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Ethnic Studies and White Identity

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Abstract

This dissertation addresses white individuals' experiences in ethnic studies courses and addresses concerns that there is too little research in this area. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Critical Whiteness Studies and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, this qualitative research study examines the lived experiences of white individuals who have taken at least one ethnic studies course in high school and explores the extent to which these experiences influence the development of their racial identity in the present. An extensive literature review includes the most recent research on Critical Whiteness Studies, white racial identity development, ethnic studies, and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. For this research project, six white participants who have taken an ethnic studies course within the past five years participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. An in-depth analysis of the data revealed four superordinate themes - critical consciousness, historical understanding, critical whiteness pedagogy, and white supremacy culture - each illuminating the participants' reflections on racial identity and the impact of the course. The study offers insights into the experiences of white students in ethnic studies courses, and emphasizes the importance of incorporating ethnic studies into secondary education. Recommendations and implications for educators, administrators, curriculum supervisors, policymakers, and future research are discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

> Last week, the largest teachers' union in the country, the National Education Association, announced that its new, and first, priority is making racist anti-American indoctrination, race-based indoctrination, mandatory in every classroom in the country…So, if you're a straight White American, even if you're a very small child, you're guilty. It's your fault. You're a bad person. That's what teachers will be telling your children this fall (Carlson, 2021, para. 2).

Tucker Carlson's hyperbolic warning about indoctrination illustrates the current assault on anti-racist education in the United States. However, the reality remains that U.S. history textbooks center whiteness and white supremacy culture (Jones & Okun, 2001) by presenting the origins of civilization and the development of national infrastructure (Kroll, 2008) in ways that render invisible the role of whiteness and white supremacy (Moffitt et al., 2021; Morris, 2016) and erase the ubiquity of BIPOC resistance and the crucial role of white supremacy in American history (Loewen, 1995; Yacovone, 2023). By erasing the role of white supremacy, this historiography fails to portray white people as perpetrators or beneficiaries of racism (Sleeter, 2011), and instead implies that white people are responsible for all remarkable progress in the world (Givens, 2021). Sociologically, this master narrative perpetuates the notion that it is natural for one group to dominate another (Borunda et al., 2020), promotes scientific falsehoods about racism, and becomes a medium for the expression of colonial ideas based on white benevolence (Givens, 2021).

In many ways, the discipline of ethnic studies offers a counter-narrative to the traditional U.S. history curriculum offered in K-12 and postsecondary institutions across the country. The nation's first College of Ethnic Studies was founded at San Francisco State College in 1969 after BIPOC students led a five-month strike - the longest student strike in U.S. history - against Eurocentric education and the lack of diversity on their campus (McKenzie, 2020). Similar student protests spread to campuses throughout California and eventually across the country, with demands to teach courses in African American, Chicano American, Asian American, and Native American studies (Posnick-Goodwin, 2021). Efforts to teach ethnic studies to younger students in California followed, and by 1976, ethnic studies was offered as an elective in California classrooms (Posnick-Goodwin, 2021). However, this development declined during the budget crises and cultural shifts in the wake of the civil rights movement, and by the 1980s, more than half of the early K-12 and postsecondary ethnic studies programs that had been established were closed (Yang, 2000).

Despite these setbacks, the 1990s saw a reorganization, reconceptualization, and redesign of ethnic studies, which re-emerged as an academic discipline; by 2000, there were more than 800 ethnic studies programs and departments nationwide (Yang, 2000). Activists and educators brought the issue to the forefront in California again in the 2010s (Posnick-Goodwin, 2021), and ethnic studies electives and graduation requirements emerged in K-12 public schools across the state (Posnick-Goodwin, 2021) and the country (Yang, 2000), particularly in the West in school districts such as the Tucson Unified School District in Tucson, Arizona (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). The Tucson Unified School District was also the epicenter of the nation's first and most public backlash

against ethnic studies when former Arizona State Superintendent Huppenthal spoke out forcefully against ethnic studies in 2010 because, in his view, they create a sense of solidarity, promote victimhood, and are anti-white (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Although a federal judge ruled in 2017 that an Arizona law banning ethnic studies violated students' constitutional rights (Depenbrock, 2017), the backlash against ethnic studies in Arizona was a harbinger of the nationwide movement against ethnic studies and Critical Race Theory (CRT), a term used as a proxy for any curriculum or educational program portrayed as anti-white, which emerged in the backlash that gripped the nation following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 (Samuels & Olorunnipa, 2022).

Floyd's death sparked conversations around the world about systemic and structural racism. Multiple organizations in the United States - including schools - implemented initiatives to address race and racism within their own communities (Weine et al., 2020). Then, just four months after Floyd's death, President Trump signed Executive Order 13950, effectively banning any type of diversity and inclusion training at the federal level (Morgan, 2022). His executive order, which warned that CRT could harm Americans and teach them that the United States is racist, quickly brought CRT into the public conversation (Grice, 2022; Morgan, 2022). Before Floyd's death, few Americans had heard of this academic theory and were unaware of its purpose to examine how the intersection of law and race in America has led to political, economic, and social inequalities (Harris, 2021; Morgan, 2022). CRT, which is rarely taught outside of higher education, aims to expose systemic racism in American society (Liou & Alvara, 2021; McCausland, 2021). However, conservative think tanks and activists have reinterpreted CRT to promote an anti-equity agenda (Grice, 2022; Jayakumar et al., 2021; Liou &

Alvara, 2021). In response to the uprising following Floyd's murder, Fox News mentioned CRT more than 1,900 times from April through July 2021 (Gutzmann, 2021), and nearly 200 bills have been introduced since 2020 to ban CRT and other practices related to the teaching of race, gender, and sexuality in K-12 public schools; at the time of this writing, at least sixteen bills are now law (Feingold, 2022).

Conservative leaders in many states argue that learning about race and oppression could divide Americans, teach them to hate America, and harm white students (Harris, 2021; Jayakumar et al., 2021; Liou & Alvara, 2021). Although President Biden rescinded Trump's executive order in 2021, anti-equity efforts continue (Harris, 2021; Liou & Alvara, 2021). Many proponents of efforts to limit discussions of race and racism in the classroom claim their goal is to prevent teachers from including material that would trigger anxiety or guilt based on race (Schwartz, 2021).

Since January 2021, 44 states have proposed legislation that would either prohibit or restrict what and how teachers can teach specifically about race (Schwartz, 2023). Most of these bills revolve around "divisive concepts" stemming from Trump's executive order (Harris, 2021, para. 1; Schwartz, 2023, para. 6). Conservative legislators proposing these bills claim that "divisive concepts" could include conversations about historical or current inequities, culturally responsive teaching, and restorative practices (Schwartz, 2023, para. 6). A law passed in Texas in June 2021 prevents educators from teaching lessons that might make students uncomfortable, and requires them to teach that slavery and racism arose "when people deviated from the country's founding principles" (Morgan, 2022, p. 37). In March 2023, Arkansas Governor Huckabee signed the LEARNS Act requiring amendments to school materials that promote CRT (Schwartz,

2023). In January 2023, a Missouri senator proposed a bill that would ban CRT in schools and pay teachers $3,000 for voluntary training in “American patriotism” (Mizelle, 2023, para.1).

Governor DeSantis of Florida, one of the leading figures of the anti-CRT movement and advocate of the Stop W.O.K.E. Act, signed a law in April 2022 that, according to his own staff’s press release, will “give businesses, employees, children and families tools to stand up against discrimination and woke indoctrination,” and “is the first of its kind in the nation to take on both corporate wokeness and Critical Race Theory in schools in one act” (DeSantis, 2022, para.1). At a press conference in June 2022, he criticized narratives of oppression and marginalization and claimed that schools were indoctrinating students with “woke” ideology (Allen, 2022; Grice, 2022). More recently, he opposed the proposed Advanced Placement in African American Studies course (Contorno, 2023), claiming it was tied to a political agenda and “lacks educational value” (Atterbury, 2023, para. 2). Critics of these conservative bills argue that their language is intentionally vague and as a result, censorship of conversations about race and equity will increase (Harris, 2021).

Regarding ethnic studies specifically, Arizona is the only state that has attempted to enact an explicit ban on ethnic studies courses, which was signed into law in 2010 and repealed as unconstitutional in 2017 (Cammarota, 2017). However, recent challenges to ethnic studies programs and curricula have emerged amidst the wave of anti-CRT legislation. Advocacy groups such as Parents Defending Education, Moms for Liberty, and the Alliance to Protect Children have led the opposition to ethnic studies (Parents Defending Education, 2021). Parents Defending Education and related groups are active

at school board meetings and public comment forums (Elattar, 2021), citing concerns such as indoctrination, Critical Race Theory, and the teaching of systemic oppression in their opposition to ethnic studies (Anderson, 2022; Chang, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

As teachers in this current socio-political climate, we have experienced firsthand the chilling effect these efforts against equity in education are having in our own schools. The resistance to any efforts to teach students about the historical and contemporary impact of race is relentless. In some states, teachers who have taught about race, racism, and the history of systemic oppression have been reprimanded, and others who have discussed current issues such as book banning have lost their jobs (Crenshaw, 2021).

In the wake of this new legislation, ethnic studies once again is in a precarious situation in which its very existence is threatened. Studies have shown that ethnic studies courses are associated with academic and social-emotional benefits for white students and BIPOC students (Sleeter, 2011). However, there is little research to support the claim that learning about race and systemic oppression in high school harms white students and causes them to hate the United States. Therefore, the primary goal of our study was to gain a better understanding of how white students experienced learning about these topics in their ethnic studies courses.

Rationale, Relevance and Significance

Although ethnic studies courses and Critical Whiteness Studies have an overall positive impact on white racial identity development according to existing studies (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020), there are gaps in the existing research and nuances that need to

be addressed in further studies, including the actual experiences of white students who were enrolled in a high school ethnic studies course. In addition, there are few longitudinal studies (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020) on the long-term effects of ethnic studies. The longitudinal studies that do exist are overall positive in terms of white racial identity development, but show a number of effects that merit further consideration (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). For example, in a survey of 270 white college students, Todd et al. (2011) found that empathy, guilt, and anxiety changed differentially as a result of ethnic studies class and were moderated by the colorblind attitudes students held before beginning the class. Feelings of guilt tended to increase the more information about racism was taught (Todd et al., 2011). Similarly, in a 4-year longitudinal study of 845 white college students, Neville et al. (2014) found that participation in college diversity experiences and close friendships with BIPOC students decreased the likelihood that they would describe themselves as colorblind, and that their racial consciousness increased the more diversity courses white students took. Neville et al. (2014) suggest that these experiences merit further investigation when considering the range of effects that conditions such as ethnic studies courses have on white racial identity. Todd et al. (2011) argue that there is too little guidance on how to help white students process feelings of white guilt, and Flynn (2018) further notes that a more nuanced understanding of when and why anti-racist students disengage due to white fatigue is needed, as well as curriculum and instruction that educate students about this phenomenon and provide them with the tools and resources they need to overcome these feelings of fatigue. Finally, in addition to the lack of evidence on white secondary students' experiences with ethnic studies, we discovered no current research addressing the impact of ethnic studies after high school

graduation. In addition to the question of how white secondary students experienced ethnic studies courses, the question of whether these experiences have an impact on their adult lives deserves further attention.

The results of our study can benefit various educational stakeholders. The lack of research on the experiences of white students in ethnic studies affects educators, students, policymakers, and society. Ethnic studies teachers do not have specific training on how to engage with white students, while white students in traditional history classes are more likely to be exposed to curricula that reinforce racial colorblindness. Although there is no evidence that ethnic studies courses harm white students, policymakers continue to misrepresent the work on equity and culturally relevant pedagogical practices in K-12 schools. Finally, society is also affected by this problem, as a lack of understanding of white students' experiences with ethnic studies perpetuates collective denial of inequities and teaches history within a framework of white supremacy.

Educators

Educators who teach ethnic studies are impacted by the limited research on how white students experience their curriculum. Research on critical whiteness pedagogy demonstrates the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies such as seminar and dialogue (Castagno, 2008; Yeung et al., 2013), empathy building activities (Helms, 2017), role-playing in which students learn to interpret and interrupt white talk (Harbin et al., 2019; Matias & Boucher, 2021), and helping students develop a stable and healthy white identity. Yet, ethnic studies instructors rarely receive specialized training on how to engage with white students in ways that account for the complexity of white identity

(Helms, 2017) or training that provides them with the racial grammar (Bonilla-Silva, 2011) they need for a critical whiteness pedagogy. A more comprehensive understanding of white students' experiences in ethnic studies will impact educators as they currently lack research and professional development in this area.

Students

The lack of evidence on how white secondary students experience ethnic studies in secondary school is related to a more general lack of research on the benefits of ethnic studies for white students. While some school districts in the U.S. are implementing ethnic studies programs (Posnick-Goodwin, 2021; Yang, 2020), the benefits of ethnic studies for white students in general are not discussed in great detail. In fact, ethnic studies programs are more likely to be implemented as a graduation requirement in large, urban districts that serve BIPOC students almost exclusively (Posnick-Goodwin, 2021; Yang, 2000), as opposed to white students who typically attend schools where history classes are more likely to reflect traditional historiography (Williams, 2013; Laurent, 2019; Tatum, 2017). White students are most likely to learn from curricula that reinforce racial colorblindness (Aldana & Byrd, 2015), attend classes where they are implicitly or explicitly taught that race does not matter despite the privileges that whiteness confers (Moffit & Rogers, 2022), and attend classes where it is the norm not to talk about systemic oppression and the ways in which white students benefit from that oppression (Moffit & Rogers, 2022). Our research on the experiences of white students in ethnic studies provides an opportunity to understand at a deeper level whether white students are

best served by experiencing a broader and more inclusive understanding of white identity than the dominant historiography currently offered by traditional U.S. history education.

Policymakers

This study addresses the lack of understanding of white students' experiences in ethnic studies classes in high school, an issue that also concerns policymakers, including school board members and state legislators. Legislative bans on CRT misrepresent K-12's work on equity, culturally relevant pedagogical practices, and ethnic studies courses (Grice, 2022). These bans reinforce a culture of white supremacy both in our schools and in the United States (Grice, 2022). Meanwhile, policymakers and community members who advocate for inclusive and race-conscious history courses such as ethnic studies face lawmakers, policy writers, and major political organizations determined to block efforts to implement ethnic studies courses and programs (Schwartz, 2021). Politicians, such as the aforementioned Governor DeSantis, have attempted to ban courses that make white students feel uncomfortable, sad, or guilty about racism (Jones, 2022). However, the lack of research in this particular area makes it clear that DeSantis' argument is based on conjecture rather than empirical research on white students' experiences with ethnic studies. It is clear from this that policymakers are concerned about the problem, but that there is a lack of research on white students' experiences with ethnic studies.

Society writ large

Scholars argue that schools should provide students with the skills, knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes they need to live in diverse communities and participate in democratic processes (Banks, 2020; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). The standard history

curriculum has not achieved this goal of inclusion and representation for all students (Au et al., 2016). For years, scholars, students, parents, and others have emphasized the need to improve the curriculum (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Woodson, 1933). Socioeconomic and racial inequities persist when students do not learn about diverse cultures and perspectives (Hagerman, 2018; Harvey, 2018; Loewen, 1995). Therefore, society has been impacted by the problem of not understanding white students' experiences with ethnic studies because it has affected our understanding of whether white students are ultimately helped or harmed by ethnic studies. In a sense, this has resulted in the continued teaching of history within a white supremacist framework and the continuation of collective denial of inequities (Feagin, 2013).

Purpose and Research Questions

Our research had two aims: First, we examined the lived experiences of white individuals who had taken at least one ethnic studies course in high school. Second, we examined the extent to which their memories of being a white student in that course shape their racial identity development in the present. A small sample of six participants who had taken an ethnic studies course in the past five years shared their stories with us. The overarching research questions that guided our study were:

1. How do white individuals reflect upon their experiences in a high school ethnic studies course?
2. After graduation, to what extent do white individuals continue to reflect on the insights gained about whiteness from their ethnic studies course?

Our Audience

The results of our research can benefit various educational stakeholders. A study of white students' experiences in ethnic studies courses at the secondary level will have implications for educators, both in terms of how they approach the important task of teaching white students in ethnic studies courses and in terms of how they respond to community resistance to ethnic studies courses in general. The goal of this study was to understand how white students experience ethnic studies classes so that criticism can be directly addressed based on a comprehensive understanding of white students' experiences with ethnic studies, rather than assumptions about the experience of white students based on the abstract conjecture of partisan lawmakers (Schwartz, 2021).

