the other hand holding a paper referral form.

I try to make eye contact with Kylea before Miss Trina starts talking, to give her a look of comfort, but she won't look up.

“This young lady is being rude and disrespectful. All the other kids are sitting and listening to my lesson and she is calling people racists! She has to go! She can come back when she's ready to listen and keep her mouth shut.”

“Racists, huh? Kylea? What's going on?” I try to get her to look up to gauge the situation.

“Did you tell Miss Trina why you're upset?” I nudge her a bit.

“It doesn't really matter, does it?” Miss Trina interrupted. She's supposed to be listening to the lesson, not getting people upset.

“I suspect there is a very good reason why Kylea is upset. I'd love to take Kylea

for a chat and see what it is that is causing her to be frustrated. We'll come back together when we've figured it out."

"That okay, Kylea?"

She slowly nods her head and starts for my office. We don't say a word until we're sitting at my table.

"UHHGGG! I hate this school," Kylea starts. "You know my mom doesn't want us to be here. People are racist here."

"What happened?" I ask.

"I was just sitting there, and Aiden leans over and says, "Why does every black person have an afro? They're so ugly."

"I don't even have an afro," Kylea continues, "I used to. I had longer hair out and I'd pick it out..."

"Did you tell Miss Trina what Aiden said?" I interrupt.

"I tried. She was angry I interrupted her lesson. She told me unless it was an emergency, I needed to keep my mouth shut. I told it was an emergency because Aiden is a racist."

Kylea and I continued to talk.

"Then she had to go and write me up. UHH! So am I supposed to let people say racist stuff to me?"

"Absolutely not," I answer. "Why don't you and I come up with a plan and then we can talk to Miss Trina together."

We decided I would set up a plan with Miss Trina and if someone said something racially charged, she'd tell them it was hurtful quietly, then report it to Miss Trina, ask permission to see me, talk to me about it, and then I could follow up.

In those moments I wavered on what to tell her. I wanted to say,

“You're right Kylea, white privilege is perpetuated in schools in situations such as these where the teacher doesn't know how to intervene and so she doesn't.”

I wanted to tell Kylea that she better become used dealing with white privilege because racism is here to stay (Bell, 1993), and it's best to know how to deal with it when she encounters it. I also wanted to tell her about Miss Trina's white privilege and the fact that white people, with the power and privilege do not have to listen and often it's best to use phrases such as “that was very hurtful... you hurt my feelings... or other softened phrases” but landed on the conclusion that she was eight and not responsible for teaching naïve white female teachers—that was my job.

Later that day, during Miss Trina's planning I followed up. I told her what made Kylea so upset.

“I feel like the VICC kids are always so sensitive. Not every question is racist. She sees it everywhere. She doesn't live around here so she doesn't realize Aiden was just asking a question. It was childhood curiosity.”

“Can you see how Kylea, one of two black kids in your class, felt like Aiden was racially stereotyping her? Can you imagine how that might make her feel? By calling the emergency line, used for fights, to take her out of the room, it made her feel that he was the bad one; she was the one in trouble. Also, she's not in the VICC program. She lives two blocks down the street.”

“How am I supposed to teach when kids, like Kylea, are getting mad all the time?”

“Have you thought about you might address race and learning about equity in your classroom?” I ask.

“How am I supposed to teach about race. I have math, science, reading, and writing to teach. Tell me where am I supposed to put race into my program?” Miss Trina’s voice grew louder and shaky.

“It’s hard.” I respond. “Plus, if you are like me, you didn’t grow up talking about race. It’s not comfortable.”

“I’ll try,” Trina says with a voice saying she’s putting me off.

“We’ve got to do better than try,” I keep to myself. I say “Thanks,” instead. I know I can expect another emergency call. I know nothing has changed. I leave her classroom a little despondent, not knowing what my next steps should be.

Emotional response. As I left Miss Trina’s room, I was emotionally drained. I felt isolated and alone in my beginning to see how our students of color were being mistreated. My mind flips back to an administrative council where each principal was asked to communicate the core values they held most closely to their heart. We all put up a Post-It near the indicator. I was the only administrator who believed equity was a core value at the heart of education. I felt so alone and overwhelmed.