This study also has implications for those involved in teacher education and pre-service teacher preparation programs, as well as for instructional leaders who work in schools and provide professional development to in-service teachers. Pre-service and in-service teachers should have opportunities to learn about discussion methods, strategies, and pedagogical practices that ensure that ethnic studies is effective. Our interviews with white individuals about their experiences with ethnic studies will provide insights that can inform current understandings of pedagogy and practice in ways that impact teacher education. With the expansion of ethnic studies programs in the United States (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020), there will be more robust teacher education and professional development to prepare new and experienced teachers to teach ethnic studies in multiracial classrooms, including for white students. Research in the field of critical whiteness pedagogy (Watts et al., 1999; Thomas, et al., 2014; Harvey, 2018) demonstrates that white students benefit from targeted pedagogy that enhances their

critical consciousness. This study illuminates the specific experiences of white individuals in ethnic studies courses so that teacher preparation programs are best positioned to meet these specific needs.

Finally, this study aims to inform policymakers about the experiences of white students in ethnic studies courses so that they can be better informed about the impact of anti-equity legislation. It adds context to the divisive statements of legislators who argue that learning about race and oppression is specifically harmful to white students by methodically examining the reflections of white individuals who have taken ethnic studies courses, rather than relying on politicized assumptions to extrapolate the feelings of white students to better inform public policy (Jones, 2022).

Theoretical Frameworks

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenological research focuses on understanding what it means to be a person in the world and gaining authentic insight into a particular phenomenon (Teherani et al., 2015; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Our research goal of understanding the experiences of white adults who had taken an ethnic studies course in high school was most consistent with Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic phenomenology (Larsen & Adu, 2022). Hermeneutic theorists such as Heidegger (1962), Gadamer et al. (2004), and Smith et al. (2009) emphasize the complexity of interpretation and how it is influenced by the researcher's personal experiences and biases (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al., 2009).

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a modified form of Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic phenomenology, served as both the theoretical framework and the

research design for this study. The study participants interpreted their own experiences when they shared them with the researchers, and the researchers in turn interpreted the data collected in interviews based on their own life experiences. This process of double hermeneutics (Heiddeger, 1962; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al., 2009) recognizes that both the researcher and the participant actively construct meaning about the participants' shared memories based on their unique perspectives, and that the researchers' interpretations of the data may be influenced by their own biases and values (Grossoehme, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, we aimed to explore participants' meanings and interpretations, particularly in relation to their memories of their time as white students in an ethnic studies course and its impact on the development of their current racial identity.

Critical Whiteness Studies

In the late 20th century, Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) emerged as a movement to examine whiteness and white privilege following the development of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the 1960s and 1970s. Over the years, CWS has shifted from asking how whiteness harms people of color to asking how white people understand the privileges that come with whiteness (Matias & Boucher, 2021). It examines how white privilege plays out in visible and invisible ways and how whiteness perpetuates racism.

What is whiteness? Whiteness, like race, is a social construct associated with numerous privileges that are often denied to BIPOC people (Matias & Boucher, 2021). Bonilla-Silva (2003) notes that, "whiteness, then, in all of its manifestations, is embodied

racial power" (p. 271). The United States' possessive investment in whiteness (Lipsitz, 2009) enforces institutional power through the arbitrary ways in which ethnic and cultural groups have gained access to whiteness throughout U.S. history (Laurent, 2019; Tatum, 2017; Williams, 2013), which has led the U.S. government to codify, reify, and further institutionalize hegemonic whiteness. This process rewards groups with the practical and mythological benefits of whiteness (Helms, 2017) and discourages them from forming coalitions with BIPOC individuals (Ignatiev, 2007) to gain economic and civic power. In this sense, whiteness is further entrenched in institutions such as the education system.

In the absence of a critical analysis of this past, it is all too easy to ignore or negate the influence of whiteness in the education system because whiteness is the norm (Nayak, 2007). The invisibility of whiteness (hooks, 2014) in and of itself represents its power and ubiquity. And yet, a close examination of U.S. history reveals how whiteness influences the ways in which schools devalue the historical and cultural contributions of the BIPOC community (Givens, 2021). Ultimately, schools perpetuate and reproduce whiteness both pedagogically (Matias & Boucher, 2021) and through the ways in which they systematically reiterate and reinforce racial hierarchies and white supremacy (Diamond & Lewis, 2022) by emphasizing a white historiography which erases the history of all other groups.

Helms' White Racial Identity Model. White racial identity development refers to the typical stages that white people often go through as they learn and accept their racial identity as white (Helms, 1993). Helms' (1990) model of white racial identity development provides a framework for learning more about white identity (Moffitt & Rogers, 2022). In this research project, Helms' (1990) model was used to understand the

lived experiences of our participants in their ethnic studies classes. This model is divided into six distinct schemas. Although some critics note that Helms' model does not account for the recurring changes in white racial identity that naturally occur in a person's life (Malott et al., 2015), we relied on an interpretation of Helms which notes that racial identity is not rigid and linear, but fluid and situationally dynamic (Helms, 2017).

Helms' (1990) model proposes a general two-schema developmental process that leads from a lack of awareness of racism and the importance of race to increased awareness and efforts to live as an anti-racist white person (Malott et al., 2015). Helms' (1990; 1993) model provides an organizing framework for identifying and interpreting the nuanced ways in which white youth and adults make sense of race and develop a racial identity along a predictable continuum (Moffitt et al., 2021). Helms (1995) further argues that maturation in racial identity development is triggered by personal encounters with meaningful racial material and moments when one is unable to cope effectively, and can lead to a racial identity that begins to evolve (Helms, 1995; Puchner et al., 2012).

Key Terms

BIPOC

The term BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and is a collective term for people who are part of the global majority and have experienced systemic oppression. While this systemic oppression is fundamentally rooted in anti-Blackness, the use of BIPOC in this study recognizes the shared experiences of diverse racial and ethnic groups.

White Supremacy Culture

White supremacy culture defines the cultural values typically upheld by white supremacist systems (Jones & Okun, 2001). Okun (2021) argues that these characteristics serve no one but train white people and the BIPOC community to internalize white norms. These include: perfectionism, paternalism, either/or thinking, worship of the written word, valuing quantity over quantity, power hoarding, defensiveness, a sense of urgency, progress means bigger, there is only one right way, a fear of open conflict, individualism, and a belief in objectivity (Jones & Okun, 2001). The characteristics have been updated since the original 15 were written in the 1990s. In doing so, intersectionality has been emphasized and it has been recognized that the characteristics do not stand alone (Okun, 2022).

Critical Whiteness Pedagogy

Critical whiteness pedagogy refers to instructional practices that intentionally teach white students about the role of whiteness; these strategies may include direct instruction, empathy-building activities, seminar discussions, and similar activities about whiteness and white racial identity (Harbin et al., 2019).

Ethnic Studies

Ethnic studies in the United States is the interdisciplinary study of race and ethnicity, but may also include sexuality and gender. Ethnic studies also examines the institutional power wielded by the state, civil society, and individuals (Herlihy-Mera, 2018). Ethnic studies was created to challenge the existing curriculum and focus on the history of systematically oppressed people in the United States (Hu-Dehart, 1993). It is an academic field that encompasses the humanities and social sciences. Originally, ethnic

studies was developed to reframe the way certain disciplines have told the stories, histories, struggles, and triumphs of BIPOC individuals (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). In recent years, the focus has broadened to include issues of representation, racialization, race theory, and interdisciplinary topics and approaches. In some states, such as California, Connecticut, Washington (Kwon, 2021) and Minnesota (Shockman, 2023), ethnic studies is a required subject for high school graduation (Kwon, 2021); in other cases, ethnic studies is an offered elective or a local requirement for graduation (Klecker, 2020; Lonetree, 2021). While the principles and themes of ethnic studies are generally consistent across courses and typically include framework concepts such as the 4 I's of Oppression, critical consciousness, participatory action research, and critical hope (Acre, 2016; Choi et al., 2016; Magcalas, 2016), there is little consistency in terms of specific course names and ethnic studies courses sometimes focus on specific groups and sometimes focus on broader themes of race and society (Schaefer & Abarry, 2008). While courses at the secondary level are sometimes explicitly called "Ethnic Studies" (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020) or "Critical Ethnic Studies" (Elia et al., 2016), ethnic studies courses may also focus on specific groups in the United States, such as Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies (Day, 2022), African American Studies (Edwards et al., 2018), and Mexican American Studies (Acosta, 2014). For the purposes of this study, all courses which fit this description are considered "Ethnic Studies."

Summary

The lack of research on the lived experiences of white students in ethnic studies (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020) concerns educators, students, policymakers, and society. Ethnic studies teachers do not have specific training on how to engage with white students (Todd

et al., 2011; Flynn, 2018), while white students in traditional history classes are more likely to be exposed to curricula that reinforce racial colorblindness (Aldana & Byrd, 2015). Although there is no evidence that ethnic studies courses harm white students, policymakers continue to misrepresent the work on equity and culturally relevant pedagogical practices in K-12 schools (Jones, 2022). Using the theoretical frameworks of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and Critical Whiteness Studies, this study examined both the memories of white adults who were students in an ethnic studies course at the secondary level and the extent to which these experiences shape their current racial identity development.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

In preparation for a careful examination of the lived experiences of white individuals who have taken an ethnic studies course in high school, this literature review explores the current state of research on whiteness, ethnic studies, and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. A number of topics fall under the umbrella of Critical Whiteness Studies: white epistemology and ontology, white supremacy culture, white racial identity development, white critical consciousness development, and critical whiteness pedagogy. This section begins with a comprehensive overview of the distancing strategies employed by white people to preserve whiteness as the norm and to maintain control over societal systems and structures. It includes both an in-depth examination of the invisibility of whiteness (Moffitt et al., 2021; Morris, 2016) and the ways in which school systems perpetuate white supremacy culture by default (Diamond & Lewis, 2022; Fine, 1997; Matias & Boucher, 2021; Okun, 2001). Critical Whiteness Studies also includes Helms' (1990) model of white racial identity development. This is followed by a detailed analysis of existing research that demonstrates that it is possible to help white students become more critically conscious of their own privilege and whiteness through direct instruction, thereby gaining a better understanding of their role in dismantling systemic oppression. This section also includes an overview of the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies such as seminar and dialogue (Castagno, 2008; Yeung et al., 2013), empathy building activities (Helms, 2017), role-playing in which students learn to interpret and interrupt white talk (Matias & Boucher, 2021; Harbin et al., 2019), and helping students develop a stable and healthy white identity. This

section draws on extensive research showing that direct instruction in critical whiteness influences the development of white racial identity.

Because the research questions of this study specifically examine how white students experience ethnic studies courses, the next section of this literature review will give a detailed overview of these courses. It provides an analysis of Eurocentric U.S. history courses as a case study of the effects of curricula and instruction that privilege whiteness as the norm by either erasing, minimizing, or sidelining other perspectives on U.S. history and viewing acts of institutional oppression, settler colonialism, slavery, and imperialism as justified and inevitable (Loewen, 1995). In addition to this analysis of Eurocentric history, this section also examines ethnic studies as a counter-narrative that de-centers the white perspective in its historiography and has been attributed to meaningful increases in student attendance and engagement (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020).

The final section of this literature review provides an overview of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis which served as the theoretical framework and research strategy for this study. This research approach is a relatively recent modification of hermeneutic phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962) and was a good fit for a study that aimed to understand a phenomenon through the lived experiences of participants (Peoples, 2021; Smith et al., 2009).

Restatement of the Purpose of the Proposed Study and the Research Questions

Our research had two aims: first, we examined the lived experiences of white individuals who had taken at least one ethnic studies course in high school. Second, we examined the extent to which white individuals take what they have learned about whiteness with them after graduation. Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, six high school graduates who had taken an ethnic studies course in the past five years shared their stories. The overarching research

questions guiding our study were:

How do white individuals reflect upon their experiences in a high school ethnic studies course?

After graduation, to what extent do white individuals continue to reflect on the insights gained about whiteness from their ethnic studies class?

Critical Whiteness Studies

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) examines structures and practices that promote white supremacy. These include the invisibility of whiteness (Moffitt et al, 2021; Morris, 2016) and the ways in which systems - including schools - perpetuate whiteness by default (Diamond & Lewis, 2022; Fine, 1997; Matias & Boucher, 2021) through anti-BIPOC policies and structures. This section of the literature review identifies relevant themes within CWS that guided our study.

Common Themes in Critical Whiteness Studies

Critical Whiteness Studies encompasses a wide range of scholarly work on the various ways in which whiteness functions in society to perpetuate privilege and institutional power. There are a number of common themes in scholarship on whiteness, particularly in relation to the ways in which white epistemology and ontology collude to maintain white supremacy. It was important to gain a deeper understanding of white epistemology and ontology before conducting our phenomenological study of white racial identity development among white people who have taken an ethnic studies course in order to understand the underlying perspectives and beliefs that have shaped their experiences and perceptions of race.

Whiteness as the Norm. Throughout American history, whiteness has set the standard for what is considered normal and desirable. According to Moffitt, et al. (2021), it also serves as, “the baseline marker for humanity” (p. 3). Morris (2016) argues that this norm of whiteness was

codified in the United States Constitution because “We the people," actually referred to white men. More than 200 years after the Constitution was written, Castagno (2008) reminds us that whiteness remains an integral part of our institutions. Because white normativity is so deeply embedded in our systems, dismantling it will be a challenge (Nayak, 2007).

What typically happens when educators and school leaders try to disrupt white norms? Distancing strategies (Case & Hemmings, 2005), or the rhetorical devices white people use to avoid acknowledging and discussing their role in maintaining and perpetuating systemic racism, are often used in moments of systemic change to ensure that white people avoid working toward anti-racism in partnership with BIPOC people (Applebaum, 2014). What follows is a more detailed analysis of the various distancing strategies that white people use to maintain the norm of whiteness. All of these strategies, used independently or together, ensure that whiteness remains the norm and that white people retain power and control. These strategies are used to maintain power in the interpersonal realm in interactions with BIPOC colleagues and peers and in the institutional realm within systems such as education.

White Talk. We investigated the phenomenon of white talk because we anticipated that we would encounter a great deal of rhetorical semantic menuevers in our interviews with participants regarding their experience in ethnic studies. McIntyre (1997) coined the term “white talk” (p. 45) to describe evasive rhetorical strategies that protect white people from thoroughly examining feedback about their contributions to systemic oppression, which then absolves them of responsibility for solving problems and taking action to correct their biases, thus ensuring the continuation of their racist actions or behaviors (Case & Hemmings, 2005). White talk is maintained as the standard for communication in schools (Matias, 2013), underscoring a culture of niceness (Bailey, 2014) in which white people derail conversations about race, ignore the

experiences of BIPOC staff and students, interrupt speakers, and ultimately remain silent to avoid criticism. Critical whiteness scholars note that there are many different types of white talk, but they all serve the same purpose: denial of systemic racism, minimization of the input and feedback from oppressed people, and perpetuation of whiteness as the norm (Applebaum, 2014). Types of white talk include denial of privilege, denial of complicity in one form of oppression by drawing attention to another unrelated injustice (Whitt, 2015), an overemphasis on nativism or classism as opposed to racism (Matias, 2013), an evasion of questions (Bailey, 2014), the rhetoric of colorblindness (Case & Hemmings, 2005), credentialing to prove one is not a racist (DiAngelo, 2021), objectifying BIPOC individuals (DiAngelo, 2021), and boomerang discourse (Bailey, 2014), or a discourse in which white anti-racist speech and actions are conducted in a way that continues to center whiteness.

Critical whiteness scholars also note that another benefit of white talk is that white people engage in a performative complicity in which they protect each other by refusing to interrupt or intervene in each other's microaggressions or overtly racist acts (McIntyre, 1997), although Whitt (2015) notes that in some cases white people vocally condemn overtly racist acts but protect each other by allowing more subtle, subversive expressions of injustice to go unchecked. Ultimately, Bailey (2014) questions whether it is ontologically possible for white people to recognize their complicity in the language of white talk, especially in schools where white talk is the norm (Matias, 2013). Even in liberal schools with mission statements rooted in equity, white talk is pervasive. Under these conditions, it is used performatively in front of BIPOC classmates and educators to demonstrate privilege and gain validation (Bailey, 2014). Bailey (2014) notes that in these circumstances, white people either look back on their own white talk and assume that they will be interpreted as extremely anti-racist by BIPOC peers, or they dismiss any

criticism they receive as unfounded. In other words, from an ontological and epistemological perspective, white talk allows white people to feel comfortable having discussions about race and racism because they can have these discussions from a place of comfort and safety, believing that they are allies for social justice (Bailey, 2014).

Distancing strategies such as white talk stem from a deep-rooted white fear of losing power and privilege (Bailey, 2014). White talk persists because it is both unconscious and fully sanctioned (Case & Hemmings, 2005) and used by both students and educators (Whitt, 2015), leaving the task of interrupting systemic oppression, confronting microaggressions, and speaking out against anti-BIPOC practices solely to BIPOC students and educators (Applebaum, 2021). The burden of always bearing the responsibility for disrupting systemic oppression ensures that the white power structures that permeate schools remain unchallenged, because the ultimate weapon of white talk is that white people can dismiss any evidence of complicity in racism or systemic oppression by questioning the authenticity or generalizability of others' lived experiences (Amos, 2010), or what Hytten & Warren (2003) call the discourse of *yes, but....* Ultimately, the multiple strategies of white talk all have the power to silence BIPOC resistance and reify white benevolence.

White Benevolence. White benevolence, or the belief in one's innocence and enlightenment, underscores white talk and effectively blocks the vulnerable interracial dialogue that must occur in education in order for ineffective and racist systems of white supremacy to change. Helms (2017) asserts that the most common and insidious expression of white benevolence is for a white person to vigorously pretend to be a good white person by disdaining or belittling other white people, and Yancy (2013) clarifies that this is most often done performatively when a white person is in the company of BIPOC peers or colleagues, and is

often accomplished by citing BIPOC scholars. Applebaum (2014) contextualizes white benevolence as a strategy that ultimately serves to silence BIPOC peers or colleagues and protect a white person's ego from feedback that might jeopardize this ingrained sense of moral enlightenment. By proclaiming their innocence, they portray themselves as above reproach and unimpeachable, making it nearly impossible to have a real, honest, and productive conversation about racism and white supremacy. Other white people claim to already know everything about racism, and DiAngelo (2021) points out that this allows them to avoid any kind of anti-racist work. In reflecting on her own racial identity development as a white person, Applebaum (2014) notes that an important part of her journey has been to be curious about her own intuitions about what it means to be a good white person.

Contrary to Applebaum (2014), most white people will find it difficult to ever realize the rhetorical power of their white benevolence because they have developed a set of strategies that are often unconsciously employed to maintain power and control in a system while maintaining the appearance of anti-racist allyship. Bailey (2014) describes the instance of white people responding to critical feedback with sincere pleas regarding how they can say and do better as an example of a strategy called boomerang discourse, or discourse that positions one as a benevolent fixer, rescuer, or savior who is outside of the critique of whiteness. Applebaum (2014) adds that boomerang discourse privileges white people who in turn rely on BIPOC peers to educate them about their own racism rather than seeking answers themselves or making the effort to understand their racism from the inside. Applebaum (2014) and Ahmed (2007) describe a similar rhetorical strategy in the context of white benevolence, in which white people make statements about their white privilege or admit to racist thoughts or actions in order to performatively demonstrate their perceived critical consciousness and thus place themselves

above criticism or feedback, and demonstrate their perceived critical consciousness and thus place themselves above criticism or feedback in order to manifest a fantasy of transcendence (Ahmed, 2004). Applebaum (2014) explains that by admitting their privilege, white people are able to avoid complicity in systemic racism and, as Yancy (2012) notes, these confessions demonstrate that the white person is good and moral. As a redemptive outlet, especially in terms of admitting privilege, this strategy, though often implicit and unintentional, leads white people to believe that they are indeed anti-racist, have done their part to combat systemic oppression and can no longer be implicated in systemic racial injustice (Levine-Rasky, 2000).

Although the scholars cited in the previous sections speak more generally about white benevolence from their perspectives as critical whiteness theorists, Whitt (2016) reflects on how white benevolence is specifically utilized by white students in the classroom. Echoing Ahmed's (2004) fantasy of transcendence, for example, Whitt (2016) notes that students often make statements such as, "everyone is racist" (p. 428) or similar remarks that make it clear to them and everyone else that they are aware of their own racism but they are not racist "in a *bad* way" (p. 428). Similarly, Hagerman (2018) describes interactions in which students are able to articulate their privilege but struggle to apply the concept to their own lives. The epistemic root of these explanations, for students and adults alike, is to assert one's knowledge and awareness of anti-racism as a protective measure against meaningful critique, and to consciously avoid confronting one's role within a system of institutional oppression.

Conscious Unknowing. Conscious unknowing refers to an active ignorance in which a white person, when confronted with feedback about their own biases, evidence of systemic oppression in society, or examples that confirm the existence of their white privilege, simply chooses not to know or understand more. Applebaum (2014) describes conscious unknowing as

an epistemology of ignorance and asserts that white supremacy in institutions such as the school system is perpetuated by this strategic, persistent obliviousness that occurs when white people are confronted with racism. Mills (2014) describes this phenomenon as an implicit, unspoken agreement among all systemically advantaged people to misinterpret the world and to consciously ignore, reject, or not fully process or understand information that threatens their position of power and privilege in society. Conscious unknowing is so deeply embedded in the psyche of white people that not only do they not understand injustice, Mills (2014) explains, but they also do not understand the world itself and how it has been completely and undoubtedly shaped by that injustice.

Conscious unknowing is related to white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018) because, as Castagno (2008) explains, white people tend to immediately reject or shut down when their racism is even hinted at because they take this feedback personally and consequently feel a sense of shame. Conscious unknowing serves as a protective salve against feelings of shame or guilt when confronted with actions that society deems unforgivable (Castagno, 2008). By feigning ignorance about race, white people model for each other the importance of avoiding conversations about race and racism (Lewis, 2003). Furthermore, when white people engage in conscious unknowing after being accused of interpersonal oppression, their feigned ignorance distracts from the institutional oppression in which we are all complicit (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Castagno, 2008, Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b). By creating a safe, personal distance between themselves and the socially charged issue of racism (Case & Hemmings, 2005), the act of conscious unknowing instead becomes one of countless actions that perpetuate the system that benevolent white people supposedly reject.

Scholars such as Bailey (2014) and Mills (2014) argue that conscious unknowing is a strategy employed by even the most critically conscious white people who are otherwise considered leaders in equity and anti-racist practices. Bailey (2014) explains that white people are adept at seeing only the self they want to see, misinterpreting conversations and interactions to focus on their benevolence, and thus willfully ignoring feedback that might draw attention to something other than their good intentions. On the other hand, Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues that critically conscious people who know a great deal about race and racism also sometimes strategically use this knowledge to feign innocence in order to avoid blame for acts of implicit or explicit oppression. Helms (2008) wonders how to coach white educators and other professionals in anti-racism when they may or may not be aware of their own complicity, which they conceal through real or unconscious ignorance. In either case, this denial of complicity ensures that the racist institutions which persist in the education system and in society writ large, are perpetuated by people in power who are incapable of having an honest dialogue about race.

Denial of Complicity. White benevolence and willful ignorance feed the same white desire to deny any complicity in the perpetuation of systemic oppression. Whitt (2015) notes that denial of complicity in classroom discussions of racial issues takes various forms, including social dissociation, colorblind ideology, racial scapegoating, victim blaming, and depersonalization. White people, then, whether they do it consciously or not, deny their complicity in racism and oppression by invoking a well-cultivated and strategic epistemology and language that is willfully ignorant in order to maintain white supremacy (Matias, 2013). This denial of complicity, then, is not perceived as denial by those who employ it. In other words, although colorblind ideology is counterfactual and based on an extensive body of research on implicit bias (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013), the denial of complicity, like the belief that one cannot

be racist if one is colorblind, is logical for someone born and raised in a system that rewards conscious ignorance.

This confluence of white benevolence, conscious unknowing, and denial of complicity ensures that white educators and white students alike continue to erect rhetorical barriers against interpersonal growth and institutional change without, in many cases, fully realizing the impact of their actions and words. Colorblind ideology remains a consistent and pervasive example. Helms (2017) and Castagno (2008) also point to the use of euphemistic terms such as *urban* and *at-risk* to obfuscate discussions of race by implicitly referring to race without ever explicitly naming it. By using racially coded language, educators distance themselves from their own complicity (Castagno, 2008). A similar phenomenon occurs when white people depersonalize conversations about race and social justice by speaking generally about the need for change without reference to individual actions or by using the term *we* when *I* would be more appropriate (Bandy et al., 2021). All of these strategies of racial evasiveness (Applebaum, 2021) allow white people to deny their complicity in structural racism and institutional oppression. Taken as a whole, it becomes clear why both white educators and students in particular, and white people in general, struggle to address the systems of white supremacy that permeate schools and society. How is a system of white supremacy ever supposed to change when white people consciously or unconsciously use so many strategies to avoid confronting, hearing, and synthesizing their own complicity? And although it is non-verbal, white silence is also a powerful component of white talk that perpetuates institutional racism and oppression.

White Silence. In addition to the distancing strategies associated with white talk, white silence also reinforces and legitimizes white supremacy by protecting its invisibility to ensure its perpetuation. Castagno (2008) shows that the majority of white educators, for example, are

reluctant to talk to students about race out of a strong desire for comfort and ideological safety in the classroom. This functions as a tool of white talk because silence is itself a rhetorical choice, as teachers' silence on issues of race sends the message that race and racism either do not exist or are taboo topics (Jones & Hagopian, 2020). When teachers silence their students in conversations about race, students learn to avoid such conversations in the future, reinforcing the belief that white institutions will never change without honest, emotional conversations (Castagno, 2008). Furthermore, Amos (2010) shows that in the vacuum created by white silence, white bonds are formed. This includes nonverbal communication between white people, such as strategic eye contact, when issues of race and racism arise. Such actions demarcate racial boundaries and are the byproduct of a culture that has not learned how to productively and safely engage in courageous conversations about race (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

The natural result of white silence is a society of white people who either do not know how to talk about race without appearing racist or who completely associate conversations about race with racism (Castagno, 2008). After graduation, students will continue to have questions about race and racism and participate in discussions about events of local, regional, and national significance related to race and racism, but they will no longer have the resources and guidance from their adult educators to have these conversations (Tatum, 1999). In essence, white silence reproduces white talk because when white people are confronted with the opportunity to engage in conversations about race, their lack of skills leads to a set of learned defenses and distancing strategies (Castagno, 2008). Rather than continuing to reproduce these white cultural patterns that ensure the perpetuation of racism, it is critical that schools instead model the tools white students need to have courageous conversations about race (Singleton & Linton, 2006), form a more secure white racial identity (Helms, 2008), and develop a critical consciousness about the

world that recognizes and challenges aspects of white supremacy culture (Shuster & Giesmann, 2021a).

Learning and Unlearning White Supremacy Culture

Jones & Okun's (2001; Okun, 2021) framework of white supremacy culture serves as a guide to better understand the multiple ways in which organizations value and reproduce white supremacy. This framework, Okun (2021) argues, should help us better understand how white supremacy plays out in our own lives and communities and recognize the potential harm caused by these characteristics. In our research, we used these characteristics to better understand the experiences and feelings that our participants shared with us as they reflected on their ethnic studies classes.

Fear of Open Conflict. Fear of open conflict refers to the aversion or discomfort individuals feel when confronted with situations involving overt disagreement or conflict (Jones & Okun, 2001). This anxiety may stem from concerns about damaging relationships, triggering negative feelings, or disrupting social harmony, and is often also rooted in feelings of guilt, shame, or insecurity (Jones & Okun, 2001; Okun, 2021). Individuals may avoid interrupting systemic or interpersonal racism, addressing injustice or engaging in difficult conversations, especially if they anticipate resistance or backlash from others (Jones & Okun, 2001). Consequently, this avoidance prevents meaningful dialogue and impedes progress in resolving conflict or systemic problems. To overcome this fear, an environment must be created in which open communication is encouraged, conflict is addressed constructively and individuals feel supported to express their views without fear of reprisal or judgment (Okun, 2021).

Paternalism and Saviorism. The characteristics of paternalism and saviorism described by Jones & Okun (2001) point to attitudes and behaviors often exhibited by privileged

individuals and those in positions of power, particularly in the context of social justice efforts. Paternalism refers to the tendency of privileged white individuals or groups to adopt a condescending or patronizing attitude towards BIPOC communities, believing they know what is best for them without considering their perspectives or agency. This can manifest in actions such as imposing solutions without consulting affected communities, speaking on behalf of BIPOC individuals or groups, or making symbolic gestures that do not address underlying systemic problems (Jones & Okun, 2001). Similarly, the belief that privileged individuals or groups are inherently more capable or enlightened and therefore must rescue or liberate BIPOC communities leads to a paternalistic approach to activism, where efforts are driven by a desire to feel heroic or virtuous rather than empowering BIPOC voices and addressing systemic injustice (Jones & Okun, 2001; Okun, 2021). Overcoming paternalism and a savior mentality requires humility, active listening, and a commitment to placing the experiences and leadership of BIPOC communities at the center of social justice efforts, rather than imposing external solutions or seeking validation for one's actions (Okun, 2021).

Quantity Over Quality. Quantity over quality refers to the preference for superficial measures of progress or success over meaningful, substantive change (Jones & Okun, 2001). This can manifest itself in a variety of ways, such as focusing on numerical metrics without adequately addressing deeper issues of equity and inclusion (Jones & Okun, 2001). This approach focuses on the appearance of progress rather than the actual impact on dismantling systemic inequities. This can lead to a focus on easily measurable outcomes or short-term initiatives without addressing the root causes of inequality or challenging existing power structures. Overcoming this characteristic requires a shift towards a more holistic understanding of social justice that prioritizes quality over quantity, a focus on the voices and needs of BIPOC

communities, and the prioritization of long-term, sustainable change over superficial indicators of success (Okun, 2021).

Quantity over quality (Jones & Okun, 2001) intersects with grades and school in various ways. In educational settings, the focus may be on achieving high grades, standardized test scores and advanced coursework as indicators of success rather than fostering deep understanding, critical thinking, and meaningful learning experiences (Darby & Rury, 2018; Feldman, 2019; Guskey & Brookhart, 2019). This can lead to prioritizing quick completion of tasks, memorization of facts for exams, and meeting numerical targets over engagement with complex concepts or the development of essential skills (Blum, 2020). Students may feel pressured to prioritize quantity over quality in their academic work and attempt to complete a large number of advanced courses or extracurricular activities to enhance college applications. This emphasis on quantity can lead to a culture of competition in which students may sacrifice their well-being and genuine intellectual curiosity for the pursuit of external validation or recognition (Blum, 2020; Feldman, 2019).

Power Hoarding. Jones & Okun (2001) explain that power hoarding refers to the way in which those in power use both overt and covert means to hold on to power and refuse to relinquish control because power is seen as limited. This is related to the concept of opportunity hoarding, a mechanism white people use to create, protect, and defend white cultural norms in educational organizations in order to maximize their power (O'Connor et al,. 2011; Diamond & Lewis, 2022). Power hoarding begins with the belief that there is little or no value in sharing power (Jones & Okun, 2001; Okun, 2021), such as when white parents simultaneously advocate for their students' access to advantaged educational pathways (honors and Advanced Placement classes) while working to block proposed structural changes aimed at dismantling racially

stratified academic hierarchies (O'Connor, et. al. 2011; Diamond & Lewis, 2022). Diamond & Lewis (2022) point out that a key component of opportunity hoarding is the creation and institutionalization of group boundaries which then create social boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002).

Any institutional changes that challenge the balance of power in a system, such as ethnic studies courses, cause those in power to feel threatened; even suggestions for change are taken as personal criticism of their leadership (Jones & Okun, 2001; Okun, 2021). This is because those in power assume that they have the best interests of the organization in mind and that those who want change are ill-informed and inexperienced (Jones & Okun, 2001; Okun, 2021). When privileged parents maximize opportunities for their own children while limiting access for others (Harvey, 2018), they typically fail to recognize the impact of their privilege in a space that protects the culture of white supremacy through the false belief that existing policies are objective and racially neutral (Diamond & Lewis, 2022). Harvey (2018) calls this justified avoidance or, "...vehemently claiming not to be racist while simultaneously acting in ways that secure advantages for their own child" (pp. 74-75). This pattern of power hoarding is most evident when white families flee schools that have implemented systemic reforms (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Diamond & Lewis, 2022).

Right to Comfort, Denial, and Defensiveness. That privileged white people continue to hoard power despite these systemic changes is due in part to three other aspects of white supremacy culture: the right to comfort, denial, and defensiveness. The right to comfort manifests in the belief that those with power are entitled to emotional and psychological comfort and scapegoat those who name and attempt to address the characteristics of white supremacy (Jones & Okun, 2001; Okun, 2021). This in itself is an act of denial and defensiveness.

Defensiveness is when one responds to new or challenging ideas with objections or criticism, making it very difficult to put these ideas forward (Jones & Okun, 2001; Okun, 2021). Okun (2021) notes that when white people expend energy defending against accusations of racism or denying that a BIPOC person's account of racism is authentic, they perpetuate institutionalized racism in white supremacist systems by refusing to examine the possible role of racism in society. The rhetorical devices and strategies that white people use to deny, defend, and protect their right to comfort all serve the overarching goal of maintaining power by preventing organizational change in schools and other systems.

Objectivity. Objectivity is expressed in the desire to be neutral, to demand linear thinking, and to ignore, devalue, or shame those who think differently, and finally in the refusal to recognize that there is no such thing as objectivity (Jones & Okun, 2001; Okun, 2021). Shome (1999) clarifies that objectivity and whiteness are rooted in discursive practices that privilege and uphold the global dominance of white imperial subjects and Eurocentric worldviews as if they were the objective norm. Lipsitz (2009) claims that one component of this objectivity is that those in power constantly invest in the norm as if it were objective. This creates a feedback loop in which few in society recognize how white supremacy has used its own means to justify itself, a phenomenon that also plays out in schools (Tatum, 1999).