No one cares, I think. My heart tightens. I dream of going to a district where diversity and equity are in the heart of their mission. “I’ll leave.” I think. “I’ll find a community where I can join a movement which is already in action.”

Thoughts flood my mind when I have these escapist daydreams. I have them often. Thoughts of leaving. Daydreams of returning to Seattle, where at least people talk about race. Yet, almost immediately, I am submerged with a sick feeling of drowning in my own white privilege, for I can, and have, left situations and jobs, even, leaving black children to fend for themselves, against whiteness in their classrooms.

I feel sick that Kylea will face this again and again and again. I feel sick that even when teachers try and learn about their whiteness, students will continue to confront white privilege on a daily basis. Is teaching Kylea to stay calm and handle racism at an appropriate time, cow-towing to white fragility? Shouldn't I instead tell her to stand on her desk and yell at the top of her lungs that she will not endure this any longer?

My heart then constricts with anger and sadness when I think about Miss Trina writing a behavior referral for this incident, and not for both kids, but for the black girl who was trying to defend and explain herself. This is a teacher who is not going to be content with a debrief in the office as a consequence. How do I get Miss Trina to see this could have been a teachable moment in the class and not a disciplinary infraction, let alone a 911 call on the school phone? How do I communicate with her that I will not put this in our student information system for the state review?

Connection to the literature

The privilege of escape. While identifying invisible white privilege is difficult for white people to see, thereafter, one is left to deal and deconstruct white privilege.

Researchers discuss how silence is used to maintain power structures (Haviland, 2008;

Pollock, 2017). Because whites are not adversely affected by racism, it is the easier choice to ignore, stay silent, in my case, in this cornerstone story, desire escape.

Ten years ago I worked in a school district with ninety percent black students, and ninety percent of those who qualified for free or reduced lunch. The school district was flooded with problems including underfunding, lack of experienced teachers, community scrutiny, and state oversight. I stayed in the district two years and everyday planned my escape. I would tell myself I could not take the lack of funding. I could not take the constant teaching to tests to regain accreditation. I couldn't take the pressure of state oversight. So I left. I moved to a fairly well-funded, community supported school where teacher could teach free from some of those pressures. My students never had that privilege. It is the definition of white privilege that I can, after experiencing something uncomfortable, can choose to just move.

I imagine it is part of the human experience to want to work with people with common goals and values. Instead of dreaming of staying and holding amazing learning experiences for teachers so students can be successful, I dream of leaving. This is white privilege.

Like most white, middle-class, female educators, Miss Trina has not had much professional development or classes on examining whiteness or how to successfully teach students of different races than white (Ladson-Billing 2014; Sleeter, 2011; Matias et al., 2016).

Racism is embedded in our systems, our policies, our history (Bell, 1993). It is so powerful and pervasive it can feel like it is part of our DNA. This point is especially poignant in this situation.

How Kylea experiences racial permanence. Kylea is an eight-year old girl and even now woke to the inequities toward black people in this world. (Hope et al., 2015). Kylea is already learning there will be times she, when interacting with white people, will be asked to be the teacher of all things black. She is learning there will be times she will be silenced about injustices. There will be times she will be persecuted for standing up for what is right. Kylea already has learned her world is a racist one and it will not change so she must learn how to maneuver to find success and happiness.

Miss Trina continually tries to stereotype Kylea as an other (Pollock, 2017). She refers to Kylea as a “VICC kid” meaning she is part of the voluntary busing program which brings kids into the school. She refers to “kids like Kylea” likely a euphemism for black kids—grouping them all together as people who share all the same characteristics, traits, passions and challenges (Pollock, 2017). Stereotyping students is dangerous and inaccurate. Miss Trina, despite intentions, didn’t see Kylea, she saw a stereotype (Pollock, 2017) and spoke to and about her as such.

Criminalization of a young black girl. Miss Trina calls the office to have Kylea immediately removed for acting disrespectful and rude. Instead of asking questions she immediately assigns blame to Kylea as the person to be held responsible for interrupting her lesson. She enacts racism and furthers white privilege by pitting the white student, who initiated the disruption and asked a racially charged question, as the victim. By positioning the white student as the victim, she successfully shuts down any conversation about race or inequity and maintains the status quo of white privilege in her classroom (Picower, 2009).

Kylea being sent from the room, via an emergency button, while the white student who made the racist assertion remained in class is consistent with data about the disproportionate suspension and expulsion rate of black students. Morris (2016) found black girls are sixteen percent of females yet they are thirty-three percent of the referred females to law enforcement and school-based arrests. What originated as a racist comment by a white student to a black student ended in the black student earning a disciplinary infraction.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Introduction

Life is a series of making decisions, that given the hindsight, one might change given the opportunity. Having lived and breathed a body of study for so long, it is hard, in some respects to gain the perspective to be objective. I opt instead to make transparent the answers to the hard questions I asked myself to land at the conclusions I reached.

Why Interrogate Myself?

In the onset, upon considering the inception of this research, I deliberated about the best course of action to ascertain the information I wished to collect, namely how white privilege is perpetuated in schools with black and brown children. While it is the work of some research, to shine light on pockets of darkness in society, it is instead the work of other research to highlight correlations or best practices in theory or research. Autoethnography's aim is quite different. It is the intention of autoethnography to understand the broad scope of culture through theory, existing studies and the meticulous introspection of self (Clark & Creswell, 2015).

I considered surveying or conducting study groups with other white, middle class, female educators. Originally, I thought it could be insightful to interview a large group of white, middle class women with the purpose of exposing glaring inequalities in thoughts and actions. I moved on from this idea as I spent years thinking I was a good white compared to the bad whites out there not willing to be introspective. I lingered way too long trying to conceive of ways I could help lead ignorant whites down the road toward ally. As Bonilla-Silva (2014) expands on his previous article "Rethinking Racism" when he points out "...hunting for racists is the sport of choice of those who practice the

“clinical approach” to race relations—the careful separation of good and bad, tolerant and intolerant Americans” (p. 15). I’m sad to say, I was a hunter of racists. In fact, when I finished my masters in a business administration, I was issued the Superlative “Most likely to call people a racist.”

I moved away from this idea fearing I would linger too long on the blatant racism which still exists in public schools and I am much more interested in the whiteness which is perpetuated despite good intentions. It is the intent of most people to do good and treat people well, however, we often don’t understand the impact of the actions and words we use. My intellectual curiosity hovers around how well-meaning people still harm. (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

As I emerged slowly off my soapbox, I debated the idea of interviewing people, who, like me, sought daily to be anti-racist educators despite their white skin, and white middle class backgrounds. It felt safe to analyze the stories of well-meaning teachers. I would not be exposed—it would be my colleagues. Again, I journeyed from this idea, for how could I analyze the hidden racism and bias in others when I still possessed so much inside myself. I decidedly moved to pursuing and interrogating myself in order to begin leading and facilitating learning with other white middle class females.

What is the Real Question?

Upon the theoretical inception of my project, in the last three years, I have penned my question quite differently than it currently is. While revisions are necessary in any piece of writing and research, I held strong to my original question until the very end when I conceded to my advisory committee, as they are experts in their field. Despite the fact I understand their concerns with the wording of my question, I still theoretically hold

my initial research question close to my heart. In my soul the real question remains: How do the things middle class, white, female educators say to and about students of color, create and perpetuate white supremacy in their classrooms? The point of debate between me and my committee? They contend white privilege is more palatable than white supremacy and white people are not apt to pick up a paper which points out that they are perpetrators of white supremacy. They also nudged me toward adding the word many before white, middle-class females—again, suggesting white, middle-class people who seek to be anti-racist want to feel they are not included in the group of white people who are in fact perpetuating white supremacy. Though I cannot speak for every white person who exists, adding many to the title was hard; I struggled in my title. In my heart I believe all white people perpetuate white privilege, no matter how much they learn, reflect, etc.... we still live in white skin and bear the privileges of it.

White privilege or white supremacy. White privilege is the product of white supremacy. As Leonardo (2009) white supremacy is the system white people have created and maintained to ensure white people continue to have said privileges. White supremacy is intentional, systemic, insidious, and supreme (p. 75-76). Bonds and Inwood (2016) proclaim, “If privilege and racism are the symptoms, white supremacy is the disease” (pg. 720). White supremacy is the machine which keeps the power in the hands of the white people in order to secure power and privilege. Leonardo (2004) argues, “In order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of color. As such, 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 (pg. 137).