School administrators, school districts, state boards of education, and federal education policymakers have the power to normalize the traditional Eurocentric curriculum and make false claims about objectivity. Matias (2013) asserts that at the local level, during classroom discussions, white students themselves have tremendous power to determine who and what is objectively valuable and deserving of time and attention. Said (2022) explains that white students control the culture and psychological safety of the classroom through their actions or inactions.

The choices they make about who they are willing to talk to and work with in the classroom as well as the way they develop a sense of community among themselves without regard for other students in the class, influence the culture in the classroom (Said, 2022). White students (and teachers, who should cultivate a sense of intentional community among all students) mistakenly believe that their actions are neutral and objective, but in reality, they are deeply isolating and unsafe for BIPOC students. Jones & Okun (2001; Okun, 2021) contend that this is largely due to the fact that white supremacy culture reinforces the notion that there is only one right way.

Only One Right Way. Systems such as education reflect white supremacy culture's belief that the only right way is to enforce a white, middle-class norm as an objective default and minimize other ways of knowing and being (Jones & Okun, 2001; Okun, 2021). This is especially evident when educators espouse an epistemology of saviorism, which assumes that students outside of these norms simply need to be introduced to the right way to change (Jones & Okun, 2001; Okun, 2021). For example, white cultural styles such as dress, language, and hairstyles are valued, while the cultural styles of other racialized groups are policed (Diamond & Lewis, 2022). White students are free to roam the hallways while BIPOC students are overly monitored (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). Teachers often have higher expectations for white students compared to their BIPOC peers (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Lindsay & Hart 2017).

Harvey (2018) notes that a curriculum that focuses on the accomplishments of white people throughout history reinforces one right way on multiple fronts. Curricula that pay little attention to BIPOC individuals and their vast contributions to history, science, art, literature, and all other disciplines reinforce the norm that white people are somehow smarter and have had a greater impact in these areas (Harvey, 2018; Givens, 2021). When BIPOC history and BIPOC contributions are excluded from the curriculum, or taught only as a marginal topic once a year in

designated months, the belief that there is only one right way to teach history is legitimized and reinforced (Harvey, 2018). Without a critical understanding of the complex political process through which state and national history standards are written, and without a similar understanding of how the textbooks themselves are adopted by states and school districts, a student's natural assumption is that the curriculum is organized in a way that privileges white achievement because it is, in fact, the only right way to teach and conceptualize history (Harvey, 2018; Givens, 2021). Castagno (2008) notes that when students notice and challenge this norm by initiating conversations about race in the classroom, teachers often deflect from the conversations because they want to maintain the status quo, which in turn legitimizes the belief in the one right way.

Helms' Model for White Racial Identity Development

Helms' (1990) model of white racial identity development provides a framework for learning more about white identity (Moffitt & Rogers, 2022). It proposes a developmental process that moves in two schemas, moving from a lack of awareness of racism and the importance of race to an increased awareness and effort to live as an anti-racist white person (Malott et al., 2015). Helms' (1990; 1993) model provides an organizing framework for identifying and interpreting the nuanced ways in which white youth and adults make sense of race (Moffitt et al., 2021) and develop a racial identity along a predictable continuum. Helms (1995) further argues that maturation in racial identity development is triggered by personal encounters with meaningful racial material and moments when one is unable to cope effectively, and can lead to a racial identity that begins to emerge (Helms, 1995; Puchner et al., 2012).

Helms' model consists of two distinct schemas, each with three sub-schemas (Helms, 1990). Passing through the first three sub-schemas of Helms' model is considered an oblivious or

racist identity. These schemas are characterized by an obliviousness to racial issues and an unquestioned racial identity (contact), a recognition of racial differences with a general confusion and inability to fully understand racial hierarchies and their implications (disintegration), and an unconscious or subconscious belief in white superiority (reintegration) (Helms, 1990; Puchner et al., 2012; Flynn, 2015; Flynn, 2018). The transition to the second set of sub-schemas is seen as a step towards a non-racist or anti-racist identity. The second principle schema includes the following: recognizing racial oppression and privilege without fully understanding the ways in which one is complicit in the systemic and institutional manifestations of racism (pseudo-independence), an understanding of white complicity in racial oppression and privilege (immersion/emersion), and an understanding of humanistic ideals of equity and social justice at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels (autonomy) (Helms, 1990; Puchner et al., 2012; Flynn, 2015; Flynn, 2018).

Recent research on the development of white racial identity contends that Helms' (1990) model, while drawing attention to white attitudinal issues, is inadequate in its explanation of racial consciousness as a sequential developmental trajectory (Borunda et al., 2020). Specifically, some scholars argue that the development of white racial identity is cyclical (Borunda et al., 2020; Moffitt et al., 2021), malleable (Malott et al., 2015), and influenced by intersecting identities (Malott et al., 2015; Crenshaw, 2020; Moffitt et al., 2021). Others have noted that the model is limited in its ability to operationalize the experiences, lifestyles, and perceptions of white people in concrete terms (Malott et al., 2015). Finally, scholars have warned that white autonomy is problematic because individuals with a positive white identity may inadvertently accept and enact myths of racial superiority and supremacy (Roediger, 1999; Croll, 2007; Malott et al., 2015).

In response to this critique, Moffit et al. (2021) note that Helms (1995) clarifies that white racial identity develops in cycles and that personal and social experiences can compel an individual to make shifts in racial identity - either to progress or regress. Specifically, Helms (2020) now uses the language of schemas or lenses - rather than stages - through which a person views race and their racialized experiences, which are not mutually exclusive or necessarily linear, and clarifies that progression from one schema to the next is not necessarily predictable, nor is it simply expected as a function of age (Moffit et al., 2021). As explained by Helms (1995) and Malott et al. (2015), individuals involved in a racial event tend to use their dominant schema to interpret the event, and this schema will most likely influence the person's behavior. However, there are also secondary schemas that are potentially accessible and influence a person's identity development (Helms, 2020). The schemas and sub-schemas are also influenced by the individuals and groups that are in a person's overall social context at any given time. Helms (2020) therefore clarifies that racial identity is never fixed and is always influenced by external forces.

Schemas of Development.

Contact. The first schema of white racial identity development, contact, can be characterized by white people benefiting from racism and doing little to challenge or resist the structures that enable racial privilege (Moffitt et al., 2021) and is often represented by the term colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Wise, 2010). A colorblind mentality contributes to their unwillingness to talk openly about race and their downplaying of whiteness as an important part of their identity (Helms, 1990; Moffitt et al., 2021). Moffitt et al. (2021) hypothesize that the strength of colorblind socialization may cause some white youth to persist in the contact schema even as they progress in their racial identity development in other ways. For example, Matias

(2013) and Helms (2017) point to rhetorical semantic maneuvers such as the focus on multiculturalism or diversity as safer options than race or racialized ethnic culture as evidence of this tension in relation to colorblindness in the contact schema.

Disintegration. The contact schema and the colorblind ideology that often accompanies it lead some to believe that talking about race is racist (Hagerman, 2018; Moffitt et al., 2021), which contributes to some predictable behaviors that can lead to the disintegration schema of racial identity development. In her work with white adolescents, Hagerman (2018) specifically describes this as the result of students believing that they should not talk about race and feeling bad when they do; Moffit et al. (2021) further describes this as nebulous feelings of guilt, shame, confusion, and ambiguity about one's whiteness, as well as shame and guilt about historical racism. Matias (2013) also points out that white people who are accustomed to a colorblind reality where racism is not discussed and their beliefs are supreme and unchallenged react predictably when confronted with a different reality and feel that they must resist. Estrada & Matthews (2016) note that disintegration is also associated with a general sense of shame stemming from a perceived transgression, and that judgment is made about the whole self rather than a single behavior or action. Flynn (2012; 2015) argues that disintegration can sometimes be confused with white fatigue, or when white people who disagree with the premise of racism feel overwhelmed and exhausted when discussing racism and fighting for anti-racism, which Flynn (2015) ultimately attributes this to a lack of experience in discussing issues of race and racism, as well as insufficient racial grammar in relation to the vocabulary of race and racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). Flynn (2015) warns that the blanket labeling of white people affected by white fatigue as resistant calls into question their sense of morality and forces them into a conceptual and rhetorical corner. Rather than being an empowering discourse, anti-racism and

multiculturalism can become an exclusionary discourse because their conceptual dissonance can foster frustration and resignation, making anti-racist work that much more complicated.

Reintegration. Helms' (1993) reintegration schema refers to an unconscious or subconscious belief in white superiority. According to Shuster & Giesemann (2021c), this occurs when people are confronted with alternative interpretations of their society, such as counter-narratives about U.S. history and white supremacy. They are then faced with the choice of either sticking to their existing beliefs or rethinking them. In the reintegration schema, people tend to cling to their prior beliefs and actively seek evidence to confirm them. This includes attempting to justify white privilege as a myth and finding ways to socially or biologically justify racism while blaming BIPOC people for current racial injustices (Case & Hemmings, 2005; Hagerman, 2018; Harvey, 2018). For example, Hagerman (2018) points to instances in which teachers and white students implicitly and psychosocially harm BIPOC students by attributing racially predictable exclusionary discipline and poor academic performance to BIPOC students and their families. This blame deflects attention from the interpersonal and institutional oppression these students face through the attitudes and policies of school administrators, teachers, and the educational system as a whole. In the reintegration schema, white people often lack metacognitive recognition of their own thought patterns. Applebaum (2014) refers to this as willful ignorance, Mills (2014) refers to it as conscious unknowing, and Matias (2013) calls it an epistemology of ignorance. Within the reintegration schema, then, the denial of complicity and white ignorance masquerades as white racial common sense. Matias & Mackey (2016) argue that white people who are in the reintegration schema must take responsibility for their emotional responses to learning about race, racism, and white supremacy. This provides them with the

opportunity to acknowledge and learn from the cognitive dissonance they may be experiencing and move into the next schema of Helms' (1993) model (Matias, 2013).

Pseudo-independence. If white people are able to move beyond reintegration, one outcome may be to recognize racial oppression and privilege without fully understanding the ways in which one is complicit in the systemic and institutional manifestations of racism (Helms, 1990; Puchner et al., 2012; Flynn, 2015; Flynn, 2018). Pseudo-independence is largely characterized by an acceptance of racial inequities and systemic oppression without a robust understanding of how these systems play out on a systemic or interpersonal level. This ultimately leads to an immature sense of agency and activism that is superficial and/or performative and does not take into account personal responsibility for racism (Moffitt et al., 2021). Helms (2008) called this abdication of personal responsibility for racism, "I'm a racist" (p. 67). Although the ally ostensibly admits to engaging in bad behavior, they excuse themselves by saying that they are essentially powerless in the face of a world full of racists. McIntyre (1997) and Applebaum (2014) point to similar rhetorical strategies and thought terminating clichés (Chiras, 1992) that obstruct engagement so that reflections on one's complicity in systemic oppression can be avoided. Hagerman (2018) further explains that pseudo-independence occurs when parents vehemently claim not to be racist while simultaneously acting in a way that benefits their own child in the educational system, which is consistent with what Helms (2020) calls an *ain't it a shame* strategy. This allows the white person the illusion of sensitivity without actually having to do anything about it. Matias & Mackey et al. (2016) note that this is especially evident when white teachers adopt an attitude of white saviorism, hoping to liberate urban students of color without being aware of their own racial culpability in perpetuating white supremacy (Matias, 2013).

Immersion/Emersion. The next phase of Helms' (1990) model, immersion/emersion, occurs when white people commit to developing an understanding of white complicity in racial oppression and privilege (Puchner et al., 2012; Flynn, 2015; Flynn, 2018). Essentially, this stage occurs when white people realize that whiteness is the product of powerful social forces that have become naturalized over time and ask themselves how they can challenge, resist, and overturn white hegemony (Nayak, 2007). Annerud (2014) notes that this phase is characterized by white people accepting humility, mystery, and uncertainty as necessary conditions for knowledge, especially knowledge about race and whiteness. Matias & Boucher (2021) argue that it is also necessary for white people to reject the rhetoric that has so readily blamed BIPOC students, BIPOC parents, and BIPOC culture for academic failure, and instead conceptualize an observation of how white racial privilege deleteriously impacts the lives, liberties, and well-being of BIPOC individuals. Critiquing white norms (Applebaum, 2014; Yancy, 2013) leads to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of self and the world to explain how and why change becomes possible (Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b). Yancy (2013) provides a detailed analysis of the notion of tarrying as an important process by which white people remain open to the experiences of BIPOC people, thereby allowing for the possibility of learning. Malott et al. (2015) point out that the immersion/emersion stage is also characterized by such a strong focus on identity that it is very easy for people to get stuck in an individualistic place around this concept of an identity that draws attention back to whiteness.

Autonomy. White racial autonomy is characterized by an understanding of the humanistic ideals of equity and social justice at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels. (Helms, 1990; Puchner et al., 2012; Flynn, 2015; Flynn, 2018). Moffitt et al. (2021) clarify that this presupposes a certain degree of certainty about one's anti-racist white identity. In their analysis of

white racial identity development, they note that among the autonomy-related characteristics referenced in Helms' (1990, 1995) theory is an awareness of structural racism and internalized white superiority. Yancy (2013) also characterizes this dissonance as the sense of crisis that arises from the awareness that this must be endured and confronted, and distinguishes this from immersion/emersion because whiteness is no longer the focus and is less a function of self-indulgence to see how much guilt one can endure, but rather it is about examining the white racist self in terms of one's social embeddedness in structures of white supremacy so that it can be exposed, identified, confronted, and challenged. Shuster & Giesemann (2021b) link white racial autonomy to the development of a critical consciousness in terms of a positive sense of self that relates to the world, exists in it, and has the capacity to change it. Similarly, Watson (2013) speaks of racial autonomy as a kind of white double consciousness, or an embrace of the uncomfortable tension that comes with taking seriously how whiteness is perceived in BIPOC imagination, as a valuable tool that opens up a space for activism that is more about supporting others than reaping rewards for oneself. Malott et al. (2015) call for a more comprehensive, complex, and nuanced exploration of the ways in which white people in autonomy give meaning to their own whiteness, as well as the need to operationalize concretely how anti-racist white people engage in the world.

Research on Developing a Critical Consciousness in White Students

Critical Consciousness Pedagogy. Critical consciousness is a process that combines reflection and efficacy to produce social action (Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b). Critical consciousness began with the work of Freire (1970) and his concept of conscientização; Freire wanted to teach Brazilians living in poverty to learn to read both words and the world, and he recognized that their education could not be independent of the social inequalities in which they

lived. Research in education has linked the development of critical consciousness to various positive outcomes: the development of critical consciousness in students is associated with higher engagement in school and better grades (McWhirter et al., 2016), higher college enrollment (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013), and lower likelihood of dropping out of school (Pérez-Gualdrón & Helms, 2017). The development of critical consciousness in adolescents has also been linked to the development of self-confidence, leadership skills, and positive self-esteem (Delia & Krasny, 2018; Clonan-Roy et al., 2016).

Although this is often associated with BIPOC students (El-Amin et al., 2017), there is growing evidence that the development of critical consciousness also has positive effects on white students (Watts et al., 1999; Thomas et al., 2014). White students with a developed critical consciousness learn to question, challenge, and interrupt the injustices they perceive in their schools (Harvey, 2018). Students who have critical consciousness question conventional wisdom about how systems such as the education system should operate and also develop the ability to challenge school leaders (Harvey, 2018).

A number of instruments have been developed to measure critical consciousness (Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b), including the Critical Consciousness Scale (Diemer et al., 2020). This rigorously validated scale (Diemer et al., 2020) measures three aspects of critical consciousness development based on Diemer's research (Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer & Rapa, 2015; Diemer et al., 2016): reflection, efficacy, and action (Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b). Teachers develop their students' critical consciousness when they meaningfully engage in lessons and activities that promote reflection on race and inequality, build efficacy through the use of modeling, mentor texts, and other activities, and create opportunities for social action in their classrooms (Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer & Rapa, 2015; Diemer et al., 2016).

Reflection. Research on developing critical consciousness in the classroom highlights a range of pedagogical practices that help students develop their ability to critically reflect on themselves, their school, and the world. Yeung et al. (2013), for example, note that understanding one's identity is critical to the ability to reflect on complex social inequalities. Harvey (2018) agrees that students must learn to actively surface, name, acknowledge, and further explore their own experiences of race and racism in society before they can develop understanding and empathy for others. Yancy (2012) argues that for white people, this process first means "tarrying," or intentionally dwelling in the complexity of racism, reflecting on one's role in perpetuating it, and acknowledging the challenges that come with attempting to eliminate it (p. 158). Participating in this work as a community allows students to see how they are connected to one another (Yancy, 2012, p. 54). Cultivating a community perspective before delving into race and racism reveals our plurality as a society, allows students to see and understand whiteness from multiple perspectives, and shows how whiteness is a problem for those who do not benefit from it in their community (Bailey, 2014). Yeung et al. (2013) state that this stage of identity development is also about students becoming aware of and acknowledging their own biases and stereotypes about BIPOC individuals and addressing the origins of these beliefs.