White supremacy is a scary phrase. Most likely, people associate the phrase white supremacy with white men in white hats, riding horses with torches in their hands, chasing and murdering black and brown bodies by hanging them from trees. We see overt hatred, hear vile language used against black and brown bodies, and feel some relief that acts such as these are becoming further and farther between.

Zeus Leonardo (2004) contends, there is the cost here of downplaying the active role of whites who take resources from people of color all over the world, appropriate their labor, and construct policies that deny minorities' full participation in society. These are processes that students rarely appreciate because their textbooks reinforce the innocence of whiteness. As a result, the theme of privilege obscures the subject of domination, or the agent of actions, because the situation is described as happening almost without the knowledge of whites. It conjures up images of domination happening behind the backs of whites, rather than on the backs of people of color. I continue to contend if we discuss the ways we talk to and about our students of color as perpetuating white privilege we are missing the machine which secures the position of power thereby perpetuating privilege in the first place.

Many or all? While it is not a popular or palatable idea, I believe all white people perpetuate white supremacy, not some of us, all of us. The word "some" allows some of us to get off the hook, as we are the good whites who acknowledge the racist structures we contribute to and from. In the end I was convinced my work would have less

readership, therefore less impact, if I implicate all white people in the atrocity of white supremacy.

I argue as Wildman (1995) has written, “I simply believe that no matter how hard I work at not being racist, I still am. Because part of racism is systemic, I benefit from the privilege that I am struggling to see” (p. 896). To solidify my point, I would like to argue that if there was a rubric of good people, I feel confident I would earn a rating of good person. I prioritize people in my career and in my personal life. I selected a career to make the world a better place whereas I could’ve selected a job for money. I picked a job where I started out making \$25,000 a year, while my friends who went in to the dot.com field made \$75,000 a year, and had paid off their student loans and bought houses in sought after neighborhoods. I worked ten hour days, getting paid for six and a half.

I work in schools which have high crime statistics and often have been escorted to my car if it is dark outside. I have upset parents, distrusting my white skin yell, threaten, and speak disparagingly toward me. I have been judged by the public for not having students meet proficiency standards when they grew three years of learning in my classroom. I went back to school, for four different graduate degrees, because I knew I didn’t know enough to change everything I needed to change in public schools.

I purposefully put myself in situations where I could experience, at least for a day or a week, what it was like to be the racial minority. I read books, joined book clubs, and talked to people about my whiteness, my privilege, and my biased perspectives, and I learned to listen. I pushed through the phases of wanting to close my eyes to injustice, to feeling shame and guilt, to a balanced place where I know I need to roll up my sleeves, continue to look deeply inside myself, and push forward.

I arrogantly espouse my goodness to say, despite efforts towards goodness, I perpetuate white supremacy in schools. I have grouped, and stereotyped students and their families, spoken disparaging remarks about them to colleagues, or my families and friends, exploited and stereotyped them in grant proposals trying to get resources, reveled in the glory of being a white beacon of hope for a community who needed me. I have overrepresented the white middle class perspective in my books, my classroom decorations, and curriculum.

I have wrongly viewed developmentally appropriate conflict as aggression in black children. I have crossed streets to not walk by a black person at night. I have held too low expectations of students based on their skin color. It is troubling to accept; yet, all white people perpetuate white privilege. The best we can do is continue to learn, grow, take responsibility, and forgive, heal, and push on.

White glove treatment for white supremacists. My strategic advisors insist readers will put my paper down if I used the word I had intended upon using—supremacy. Again, it is the readers white privilege to not pick up and read a paper which asserts she perpetuates white supremacy in schools. However, I share the ideology of Sleeter (1994), “...all of us have been well socialized to be racist, and benefit from racism constantly” (p. 33). While there are certainly white people who strive to be race conscious and anti-racist allies, there is still too much we do not know about what we do not know. There is privilege we have yet to see and acknowledge, and actions we are too scared to take.