After guiding students to reflect on their own identities within their communities, teachers who cultivate critical consciousness in their students ask them to engage with the history of systemic oppression in ways that consider the social-emotional development of young learners (Kelly, 2020). Bandy et al. (2021) point out that this understanding of oppression is critical to the reflective component of developing critical consciousness because without a historical understanding of institutional racism, students will have a difficult time understanding and

comprehending contemporary racial injustice. For example, Bandy et al. (2021) note that environmental racism makes little sense without understanding that contemporary housing conditions are characterized by redlining and racial covenants that have been enforced through state violence and vigilante terrorism. Therefore, understanding the complex, interconnected systems of oppression and how they function together and separately is essential to developing critical consciousness (David & Derthick, 2017; Diemer, et al., 2020).

Finally, teachers who know how to cultivate critical consciousness provide opportunities for their students to reflect in a variety of ways. These include journal entries and other written reflections, one-on-one conversations with the teacher (Kelly, 2020), and seminar and dialogue formats that allow students to share and hear multiple perspectives (Yeung et al., 2013). It is equally important for teachers to create a safe space where students feel comfortable expressing their emotions and vulnerabilities (Puchner & Roseboro, 2011), because an environment of psychological safety is essential for the development of students' affective judgment and actions related to race, including their emotional ability to participate in interpersonal discussions with their classmates in a multiracial setting (Yeung et al., 2013). Winkler (2012) argues that this process of engaging in multiracial discussions leads students to negotiate, interpret, and make sense of the diverse and conflicting messages they receive about race, and ultimately develop their own understanding of how race functions in society and in their lives.

Efficacy. To develop critical consciousness, students must also develop a sense of self-efficacy, i.e., the belief that their actions can help eliminate racial injustice and institutional oppression (Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b). In this context, a sense of self-efficacy is an indicator that students have critical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2016) that the world can change for the better and that their actions can help bring about this change. A perceived sense of self-efficacy has

been shown to predict motivation and behavior (Shuster & Giesemann, 2021a). Yeung et al. (2013), in their study on the development of critical consciousness in environmental science students, note that students need more than academic reading and discussion to develop critical consciousness; they need opportunities to learn and practice the skills to create movements for racial justice in their community. de Saxe & Trotter-Simons (2021) argue that to strengthen self-efficacy, students need to address the cognitive dissonance that results from a new understanding of the world and understand the importance of seeing themselves as citizens of that world (Freire, 1970).

Through the work of educators who meaningfully model the practice of civic engagement, students begin to see themselves as global citizens (de Saxe & Trotter-Simons, 2021). Longitudinal research shows that classroom activities that model civic engagement, such as writing letters or calling public officials, promote feelings of self-efficacy (Patterson et al., 2021). When educators model how to care about and take action against injustices in the world, they give students the support and autonomy they need to recognize and reject inequities in their environment (Diemer & Li, 2011; Patterson et al., 2021).

Studies on the development of self-efficacy in the classroom confirm the findings of Puchner & Roseboro (2011) that a psychologically safe environment is essential. In a nationally representative study of ninth grade students from the United States, Godfrey & Grayman (2014) found that an open classroom climate in which students felt comfortable sharing their ideas with their classmates promoted self-efficacy, and Patterson et al. (2021) indicated that both a strong connection to school and strong relationships with teachers were positively associated with the efficacy dimension of critical consciousness. This speaks to the origins of conscientização, in which Freire (1970) advocated for a pedagogy in which teachers and students co-create

curriculum, freely exchange ideas, and learn from each other with the ultimate goal of an education that changes systems to eliminate structural oppression.

Action. The final indicator of the development of critical consciousness in students is action, i.e. the actions students take in their school and community to interrupt systemic injustice. Reflection and self-efficacy help students build a psychological model of critical consciousness that enables them to develop empathy and solidarity with those around them who are affected by systemic injustice (Boucher, 2014; Seawright, 2018). They need a pedagogy that connects them to community action so that they can advocate for racial justice outside of the classroom (Matias & Mackey, 2016).

Yeung et al. (2013) argue for an action-oriented pedagogy in which students progress sequentially through the stages of critical consciousness. This begins with reflecting on and understanding how the social and historical forces of race, gender, and class shape inequality and injustice (Yeung et al., 2013). Next, students develop self-efficacy and learn how to take action against systemic injustice through examples of movements in history (Yeung et al., 2013). Finally, students practice taking action by engaging in collective problem solving, coalition building, conflict negotiation, and interracial dialogue (Yeung et al., 2013). This model is sometimes referred to as social justice education. Several studies show a positive correlation between participation in a social justice education course and student commitment, confidence, and willingness to engage in critical action (Nagda et al., 2003; Nagda et al., 2009; Gurin-Sands et al., 2012). Classes that engage in civic projects where students write directly about systemic inequities and racial injustice to advocate for public policy follow a similar model and also show positive results in student self-efficacy and engagement (Ballard et al., 2016, Morgan, 2016; Hart & Wandeler, 2018). In Storms' (2012) qualitative study with students enrolled in a social justice

course, students attributed their greater willingness to engage to higher levels of awareness, empathy, racial consciousness, and confidence in speaking and leading.

Critical Whiteness Pedagogy. Developing critical consciousness through intentional pedagogy enriches learning for all students (Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b) and leads to measurable improvements in academic achievement (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013; Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; McWhirter et al., 2016; Pérez-Gualdrón & Helms, 2017; Delia & Krasny, 2018). White students also benefit from pedagogy that aims to increase students' critical consciousness (Watts et al., 1999; Thomas et al., 2014; Harvey, 2018). However, Applebaum (2019) shows that critical consciousness pedagogies are not sufficient for white students. Specifically, epistemologies of ignorance and conscious unknowing perpetuate systems of social injustice (Applebaum, 2019). This occurs when white students willfully ignore epistemic sources that demonstrate the persistence of racial injustice and insist on utilizing dominant epistemic views that distort the realities of racial injustice (Applebaum, 2019). Therefore, educators teaching white students must combine the pedagogy of critical consciousness with the pedagogy of critical whiteness to help students name and acknowledge systemic racism and develop a sense of self-efficacy that motivates them to take action.

Critical whiteness pedagogy refers to the specific teacher strategies that educate students about the norms and implications of whiteness (Applebaum, 2019). Harvey (2018) points out that students' racial development is just as important as their emotional, physical, and intellectual development. When educators remain silent on racial issues in school or discourage conversations and questions that revolve around race, schools legitimize whiteness (Castagno, 2008). There is also a risk that students will believe that racism is no longer an issue in our society (Shuster & Giesemann, 2021a) and that talking about race is wrong (Hagerman, 2018).

Some educators are so uncomfortable talking about race that they prefer to avoid the topic altogether (Castagno, 2008). However, when educators don't have conversations with students about whiteness, they deny its prevalence in schools. Helms (2017) asserts that it's not enough to reinforce multiculturalism and diversity programs. Educators can and must discuss whiteness in ways that help white students understand how privilege and oppression operate in institutions. To help students understand the world around them and learn how to be citizens of that world, educators must learn how to talk about race. In fact, a meta-analysis of critical whiteness pedagogy shows that classroom dialogue about race and whiteness (Yeung et al., 2013) and other discursive strategies such as online discussion posts, case-based analyses, role-playing, and simulations (Harbin et al., 2019) increase empathic perspective-taking, critical consciousness, and civic engagement among white students.

Seminar, Dialogue, and Discussions about Race. Several studies (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Taylor et al., 2006; Kroll, 2008; Olitsky, 2008; Flynn, 2012; Yeung, et al., 2013; Whitt, 2015; Kohli et al., 2017; Bandy et al., 2021; Sánchez Loza, 2021) show that classroom discussion is the most effective instructional strategy for engaging with learners of all ages about race. Specifically, Yeung et al. (2013) suggest that intergroup dialogue is a highly effective means of addressing whiteness with white students because emotional awareness is necessary for productive dialogue about race with peers. Yeung et al. (2013) and Bandy et al. (2021), analyzing student journal reflections, show that conversations about race yield the greatest gains in understanding racial injustice, empathy for others, intellectual development, analytical skills related to conversations about race, and critical reflection compared to all other pedagogical strategies. Discussions about race allow learners to share epistemic responsibility in an interactive and collective way (Whitt, 2015), which furthers their understanding of racism to a

far greater extent than individual reflection (Flynn, 2012; Kohli et al., 2017). Olitsky (2008) also demonstrates that participation in a group dialogue where learning is viewed as a collective activity rather than an individual endeavor is important for identity formation as students' academic achievements are highlighted in a socially situated view of learning rather than depending solely on their individual academic identity. This sense of collectivism also mitigates whiteness in the classroom by creating an epistemological role reversal in which BIPOC students are ideally perceived by white students as possessing the most epistemic knowledge (Kroll, 2008).

Singleton & Linton (2006) emphasize the importance of skillful facilitation to ensure that conversations about race are productive and reduce the likelihood of white talk. When white talk and other discursive rhetorical strategies inevitably emerge, Case & Hemmings (2005) note that gifted facilitators openly name and discuss white distancing through white talk because this transparency allows students to develop a more critical analysis of their own racial ideologies. Sánchez Loza (2021) argues that these moments educate students about whose speech and freedom to exist is protected and whose is consistently rejected. Although Sue (2015) agrees, he warns that it is the facilitator's job to ensure that white talk is addressed responsibly so that the education of white participants in a multiracial dialogue does not come at the expense of BIPOC participants. If done well, white students should ultimately emerge from such an intervention with an understanding that racism is a white problem and that the focus should be on how white people have acted and continue to act in interracial spaces (Kelly, 2020). For this reason, Casey & McManimon (2020) also advocate for discussion protocols, but caution against a step-by-step approach, as the desire for the simplicity of a clear protocol can blind educators to what can happen in a discussion beyond a specific protocol, including instances of microaggressions and

white talk. Educators facilitate most effectively when they allow themselves the flexibility to look beyond what is deemed possible in a class discussion through the lens of a strict product in order to adapt to the real-time complexities that often emerge during interracial discussions (Casey & McManimon, 2020), echoing Ladson-Billings' (2021) persistent reminder that culturally relevant pedagogy is not something one does, but something one is. Similarly, Kohli et al. (2017) argue that students' ability to process and confront racism in classroom discussions and elsewhere ultimately depends on the teacher's racial competence that they infuse into their pedagogy, in conjunction with their social-emotional capacity to facilitate interracial dialogue.

Social Emotional Learning and Distress Tolerance. Godfrey & Grayman (2014) found that a psychologically safe learning environment is critical to the success of a course that addresses issues of race and systemic oppression. Immordino-Yang & Damasio (2011) claim that all learning depends on psychological safety because the physiology of emotions has implications for how people learn, store new information, and access knowledge. Bandy et al. (2021) suggest a number of approaches to create an environment that is safe for all learners. These include class meetings, community building, collective norms, and agreements that openly value student contributions, model appreciation for diverse perspectives and address students' emotional and cognitive needs. To create successful opportunities for peer-to-peer learning through small group discussion and problem solving (Bandy et al., 2021), teachers also need to build personal relationships with students and focus on who their students are as individuals so that they can respond to difficult moments during class discussions in a way that is tailored to each individual learner and not entirely dependent on a specific step-by-step protocol or strategy that is impersonal and therefore likely to fail in very challenging situations (Casey & McManimon, 2020).

In the field of critical whiteness pedagogy, there is no broad consensus on how educators should respond to the needs of white students in discussions about race in the classroom, although much has been written on this topic. Matias & Mackey (2016) argue for a social-emotional curriculum and pedagogy that focuses on deconstructing students' emotionality to move beyond discomfort, guilt, sadness, defensiveness, and anger when addressing issues related to race and systemic oppression. Otherwise, they argue, students fall back into white distancing and undermine the goals of the course (Matias & Mackey, 2016). Bandy et al. (2021) advocate for direct instruction in active listening, conflict management, and distress tolerance, as well as direct instruction on the benefits of discussing race and privilege as opportunities for growth. Applebaum (2021) suggests that teachers name and define the vocabulary of critical whiteness in a non-confrontational way to mitigate white resistance that can lead to defensiveness and derail conversations about race (Todd et al., 2010), and as a strategy to avoid white fatigue that can occur when white students want to engage in conversations about race but lack the necessary background knowledge to understand how systemic racism operates in society (Flynn, 2015). Flynn (2018) also notes that social-emotional responses to conversations about race that are typically interpreted as white resistance are often more nuanced and could be viewed as white fear, white guilt, white fragility, or white fatigue. Educators would do well to consider the emotional responses of white students with the individual student in mind and respond to these emotional responses in a more nuanced way (Flynn, 2018). Todd et al. (2010) advocate for a mix of individual written reflections and cross-racial discussions to help educators better address students' nuanced emotional responses. Estrada & Matthews (2016) suggest that it is especially important for educators to be sensitive to students' emotions and aware of their pedagogical implications when feelings of guilt and shame emerge during class discussions or

written reflections, as these are common emotional responses to conversations about systemic racism and white privilege.

Teaching Students about White Privilege. Helping white students develop an awareness of their privilege is an important component of critical whiteness pedagogy, which begins after students have developed an understanding of structural inequality and begin the process of critically reflecting on the ways in which they have benefited from oppressive systems (Patterson et al., 2021). Moffit et al. (2021) argue that through the process of critical reflection and the development of critical consciousness, white students begin to recognize the ways in which racism not only disadvantages BIPOC people, but also benefits white people. Multicultural educators demonstrate that explicit, direct instruction about white privilege is necessary to move white students from ignorance to an alternative framework that enhances their understanding of power, privilege, and oppression (Reason et al., 2005; Monture, 2009; Yeung et al., 2013). Furthermore, it is crucial that teaching about white privilege encourages students to see themselves as members of a racialized group in society (Yeung et al., 2013), especially because whiteness is so often invisible (Morris, 2016; Moffitt et al., 2021) and therefore white students may not even perceive themselves as racialized (Tatum, 1999). Although an understanding of institutional oppression and white privilege is a prerequisite for white students to develop anti-racist attitudes and behaviors (Yeung et al., 2013), Applebaum (2021) contends that an isolated understanding of privilege without a dynamic analysis of Critical Whiteness Studies downplays the ways in which white people play an active role in perpetuating institutional oppression in systems such as education (Puchner & Roseboro, 2011). Similarly, Goldberg (2020) notes that scholars like DiAngelo (2018) focus on the passive aspects of white privilege, which encourages white people to introspect and reflect, but does not lead to action because it

does not illuminate the various ways in which white privilege enables white people to actively contribute to institutional oppression (Puchner & Roseboro, 2011). Instead, Applebaum (2021) argues for a careful pedagogical balance in which white students learn about white privilege and their complicity in perpetuating systems of racial injustice while minimizing the reproduction and realignment of whiteness.

To achieve this more dynamic understanding of white privilege, Kohli et al. (2017) call for a more systemic approach to white privilege that connects everyday acts of interpersonal oppression and passive privilege to a larger historical chain of events, structures, and changes rooted in slavery and systemic oppression. Schools themselves are an ideal field of study for K-12 students to engage in this work, as schools are one place where the systemic privileging of white students is often evident when it comes to the curriculum (Kohli et al., 2017; Sánchez Loza, 2021). White students who lack critical consciousness and a systemic understanding of white privilege do not notice the institutional advantages they are afforded in the school system, nor are they able to recognize the ways in which they consciously and unconsciously maintain and perpetuate this systemic racism (Sánchez Loza, 2021). In contrast, when students are aware of these privileges, it leads to the efficacy and action that Diemer et al. (2016) emphasize in their critical consciousness framework.

However, a pedagogical framework that emphasizes the ways in which white students benefit from and maintain interpersonal and institutional privilege is not sufficient to ensure that white students develop into critically aware, anti-racist leaders, for such a curriculum must be supported by the social-emotional awareness described in the previous section (Bandy et al., 2021). Annerud (2014) argues that due to the fact that many white people in the United States are ill-informed about whiteness as a site of structural racial advantage, which carries with it

ontological and epistemological implications, familiar and predictable emotional patterns of shame and guilt emerge for teachers to reckon with as students begin to understand the immense layers of violence perpetrated in the name of whiteness. In fact, this phenomenon is particularly threatening for white students who are relatively conscious of oppression in general because a broader understanding of white privilege can lead to cognitive dissonance when these students understand that they are complicit in the systems they seek to abolish (Annerud, 2014). Annerud (2014) describes this as a political crisis and a spiritual crisis for white students. On the other hand, Kroll (2008) notes that a curriculum that focuses on white privilege leads to feelings of anger, entitlement, and denial in students who are not at all critically aware of racial oppression as an everyday reality for BIPOC people, which presents teachers with additional social-emotional challenges, often in the same classroom. To address these challenges, Applebaum (2021) recommends that teachers remain socially and emotionally responsive and emphasizes the need to slowly introduce white students to concepts related to whiteness and white privilege. Todd et al. (2010) suggest that it is important for teachers to anticipate white students' general emotional responses when thinking about racism and white privilege in order to consider their reactions and prepare to respond with a mix of critical empathy and inquiry. Privilege protects white people from noticing their own institutional advantages, and the teacher's role is ultimately to help white students understand racism, discrimination, and institutional oppression in order to foster the development of a critically conscious, anti-racist white racial identity (Harvey, 2018).

Developing a White Racial Identity. White students' racial identities are not fixed, but works in progress (Olitsky, 2008). They are the dynamic product of a series of interactions that take place over time in a variety of environments and are constantly evolving in social situations

(Roth et al., 2004). Thus, an important goal of critical whiteness pedagogy is the development of white students' racial identity (Helms, 1993; Yeung et al., 2013). The goals of racial identity development in the practice of critical whiteness pedagogy include helping students understand whiteness as a social construction associated with institutional power and privilege (Yeung et al., 2013), helping them to critically analyze how intersecting identities impact whiteness (Yeung et al., 2013), and providing the social-emotional and reflective instructional context necessary for the development of a healthy white identity (Helms, 1993; Yeung et al., 2013). Matias (2013) argues for a Freirean metacognitive process (Freire, 1970) referred to as racial metacognition. In this process, teachers model and facilitate a metacognitive thinking process about race and whiteness during classroom discussions about literature to help students develop a better cognitive apparatus for understanding race. To accomplish this, teachers can teach the history of race and whiteness and re-center the once marginalized counter-narratives of students of color (Matias, 2013), engage students in readings and discussions that address the complexities of race and whiteness in both society and the classroom (Bandy et al., 2021), and design curricular interventions that connect to students' current sense of anti-racism to move beyond traditional narratives of shame, guilt and saviorhood (Casey & McManimon, 2020).

From the perspective of critical whiteness pedagogy, shame, guilt, and saviorism are the antithesis of a healthy white identity. Annerud's (2014) pedagogy of humility asks students to not lose sight of the violence perpetrated in the name of whiteness while adopting a meaningful critical stance toward that violence in order to tarry with the meaning of their whiteness as a dynamic site of struggle and transformation. Such positioning moves students beyond a largely meaningless focus on individual guilt and shame and toward a collective vision and commitment to social change (Annerud, 2014). Such a pedagogy requires teachers to foster the emotional

preparation necessary to fully conceptualize and take responsibility for the oppression that has unfolded and continues to unfold systemically and interpersonally in the name of whiteness (Yeung et. al., 2013) without adopting a savior mentality, as one does when seeing oneself as not inherently complicit (Matias & Mackey, 2016). Such pedagogy also requires an environment of vulnerability in the classroom where students are able to name their ignorance as well as their attachment to what is good and comfortable in order to recognize fear and discomfort as sources of knowledge and connection rather than sources of guilt and shame (Bailey, 2014). Finally, teachers need to foster in their students a sense of efficacy and critical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2016; Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b) that leads them to believe that they have the ability to change this system through their actions.

Teaching Students to Interrupt Whiteness. Perhaps the most important outcome of critical whiteness pedagogy is to teach students to interrupt racism and white supremacy as a social responsibility. Fundamentally, critical whiteness pedagogy strives to foster in students a sense of responsibility for their own discursive habits (Whitt, 2015), particularly with regard to the connections between social position, knowledge, and the epistemic responsibility to name the emotionality of whiteness (Matias, 2016) as it manifests in their interpersonal conversations, as these interactions ultimately contribute to the perpetuation of institutional oppression. Schools are sites of white supremacy because of the institutionally oppressive structures that exist within them (Dumas & ross, 2016; Sánchez Loza, 2021), and teachers have a responsibility to teach white students to collectively shape the landscape of school culture as a whole (Urrieta & Reidel, 2008; Sánchez Loza, 2021) and offer counter-narratives against policies, practices, and interpersonal interactions that center and perpetuate whiteness (Milner, 2020).

Teachers do this primarily by modeling their own behavior, especially when white talk, willful ignorance, and other examples of white distancing occur during classroom discussions. Similar to Matias' (2013) model of racial metacognition, Case & Hemmings (2005) advocate for "metadialogical" (p. 623) work in which teachers share their own ways of speaking to draw attention to the ways in which students talk about, or around, race and racism in order to make them aware of their discursive choices (Whitt, 2015). It is imperative that teachers interrupt white students when they use distancing strategies (Applebaum, 2021) such as rhetorical semantic maneuvers to distinguish themselves as *good* white people (rather than a *bad* white people) while intentionally failing to recognize their own racism (Matias, 2013). Teachers are also models of disruption when they call attention to moments when students center themselves in conversations about race (Matias, 2016) and engage in other types of white talk (McIntyre, 1997).

Metacognitive narration is another strategy that teachers can use to prepare students to interrupt whiteness. Researchers report numerous examples of effective use of metacognition, such as highlighting the larger structural forces at play in instances of white emotionality and white talk (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Matias, 2013; Estrada & Matthews, 2016), analyzing overt racism and microaggressions in the classroom (Sue, 2015; Sánchez Loza, 2021), unpacking the psychological reasons why white people use rhetorical semantic maneuvers and distancing strategies (Matias, 2013; Applebaum, 2021), and describing the work required to embrace confusion, ignorance, and fear and then release attachment to white benevolence (Bailey, 2014). Educators and students can work together to understand the discomfort and loss (Bebout, 2014) associated with developing a white racial identity (Helms, 1993) and the disruption of whiteness. Teachers can also use metacognitive narratives to analyze whiteness and its role in texts, films,

social media, and myriad other sources where the emotionalities of whiteness are present (Matias, 2020).

Schools are spaces in which society is reproduced, and studies on critical whiteness pedagogy show that political, ideological, and cultural disruption can also take place in schools (Sánchez Loza, 2021). In their research, critical whiteness pedagogy scholars cite numerous qualitative examples of how direct instruction, classroom discussions (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Taylor et al., 2006; Kroll, 2008; Olitsky, 2008; Flynn, 2012; Yeung et al., 2013; Whitt, 2015; Kohli et al., 2017; Bandy et al., 2021; Sánchez Loza, 2021), social-emotional skill building (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2011; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Casey & McManimon, 2020; Bandy et al., 2021), teaching about whiteness and white privilege (Reason et al., 2005; Monture, 2009; Yeung et al., 2013; Goldberg, 2020; Applebaum, 2021; Moffit et al., 2021; Patterson et al., 2021), the development of white racial identity (Roth et al., 2004; Olitsky, 2008; Matias, 2013; Yeung et al., 2013; Annerud, 2014; Bailey, 2014; Matias & Mackey, 2015; Casey & McManimon, 2020; Bandy et al., 2021) and the capacities to interrupt whiteness (McIntyre, 1997; Case & Hemmings, 2005; Matias, 2013; Bailey, 2014; Whitt, 2015; Matias, 2016; Matias, 2020; Applebaum, 2021; Sánchez Loza, 2021) directly lead to meaningful changes in the development of white students' racial identities. Sánchez Loza (2021) argues that schools serve as spaces where white students learn and adopt the ideology of white supremacy, and as such, schools can also serve as sites of de-escalation and the development of a healthy anti-racist white racial identity. A variety of qualitative narratives (Cooks, 2003; Case & Hemmings, 2005; Reason et al., 2005; Amos, 2010; Todd, et al., 2010; Puchner & Roseboro, 2011; Annerud, 2014; Boucher, 2014; Yancy, 2013; Yeung et al., 2013; Matias & Mackey, 2015; Whitt, 2015; Estrada & Mathews, 2016; Hagerman, 2018; Applebaum, 2019; Kelly, 2020; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Bandy

et al., 2021; Patterson et al., 2021), for example, all point to the effectiveness of critical whiteness pedagogy in raising awareness among white students, empowering them to view their social interactions differently, and giving them the skills and courage to intervene when others express racist views. Wilson (2021) conducted a meta-analysis to examine what prior experiences, contexts, and relationships motivate white people to engage in social justice work after a workshop focused on critical whiteness and racial justice. He argues that the level of experience with anti-racism work with which participants came to the workshop and the focus of the workshop itself on individual attitudes and skills (as opposed to a focus solely on systemic racism) predicted future activism after the workshop, which only further supports the efficacy of critical whiteness pedagogy (Wilson, 2021).

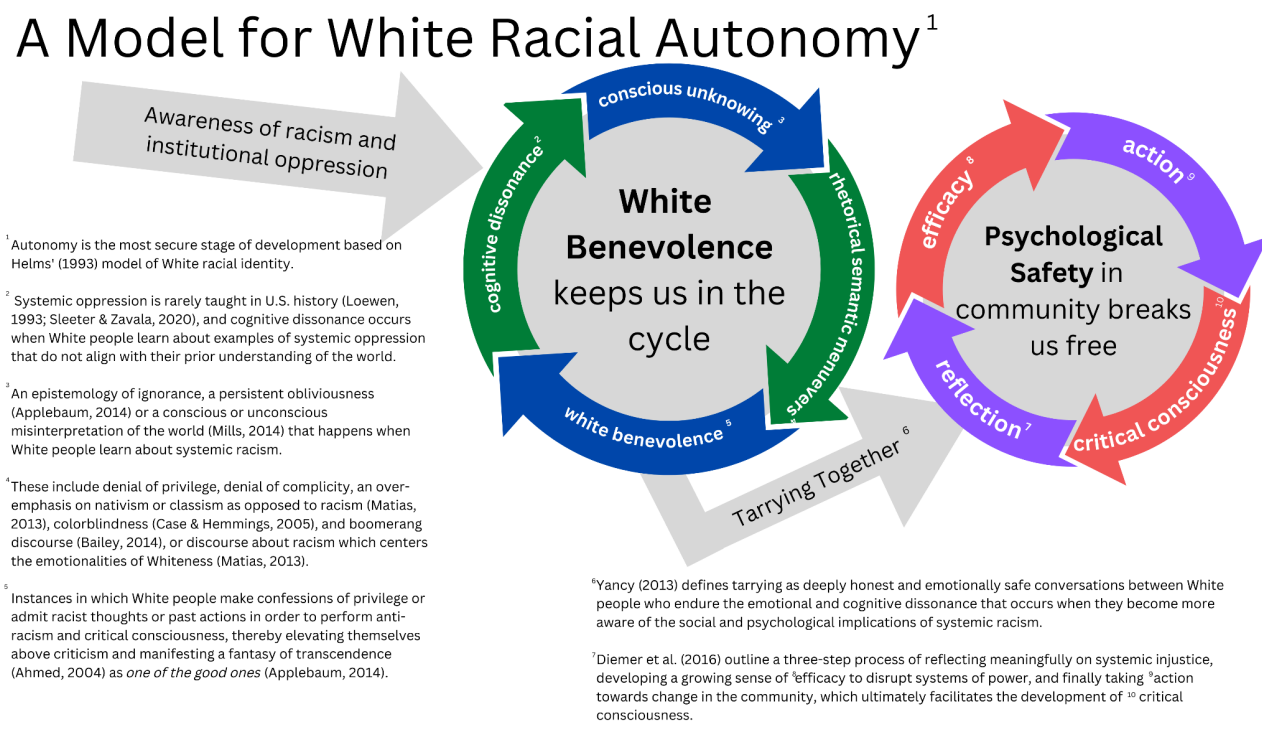
A Model for White Racial Autonomy

How can the study of critical whiteness connect with ethnic studies coursework? According to Helms' (1993) model of white racial identity, autonomy is the most secure stage of development. However, on the path to autonomy, white individuals must confront the cognitive dissonance they experience when they encounter instances of systemic oppression that challenge their previous worldview, which is often influenced by the omission of systemic oppression in U.S. history education (Loewen, 1995; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). This dissonance can lead to an epistemology of ignorance in which white people consciously or unconsciously misinterpret the world and deny their privilege, complicity in maintaining white supremacy, and the ubiquity of racism. Common reactions include colorblindness, an overemphasis on nativism or classism instead of racism, boomerang discourse, and the emotionalities of whiteness (Matias, 2013; Mills, 2014; Bailey, 2014; Case & Hemmings, 2005). However, as white people become more conscious of their whiteness, they may engage in a pseudo-independent schema of white racial

identity development through performative acts of anti-racism (Helms, 1993) and attempt to rise above critique (Applebaum, 2014; Ahmed, 2004). To move beyond this schema, honest and emotionally safe conversations, sometimes called tarrying (Yancy, 2013), can allow for a deeper understanding of the social and psychological effects of systemic racism. By reflecting on systemic injustice, developing a sense of efficacy to disrupt systems of power, and taking action for change in the community - the type of pedagogy often found in a typical ethnic studies course - individuals can cultivate critical consciousness (Diemer et al., 2016). The Model for White Autonomy is our interpretation of the non-linear process one experiences on the path to autonomy (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

A Model for White Racial Autonomy



Research on Ethnic Studies

Whiteness and the Traditional U.S. History Curriculum

Loewen's (1995) comprehensive study of U.S. history textbooks shows that the master narrative that white people are responsible for almost all notable progress in the world (Givens, 2021) and that it is natural for one group of people to dominate another group (Borunda et al., 2020) is pervasive throughout textbooks and curricula. Kohli et al. (2017) show that even when newer U.S. history textbooks integrate the history of BIPOC people, violence against and resistance to white supremacy is disconnected from larger structural and institutional factors. This solidifies the master narrative by promoting heroic, simplistic, and uncontroversial accounts of individual actors such as Martin Luther King, Jr. (Wills, 2019), while erasing the larger context of their activism and leadership (Vasquez et al., 2012). By removing the narrative of BIPOC resistance from the context of systemic white supremacy, white benevolence is affirmed (Applebaum, 2014) and the institutional factors of racism and oppression are downplayed. Kohli et al. (2017) argue that this way of representing U.S. history perpetuates white supremacy by creating the impression that BIPOC contributions are limited to a few exceptional leaders.

Ultimately, traditional U.S. history textbooks and curricula exert a form of social control because they contain primarily white narratives and marginalize counter-narratives. This prevents the development of critical consciousness in students (Diemer et al., 2016), who would otherwise be forced to take action against the racist policies and practices that persist today (Givens, 2021). Furthermore, traditional U.S. history textbooks commit a form of epistemological genocide by erasing BIPOC thought, agency, and resistance (Loewen, 1995; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Givens, 2021). Loewen (1995) cites as an example textbooks that

portray historical civil rights victories such as *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* in a way that seems to suggest that white leaders were the heroes who simply had a change of heart and reversed centuries of institutional racism. This historiography undoubtedly impacts BIPOC children by devaluing the contributions of BIPOC communities and resistance to racism throughout history (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Givens, 2021) in a way that erases the development of critical hope for the future (Duncan-Andrade, 2016). The effects of this narrative also negatively impact white students by erasing the context of white supremacy (Matias, 2013), such that in some surveys, up to 80% of white people believe that BIPOC people have gained equal rights today (Sleeter, 2011). Sleeter & Zavala (2020) also note that when racial tensions arise, students surveyed are more likely to blame BIPOC people for these tensions than the policies and practices that preceded the tensions, of which white students are largely unaware.

Erasing the Context of Contemporary Racism. The phenomenon that white students are more likely to blame BIPOC people for an increase in racial tension (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020) may be due in part to the fact that modern racism is rarely taught (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Moffit et al., 2021). White post-secondary students who participated in the Moffit et al. (2021) study indicated that they had learned about historical racism in their K-12 schools, particularly about slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the civil rights movement. Very few students had learned about contemporary forms of racism. This lack of historical context deprives students of any practical benefit of learning history (Moffit et al., 2021) and suggests to students that racism is a tragedy of the past has been eliminated in the wake of American progress thanks to the benevolence of forward-thinking white people (Sleeter, 2011). Indeed, in her examination of recently published textbooks on American history, Sleeter (2011) notes that even modern historiographies separate racism in the past from racism today by naming a few evil individuals

and groups as the primary perpetrators of interpersonal racism, rather than mentioning the persistence of institutional and ideological racism. In this way, the textbooks separate these individual acts from their institutional context, virtually guaranteeing that students will not be able to connect the past events to systemic racism in the present (Kohli et al., 2017), and in this sense they perpetuate the cycle of conscious unknowing described by Bailey (2014) and Mills (2014).

Similarly, in his study of three teachers implementing the Facing History and Ourselves' *Choices of Little Rock* curriculum, Wills (2019) found that each teacher focused on remembering the events of the Civil Rights Movement in the order in which they occurred on a timeline and that this focus diverted attention away from race and racism. In a sense, this focus on memorizing names, dates, and the exact details of each event removed race from the overall narrative (Wills, 2019). Ultimately, Gay & Kirkland (2003) and Wills (2019) attribute this depersonalization of systemic racism to the failure of teacher education, noting that teachers are simply afraid to teach about race due to a lack of preparation. In any case, this white silence confirms Castagno's (2008) assertion that white educators are hesitant to talk to students about racial issues out of a strong desire for comfort and ideological safety, which may inadvertently (or intentionally) convey the message that race and racism do not exist or are verboten (Jones & Hagopian, 2020).