Given this, there is a twisted paradox in dealing with white supremacy. Those with the power to control the systems do not have to listen. They do not have to consider

their unearned power and privilege and from where it came. Wise (2012) asserts he is likely writing for those of a like mind. He speaks truth and is intolerant of intolerance and holds nothing back. While followers most certainly do not agree with everything he says they most certainly agree with most, or they wouldn't listen.

Here in lies the paradox. How do anti-racist activists, compel the powers that be to listen and consider changing the power structure for a more just world? I content we must build relationships and approach people with love.

Yancy (2018) pens a letter to white America and asks them to not "...run and seek shelter from your own racism. Don't hide from your responsibility. Rather, begin, right now, to practice being vulnerable" (p. 21). I find, in the end, yelling at people, calling people racist, is not what changes people. It didn't change me. In the end it is the courage to be vulnerable—to look inside and be truthful with hurt we've endured, and the hurt we've put on others.

Yancy (2018) continues,

What I'm asking is that you first accept the racism within yourself, accept all the truth about what it means to for you to be white in a society that created for you.

I'm asking for you to trace the binds that tie you to forms of domination that you would rather not see. (p. 23)

I began this journey 20 years ago, looking at others; judging the wrongs they were committing—commending myself for how I was beginning to see. I now voyage on a journey of one, trusting that as I examine the tie that binds me to domination, I might add less to the system of white supremacy which oppresses our students of color.

Recommendations for Future Research

Choosing auto-ethnography as my methodology, I chose depth and understanding over scope. The depth creates an opening for exploration and interrogation of closely related queries:

Is white supremacy a Christian value? What is the connection between middle class white female educators, Christianity, and white supremacy? How does it impact the education of black and brown bodies?

From the onset of Europeans landing on North America, the United States was established as a country for white, male, Christian people (Fletcher, 2016). White men ordered a world as one where they would be on top and their wants and needs were prioritized (Fletcher, 2016). Religion was used to justify mistreatment and removal of people of color because of their non-Christian beliefs. Bae (2016) states "...the birth of racism in the U.S. begins with religiously justified exploitation, massacre and war with the Native Americans. According to the Pew Forum, 70% of whites in the United States consider themselves to be Christian. With the current teaching force constituted by white, middle-class, women, I am curious about the religious beliefs of said teachers and how those beliefs affect their teaching.

Recruitment of white, middle-class teachers. My research embodies ways I, as a white, middle-class, female educator have perpetuated white privilege in schools. I have worked as an educator in schools with predominately black and brown bodies for over half of my twenty-year career. In that career, I have forged strong relationships with students, families, and staff of color, and have facilitated tremendous academic achievement. However, I have argued in this paper, that despite my desire to be an anti-racist teacher I still do and will continue to perpetuate white privilege. Given this

information, I would argue further analysis needs to be done to determine whether white, female, middle-class educators have a place in teaching black and brown bodies?

The empathetic role in experiencing otherness. I have been told by some, and have thought myself lucky on many occasions. I can pass for a straight white girl. I'm what the 90's lesbian community called a lipstick lesbian. I like my feminine dresses, heels, and red lipstick. When I interviewed for my current job, I played the pronoun game.

"My spouse and I met in Seattle," I answered when I was telling a little bit about myself.

"My spouse is also in education," I continued demonstrating education was of high priority in our family.

It was my fourth hour on the job when my boss admitted she had looked me up online, saw a picture of my wife and I on my Facebook page. She then asked me to keep it secret. She said it was for my protection as she wasn't sure how the community would handle having a gay administrator.

I will never know what it is like to have black or brown skin. I will never know what it is to have someone judge my intellect, aggression, or motivation based on my skin. I do know, however, what it feels like for people to tell you that you are not as good, that you don't belong in their church, or their schools, who you are is shameful and to be kept a secret. When I had the mother of the child involved in the busing program tell me they were privileged to get out of their neighborhood school and into a nice school like ours, my first thought was the whiteness was so thick you can taste it. It is not

a privilege to learn amongst people who have more privilege if they are constantly reminding you that you don't deserve it in the first place.

Are people who have felt discrimination more likely to see discrimination when it is happening to others?

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