Whatever the cause of these many failures, the result is obvious: as Loewen (1995) noted, as long as history textbooks make white racism invisible in the present, students will not be able to intelligently analyze the racism they encounter in their lived experiences. At a fundamental level, this is evident in the fact that students are simply uninformed. In her analysis of white students' racial identities, Hagerman (2018) notes that the students she interviewed apparently

had not learned much about the history of race relations in the United States, resulting in students confusing important events such as the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement and failing to connect these events to the present. On a deeper level, students who have been misinformed about historical and contemporary racism (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Sleeter, 2011; Kohli et al., 2017; Wills, 2019; Moffit et al., 2021) also failed to learn about the mass mobilization of youth that played a critical role in overcoming Jim Crow segregation and, in a contemporary sense, the role of youth activism today (Hagopian, 2018). While Hagopian (2018) points out the detrimental impact this has on students of color who are denied the opportunity to learn from and be inspired by historical and contemporary youth leaders, Tatum (1999) notes that the names of historical and contemporary white allies are also often missing from the curriculum. White students in her classes are often unable to name a single white person who has advocated for social change and resisted racism (Tatum, 2017). Through the normalization of whiteness (Diamond, 2022), white students do not recognize the unbalanced curriculum that ignores systemic racism or the disruptors in history who have challenged this system (Tatum, 2017). This leads white children to believe that the current American system is fair for all people and that no fundamental changes to American institutions are needed to achieve freedom, equality, and justice for all (Yang, 2000). White students will continue to perpetuate systemic oppression if they do not have the opportunity to learn from and about white allies and co-conspirators who have freed themselves from the constraints of racist socialization and developed an anti-racist white identity.

Benefits of Ethnic Studies

Contrary to the rhetoric often espoused by those who wish to ban ethnic studies, the central goals of ethnic studies are multifaceted and include criticality through a structural

analysis of racism and colonialism, the reclamation of cultural identities as well as students' intersectional identities, the study of counter-narratives in U.S. history, and participation in critical civics and community engagement to bridge from the classroom to the community through social movements (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). In this way, an ethnic studies pedagogy is culturally responsive and helps students acquire the knowledge, skills, and motivation to question and challenge the social, political, and economic structures within their communities and the nation (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020) and engage in the process of developing critical consciousness by participating in reflection, efficacy, and community action (Diemer et al., 2016; Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b).

Ethnic studies pedagogy shares many similarities with critical consciousness pedagogy as students engage with the systemic factors of oppression to build critical efficacy for social justice (Casey & McManimon, 2020). Students engage in self-reflection and reflective inquiry, collaborative learning, and dialogue to build critical efficacy (Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b), because as Sleeter & Zavala (2020) argue, ethnic studies courses that do not focus on students' cultural identities run the risk of removing race from the overall narrative (Wills, 2019), thus replicating traditional approaches to social studies. By developing students' awareness of the history of BIPOC people and the history of racism in a way that provides them with a positive self-image and the ability to think critically about these issues (Givens, 2021), and by framing this history through students' own identities, ethnic studies make visible the historical and contemporary manifestations of systemic racism (Casey & McManimon, 2020) and enable students to develop a new understanding of the world and the ability to challenge systemic oppression (Camacho et al., 2017; Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b).

Shuster & Giesemann (2021b) demonstrate through their research that students who participate in critical consciousness development courses have more positive outcomes in terms of mental health and social-emotional well-being of adolescents of different ages, positive self-concept, and improved leadership skills. The development of a critical consciousness has also been associated with greater engagement in school (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016), higher college attendance (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013), and a lower likelihood of dropping out of school in 12th grade (Pérez-Gualdrón & Helms, 2017). Students with higher levels of critical consciousness also showed higher engagement in their future careers compared to peers with lower levels of critical consciousness (Diemer & Blustein, 2006). The benefits of developing critical consciousness are similar in many ways to the benefits of ethnic studies courses in general, which researchers have demonstrated in a variety of studies.

Recent large-scale quantitative studies of students who have taken courses in ethnic studies show positive outcomes for students. For example, the Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in Tucson, Arizona, has been studied by both program participants (Cammarota & Romero, 2009) and outside researchers (Cabrera et al., 2014). Cabrera et al. (2014) showed that students were more likely to pass state standardized tests and had higher graduation rates (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). They also found that while students who participated in MAS courses had lower grade point averages and standardized test scores on average than control students, they had significantly higher test scores and graduation rates than their 12th grade peers (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Cabrera et al., 2014; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Although grading and standardized test scores are inherently problematic (Milner, 2012), state and federal agencies nonetheless quantify student achievement based on these results. For example Cabrera et al. (2014) found that the more ethnic studies courses students took, the greater the impact on student

achievement. Similarly, Dee & Penner's (2016) quantitative analysis of student participation in the San Francisco Unified School District's ethnic studies program found that the program increased student attendance by 21%, ninth grade cumulative grade point average by 1.4 grade points, and the number of credits earned by 23 credits (Chapman et al., 2020).

Dee & Penner (2016) then collaborated with Bonilla et al. (2021) to conduct a longer-term analysis of the effects of ethnic studies on academic engagement and school attendance. They found that participation in an ethnic studies course in ninth grade promoted student engagement and persistence throughout high school and that these benefits also impacted enrollment in postsecondary schools. Bonilla et al. (2021) hypothesized that participation in an ethnic studies course for ninth graders at the beginning of the school year, when students' social identities are still most malleable, breaks the repetitive cycle of poor attendance and academic disengagement that contributes to the risk of dropping out of high school.

Numerous qualitative studies also demonstrate the short- and long-term effects of ethnic studies courses on student efficacy. For example, Vasquez (2021) shows that high school students who take an ethnic studies course are more likely to show interest in becoming educators, and Peterson (2018) shows that students who take an ethnic studies course exhibit greater critical thinking skills in the sense that they begin to question the master narrative at an early age. They are also more open to alternative viewpoints later in life and have more resources to look critically at contemporary America (Peterson, 2018). There are also studies that specifically show that ethnic studies have a positive impact on white students.

Benefits of Ethnic Studies for White Students. Although benefits of ethnic studies are often associated with BIPOC students (Chapman et al., 2020), white students also benefit, as numerous qualitative and quantitative studies have shown. There are many reasons why ethnic

studies courses benefit white students: As Loewen (1995) notes, the way students conceptualize and think about the past is inextricably linked to implicit associations about race and privilege, and the messages they receive about perceived superiority or inferiority shape their perceptions of reality and influence their interactions with others (Tatum, 1999). If white students who learn the master narrative come to believe that their privilege was historically justified and deserved, it will be difficult to convince them to provide opportunities for others (Borunda et al., 2020). One could argue that this shift away from the master narrative can be accomplished through the standard U.S. history curriculum by promoting multiculturalism and absent narratives. However, studies show that under these conditions, white teachers incorporate BIPOC history only sporadically and within a Eurocentric framework (Epstein, 2009; Sleeter, 2011), which only reinforces the dominant narrative that white Americans are the architects of the nation and BIPOC people in America are either victims or freedom fighters. Coupled with the master narrative's tendency to present a narrative of history in which life is constantly improving for everyone (Loewen, 1995; Epstein, 2009), this leads white children to believe that the current American system is fair for all and that no fundamental changes to American institutions are needed to achieve equity and justice for all (Yang, 2000). Based on research that views racism as a psychological condition and demonstrates that anti-racist white people are mentally healthier than their racist counterparts (Pettigrew, 1988; Wellman, 2000; Kovel, 2001; Thomas, 2014), the field of ethnic studies empowers white students to reflect more critically about the systemic causes and effects of institutional oppression (Yang, 2000). Helms (1993) and Tatum (1999) argue that the task for white people is to develop a positive white identity, which is accomplished through ethnic studies (Sleeter, 2011; Yang, 2000; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Sleeter (2011) also shows in her meta-analysis of ethnic studies research that the portrayal of racial and ethnic

diversity has little impact on students' attitudes toward racism and that ethnic studies has a stronger positive impact than curricula that portray diverse groups but ignore racism.

Okoye-Johnson's (2011) statistical meta-analysis of 21 studies compared the effects of a traditional curriculum with a multicultural curriculum that focuses on history and systemic racism on the racial attitudes of students in preschool through grade 12. The majority of students examined in the 21 studies were white. Okoye-Johnson (2011) reports an effect size of 0.645, showing that exposure to ethnic studies produces positive changes in students' racial attitudes compared to traditional history instruction. Sleeter (2011) also demonstrates in her meta-analysis of ethnic studies in higher education that the effect of ethnic studies is even greater when white students take courses that also promote interracial interaction. Interracial interaction also benefits BIPOC students but the effect is greater for white students, presumably because intergroup dialogue is newer for white students than for their BIPOC peers. Tatum's (1999) analysis confirms Sleeter's (2011) synthesis because interracial conversations led by qualified teachers reduce racial illiteracy, confusion, and misinformation that would otherwise persist. A qualified ethnic studies teacher is able to facilitate dialogue in a way that allows students to recognize and respond to the rhetorical semantic menuevers (Matias, 2013), denial of complicity (Whitt, 2015), and strategic silence (Castagno, 2008) associated with white talk (Bailey, 2014). Further research shows that ethnic studies that integrate histories of systemic racism, interracial dialogue, and critical consciousness through community grounded praxis (Sleeter, 2011) demonstrate that white children emerge from these courses with improved racial attitudes (Aboud & Fenwick, 1999) and a greater sense of efficacy in changing their communities (Bigler, 1999; Hughes et al, 2007).

Regarding efficacy and critical consciousness in ethnic studies courses, much of the early research focused exclusively on the benefits for BIPOC students (Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer & Rapa, 2015; Diemer et al., 2016), but there is growing evidence that critical consciousness helps white children as well (Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b). White students have the opportunity to acquire a new understanding of history that provides models of behavior that collectively oppose white supremacy (Borunda et al., 2020) and help white students understand that social change does not happen through quick fixes or waiting for a strong leader, but through slow, patient organizing (Sanchez, 2018), where white co-conspirators organize in partnership with existing organizations and communities (Borunda et al., 2020). Such courses ultimately promote efficacy, action, and democratic engagement (Sleeter, 2011) and deepen students' knowledge of whiteness in relation to structural racism and systemic oppression (Thomann & Suyemoto, 2018; Moffitt et al., 2021).

Tatum (1999) and Borunda et al. (2020) argue that it is not enough for white students to study ethnic studies to truly develop an anti-racist epistemology and advocate for social justice, for they must also understand whiteness in relation to Helms' (1993) model of white racial identity development. hooks (1994) asserts that it is equally important for white students to learn about whiteness, and Borunda et al. (2020) further argue that white students must learn to critique the systems that maintain white supremacy (Jones & Okun, 2001) in ways that enable white students to recognize and address white talk (Bailey, 2014) and other habits of whiteness. Matias (2013) also argues for a curriculum that reeducates white students by centering counter-narratives to renew the process of developing white racial identity (Helms, 1993). Following Helms' (1993) model, the notion of white benevolence (Bailey, 2014) and the ways in which white people who believe they are anti-racist sometimes distinguish good white people

from bad white people (Applebaum, 2014) to either abdicate their responsibility to disrupt racist acts, or do so performatively to endear themselves to BIPOC people. Tatum (1999) argues for an education that asks white students to fight for themselves, not for people of color, because white people have also been harmed by the cycle of racism. Similarly, Baldwin (2018) suggested that a curriculum in which BIPOC students learn more about themselves and their actual contributions to history would also liberate white students who know nothing about their own history in terms of critical whiteness (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Borunda et al.'s (2020) study also shows that when white students learn about historical figures such as Angelina Grimke, Benjamin Lay, Fred Ross, and other anti-racist white role models, it has a positive impact on the development of white racial identity and critical consciousness. Similarly, Paone et al. (2015) found that a course on whiteness produced significant positive changes in white students. However, it is worth noting that their study also found some nuances, such as increased levels of white guilt and no overall changes in empathy.

Research Gaps

Existing research suggests that courses in ethnic studies and Critical Whiteness Studies have a positive impact on the development of a white racial identity (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). However, there are gaps and nuances in the current research that need to be further explored. Longitudinal studies on the long-term effects of ethnic studies are limited, but the available studies suggest a range of effects. For example, Todd et al. (2011) found that teaching topics related to racism influenced empathy, guilt, and anxiety in white college students, with guilt increasing as more information was taught. Neville et al. (2014) discovered that college diversity experiences and friendships with BIPOC students decreased colorblindness and increased racial consciousness in white students, especially after completing diversity courses. These findings

underscore the need to further investigate the impact of ethnic studies on white racial identity. It is worth noting that the existing studies such as these are qualitative case studies, mostly conducted at the post-secondary level. Currently, there are no phenomenological studies that investigate white adults' experiences with ethnic studies courses they took while in high school. The experiences of white secondary school students in ethnic studies courses remain under-researched, and it is critical to examine whether these experiences continue to impact them in their adult lives. The lack of research on this topic highlights the importance of examining both white individuals' experiences of ethnic studies classes and the long-term effects after graduating high school.

Quantitative research has shown that ethnic studies courses have a positive impact on GPA scores (Dee & Penner, 2016). Similarly, quantitative research has shown that racial socialization practices in school, such as cultural socialization (which focuses on teaching youth about the heritage of their own racial/ethnic community and fostering their cultural pride) and cultural competence (which includes instruction in the traditions and history of other social groups), have a positive impact on students' academic achievement. For example, Wang et al. (2023) conducted a study in which they examined how racial and cultural socialization in school predict academic achievement through the mediator of perceptions of school climate.

The results of the study by Wang et al. (2023) suggest that racial and cultural socialization practices in school can act as a protective factor for students and improve academic outcomes. However, the researchers themselves acknowledge that they still need to better understand how students interpret and attach meaning to various racial and cultural socialization practices, and that these practices may vary by race, ethnicity, and gender. They note that survey-based approaches may not capture the full range of ways in which students are exposed to

and understand these practices (Wang et al., 2023). They recommend the use of mixed methods and ethnographic studies to gain a deeper understanding of these practices and their underlying ideologies. Although our study does not use an in-depth ethnographic or mixed methods approach, our phenomenological research will help identify and operationalize the ways in which ethnic studies promote positive school climate and contribute to the development of a healthier white racial identity.

Similar quantitative studies with elementary children also confirm the existence of research gaps. Hughes et al.'s (2007) quantitative study examined the responses of Black and white elementary children to learning about historical racism in the United States. In their study, Hughes et al. (2007) examined children's immediate cognitive and affective reactions to history lessons as well as their attitudes toward each other in the days that followed. The results showed that white children who were taught about historical racism had more positive attitudes towards Black students and less negative attitudes towards Black people in general compared to children in the control condition (Hughes et al., 2007). Furthermore, the study showed that these lessons had no significant impact on negative or positive attitudes towards white people as a group, although 10- to 11-year-old children in the historical racism condition were more likely to express racial guilt than children in the control condition (Hughes et al., 2007). Like Wang et al. (2023), Hughes et al. (2007) emphasize the need for longer-term impact evaluation and more in-depth qualitative analysis that would allow exploration of children's implicit responses.

Connecting the Research to Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

In order to examine the gaps and nuances of current research in Critical Whiteness Studies and ethnic studies, this study utilized Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Phenomenological research studies examine the lived experiences of participants to better

understand a phenomenon (Larsen & Adu, 2022; Teherani et al., 2015). This type of research does not begin with a theory or hypothesis about a phenomenon. Instead, researchers interpret the shared data, recognizing that their own biases and values will influence these interpretations (Grossoehme, 2014). Furthermore, in IPA it is important to recognize that participants interpret their own experiences when they share them with the researcher, and that the researcher, in turn, interprets the shared information based on their own life experiences. Through a process known as the hermeneutic circle (Heiddeger, 1962), researchers move from a focused analysis of individual interviews to a broader analysis of the group as a whole as they work to uncover commonalities and emergent themes (Smith & Sparkes, 2016; Smith et al., 2009).

In IPA, data collection is intentionally designed to make participants feel comfortable sharing memories of a particular phenomenon, as the information is often both personal and complex (Smith et al., 2009). Semi-structured questions asked during a one-on-one interview provide the flexibility that allows the researcher to personalize questions and encourage the participant to truly reflect on their experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2009). Furthermore, the flexible nature of IPA interviews aligns well with the complexity and multidimensionality of Critical Whiteness Studies, as the experiences of all of our participants influenced the development of their white identities in myriad ways.

Summary and Conclusion

This literature review addresses various aspects that contribute to understanding the experiences of white students in ethnic studies courses. The review includes Critical Whiteness Studies, white supremacy culture, white racial identity development, the development of critical consciousness, critical whiteness pedagogy, and the history and impact of ethnic studies. By examining these topics, we aim to better understand the memories of white individuals who took

an ethnic studies course in high school. Critical Whiteness Studies provides a comprehensive overview of the strategies used by white individuals to maintain whiteness as the norm and uphold control over societal systems (Castagno, 2008). This includes an examination of the invisibility of whiteness and the ways in which school systems unintentionally perpetuate characteristics of white supremacy culture (Moffitt et al., 2021; Morris, 2016; Matias & Boucher, 2021). Another important aspect of the literature review is the development of white racial identity (Helms, 1990; Helms, 1993) and critical consciousness development (Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer & Rapa, 2015; Diemer et al., 2016). Through direct instruction and pedagogical strategies such as seminars, dialogues, empathy-building activities, and role-playing (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Taylor et al., 2006; Kroll, 2008; Olitsky, 2008; Flynn, 2012; Yeung et al., 2013; Whitt, 2015; Kohli et al., 2017; Bandy et al., 2021; Sánchez Loza, 2021), researchers have found that white students can become more aware of their privilege and think critically about their own whiteness (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013; Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; McWhirter et al., 2016; Pérez-Gualdrón & Helms, 2017; Delia & Krasny, 2018). These research findings underscore the potential of ethnic studies courses to provide transformative experiences and promote a more nuanced understanding of systemic oppression among white students (Reason et al., 2005; Monture, 2009; Yeung et al., 2013; Goldberg, 2020; Applebaum, 2021; Moffit et al., 2021; Patterson et al., 2021). By understanding these factors, we hoped to gain valuable insights into the ways in which ethnic studies can shape the perspectives, engagement, and transformative learning experiences of white individuals and ultimately contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the memories of white individuals who have taken an ethnic studies course through the methodological framework of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith & Sparkes, 2016; Smith et al., 2009).

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of white participants who have taken at least one ethnic studies course in high school and how their memories of these experiences influence the development of their racial identity today. There is limited research on how these courses impact white students, and this information can help teachers, administrators, students, legislators, and the community better understand this phenomenon. The overarching research questions that guided this study were: *How do white individuals reflect upon their experiences in a high school ethnic studies course? After graduation, to what extent do white individuals continue to reflect on the insights gained about whiteness from their ethnic studies course?*

Research Design

Because our study focused on the lived experiences of adults who had taken an ethnic studies class in high school, we used a qualitative research method (Smith et al., 2009). Sallee & Flood (2012) argue that qualitative research is particularly useful in education because it bridges a historical gap between quantitative researchers, who can provide efficient and generalizable data, and educational practitioners, who seek a more holistic picture to better understand students' experiences so that they can make specific changes that will improve the quality of their students' education. In addition, Fossey et al. (2002) note that qualitative research methods are effective when researchers are exploring complex issues - in this study, white identity in an ethnic studies class after graduation - that can't be quantified and when experiences, like those of the individuals we interviewed, are subjective.

In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research does not look for a single answer that can be derived from experimental methods (Teherani et al., 2015). Rather, qualitative researchers assume that participants' responses will vary due to environmental and individual differences (Teherani et al., 2015). Furthermore, unlike quantitative research designs, this study did not assume a theory or hypothesis about the experiences of white individuals in ethnic studies courses, but rather looked for themes and patterns that emerged from the descriptive data collected (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) through broad open-ended interview questions (Patton, 2002). Unlike quantitative research, where the researcher attempts to remain objective and detached from the findings, qualitative research is subjective and the interpretation of the data influences the research findings.

Research Strategy

This qualitative research followed a strategy of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, an approach that aims to understand how people make sense of their personal experiences in particular situations (Smith et al., 2009). There are three philosophical foundations for this research strategy: phenomenology, hermeneutics (interpretive), and idiography (Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenology

In order to conduct our phenomenological research, we first familiarized ourselves with its foundations. In contrast to other qualitative research methods, philosophy forms the basis of phenomenological research (Peoples, 2021; Smith et al., 2009). It is complex, and there is no real consensus among philosophers and researchers about its meaning. However, Smith et al. (2009) note that regardless of the different approaches to phenomenology, all phenomenologists focus on what it actually means to be a human being living in this world.

Through a review of the literature of early phenomenologists, including Husserl (1931) and Heidegger (1962), we examined the variations of phenomenological research as well as the challenges of conducting this type of research (Larsen & Adu, 2022). According to Husserl (1931), researchers must set aside their own personal beliefs and experiences in order to uncover the true essence of a phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). In order to do this, the researcher must bracket, or set aside, all their biases and preconceptions (Peoples, 2021). Therefore, when conducting phenomenological studies in the Husserlian sense, no additional theoretical frameworks are used (Peoples, 2021). However, Heidegger (1962) argued that researchers can never truly separate themselves from the world and that the researcher's own experiences have an impact on how they understand and interpret the data (Peoples, 2021). In Heideggerian phenomenological studies, additional theoretical frameworks can serve as lenses that lead to new understandings about the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). For this study, we found that Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic phenomenology, paired with Critical Whiteness Studies, rather than Husserl's (1931) transcendental phenomenology, was better aligned with the goal of our research: to provide new and more comprehensive insights and interpretations about the experiences of six white individuals who participated in an ethnic studies course at the secondary level as well as how these experiences shape their racial identity today (Larsen & Adu, 2022).

Phenomenological research explores a phenomenon from the perspective of those who actually experience it (Teherani et al., 2015), with the aim of gaining a deeper and more authentic understanding of the phenomenon (Lopez & Willis, 2004). A phenomenological approach was a good fit for this study as it is based on a set of common assumptions that applied to our work: white identity is a social construct that changes over time, the development of our participants' identities both during high school and after graduation can vary significantly due to their unique

life stories and experiences (Boss et al., 1996), and our own biases and values played a role in our research approach and analysis of the data (Grossoehme, 2014). Unlike other qualitative research methods, phenomenological studies do not necessarily end with the confirmation of new or established theories (Teherani et al., 2015). Instead, this approach is used to expand our current understanding of phenomena (Teherani et al., 2015). We hope that this study will expand the limited understanding of the experiences of white individuals who have participated in an ethnic studies course at the secondary level.

Phenomenological research is complex and there is ongoing debate about the right methods and strategies (Peoples, 2021). Peoples (2021) argues that there is room in phenomenological research for researchers to modify methods as better strategies emerge. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is one such modification that emerged in the mid-1990s and was closely associated with the field of psychology, particularly health, counseling, and social and educational psychology (Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 2009). Over time, the use of IPA as a research method has expanded to include many other disciplines (Smith et al., 2009). In IPA research, the goal is to, "...explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, and states hold for participants" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 53).

Hermeneutics (Interpretive)

A key component of IPA is its interpretive nature (Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutic theorists such as Heidegger (1962), Gadamer et al. (2004), and Smith et. al (2009) emphasize the complexity of the interpretive process. The researcher's life experiences, personal biases, and preconceptions influence the way in which the data is interpreted. In a research study, participants interpret their own experiences as they describe them to the researcher. In turn, the

researcher interprets both how and what the participants share. This double hermeneutic process places the researcher in a similar position as the participant, with the researcher attempting to interpret the data based on their own life experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al., 2009). In contrast to the positivist approach, where the researcher should remain objective and detached from the research findings, the researcher's interpretations of the data will influence the findings.

Because we did not take a Husserlian (Husserl, 1931) approach to phenomenology, we did not use the process of bracketing, or époché, to suspend our preconceptions and biases when interpreting the data (Smith et al., 2009; Peoples, 2021). In fact, hermeneutical phenomenologists do not believe that these preconceptions and biases can truly be set aside (Smith et al., 2009; Peoples, 2021). Instead, the researcher must recognize, reflect on, and share their assumptions about the research and then eventually revise their understanding of the phenomenon as more data are analyzed (Peoples, 2021).

Idiography

IPA is idiographic by nature (Smith et al., 2009). In IPA, the researcher begins by analyzing the data as a whole and then systematically focuses on the particular, be it specific experiences or specific participant interviews, before moving on to examine similarities and differences within the research and finally returning to the whole to make general statements about the research (Smith et al., 2009). This intensive and thorough analysis takes time. Therefore, the sample size in an IPA study is necessarily smaller than in other qualitative studies (Smith et al., 2009).

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

IPA has its critics. Some question whether it is actually phenomenology (Larsen & Adu, 2022). However, Larsen & Adu (2022) state that phenomenology is not simply about reporting lived experiences, but rather about making sense of those experiences, which is the goal of this research study. Giorgi (2011) and Applebaum (2012) argue that IPA is not grounded in theoretical and philosophical foundations, cannot be replicated by other researchers, and therefore lacks scientific rigor (Larsen & Adu, 2022). Suddick et al. (2020), on the other hand, argue that, "hermeneutic phenomenology *can* be philosophically and theoretically grounded *and* rigorously and systematically applied" (p. 2). Thus, we used a hybrid phenomenological approach. Our research was philosophically and theoretically grounded in hermeneutical phenomenology and Critical Whiteness Studies. Both frameworks formed the foundation for our study of the lived experiences of white students who had taken an ethnic studies course in high school and how their memories of that course shape their racial identity today.

Participants

Our study specifically included white individuals who had taken an ethnic studies course in high school, as defined in chapter one, within the last five years (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). We used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to find our study participants to ensure that they had taken an ethnic studies course (Fossey et al., 2002) and we relied on our educational networks as well as former students to locate potential study participants. To ensure that we had enough participants, we also used snowball sampling, a method in which we received referrals from other study participants, including ethnic studies teachers (Frey, 2018). While Larsen & Adu (2022) suggest a sample size of five to ten participants, there is no specific rule regarding the number of participants that should be included in IPA (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). It was

specifically designed to allow the researcher to explore a phenomenon in depth rather than develop a theory that is generalizable to the entire population, and a smaller research population allows for this in-depth analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Our small sample size of six participants allowed us to compare and contrast participant data without an overwhelming amount of data to interpret (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Finally, our participants were all at least 18 years old, so they did not need adult permission to participate in our study, but they were given a qualitative informed consent form (see Appendix A) and we used numbers (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) to maintain confidentiality.

Researcher Responsibility to the Participants

According to Smith et al. (2009), researchers should approach their study with a *do no harm* mentality when working with their study participants. If something sensitive comes up during the interviews, it is the researcher's responsibility to offer support options to the participants (Smith et al., 2009). Researchers must be transparent about the purpose of the study and how the data will be stored and shared. Participants must be made aware that the information may be viewed by others. To protect their identity, our participants were assigned numbers and the high schools they attended were not named in our findings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Smith et al., 2009). Our participants were given an informed consent form (see Appendix A) before they began our study, and it was our responsibility to inform them that they could withdraw from the study at any time prior to publication (Smith et al., 2009). Although member checks are often considered a basic measure of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), their utility is less valuable when it comes to the emotionality of whiteness (Matias, 2020), as respondents may find it difficult to accept critical interpretations of their statements. This leads to many complicated questions about whether it makes the most sense to forgo

member checks with white participants in studies about the role of whiteness. For this reason, participants in our study had access to the original Skype interviews so that they could let the researchers know if they felt any information was inaccurate and if there was anything the researchers should exclude or add. Although they had access to their Skype interviews, no participant in this study chose to discuss the content of the saved file of their Skype interview with the researchers.

Researcher Responsibility to the Research

IPA requires researchers to be transparent about their own biases and prejudices and to deal with them openly from the outset. Both researchers who led this study strongly believed that the narratives in traditional U.S. history textbooks must be challenged and that all students should learn about the counter-narratives of struggle and resistance from the perspective of BIPOC people. We were aware that this belief might impact our interviews with white students who participated in ethnic studies courses as well as our interpretation of the data. In addition, our professional experiences and responsibilities may have influenced the way we conducted the interviews, the questions we asked, and our analysis of the data. Kara taught ethnic studies and wrote and published a book that can be used as a textbook for ethnic studies or as a supplement to U.S. history courses (Cisco, 2022). Aimee was a social studies teacher and researched a new civics curriculum for her school's seventh grade students. She taught in a state where the Senate had passed a bill that would restrict discussions about race in school and regulate discussions that might cause some students to feel guilt about the past (Fortino, 2023) and she was concerned about how this would affect the content of the new curriculum. We were both concerned about the decisions recently made in several states to restrict what teachers can and cannot say about race, as well as what courses can and cannot be taught. After seeing the impact of anti-racism

efforts nationwide, we wondered if conservative lawmakers' claims that learning and talking about historical and systemic racism harms white students were true.

Data Collection

In IPA, the process of data collection should feel more like a discussion or conversation than a structured interview (Smith et al., 2009). This is intentional because participants need to feel comfortable with the researcher in order to share enough rich data about their lived experiences for the researcher to analyze (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, building a close relationship between the researcher and the participant is crucial for IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Individual interviews are best suited for this research strategy because they provide the flexibility and time to allow participants and researchers to connect on a personal level before the participants are asked to reflect on their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Individual interviews also provide ample time for the participant to really think about what they want to say and to feel heard by the researcher (Reid et al., 2005), which may prompt the participant to share additional memories.

Semi-structured questions are often used in IPA interviews (Smith et al., 2009). They were designed to focus specifically on how participants experienced a particular phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009), and in our study, they were designed to help participants with their own interpretations, memories, and thoughts about being a white student in an ethnic studies class (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Our goal was to learn as much as we could by asking as few questions as possible in a 45-60 minute interview. We began with general questions such as, "What was your high school like?" and, "What do you remember about how the class was structured?" and then moved to more complex questions related to their learning about whiteness and their own identities as white students in the classroom. We were flexible throughout the

interview process and prepared an outline with additional open-ended questions (Smith et al., 2009) to guide the conversation as needed (see Appendix B). These semi-structured interviews were web-based and, with the consent of our participants, were recorded via the Skype platform and stored digitally on locked password-protected devices.

Once we completed this process, we transcribed the interviews. Transcript fidelity is crucial when conducting a qualitative study, as researchers are obligated to accurately capture the thoughts and experiences of participants (McMullin, 2021). Indeed, verbatim transcription is required in IPA (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Peoples (2021) argues that using software to transcribe phenomenological interviews distances the researcher from the data, so transcription should ideally be done by the researchers. However, McMullin (2021) notes that audio transcription technology has improved and that it undoubtedly saves researchers the time and expense of human transcription, but no software is perfect so it was imperative that we carefully and repeatedly checked for accuracy. For our study, we used audio transcription software to transcribe our Skype interviews. To avoid distancing ourselves from the data (Peoples, 2021) and to ensure transcription fidelity, we both reviewed the transcripts line by line several times and checked the accuracy of all verbal utterances (Smith et al., 2009). After transcription, all interviews were deleted from both platforms. The transcripts were then uploaded to Dedoose, a private app that securely stores qualitative data and allows researchers from different locations, as was the case in this study, to collaboratively on the analysis and organization of their research (Lewins, 2007).

Data Analysis

Some argue that the use of a particular research method for data analysis runs counter to the philosophy of phenomenology (Grossoehme, 2014). VanManen (2014) cautions against the

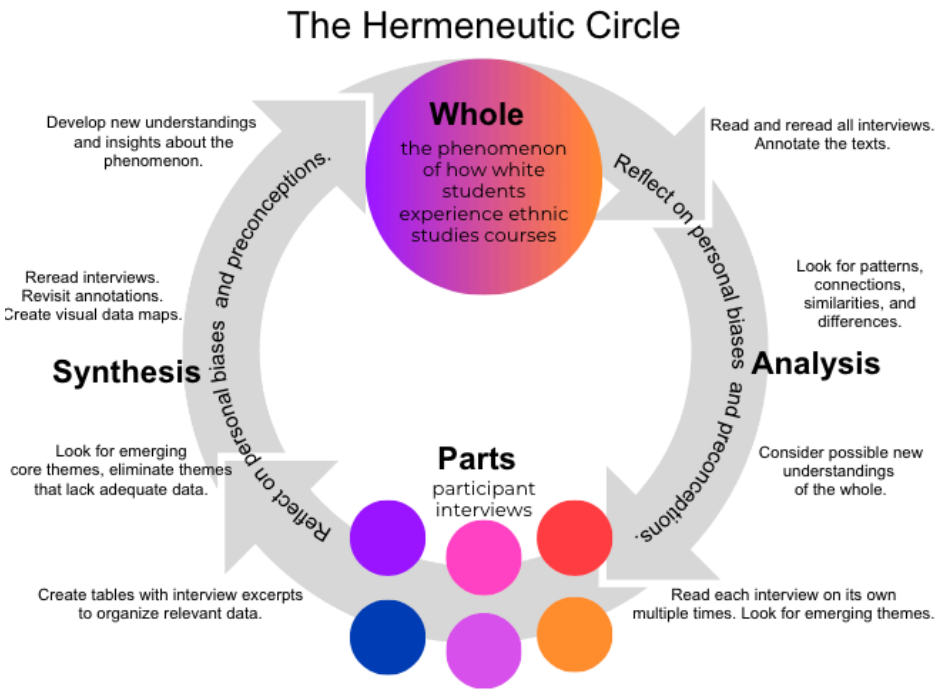
use of prescriptive methods in phenomenological research, claiming that uncovering themes from interview transcripts can lead to superficial or cliché findings. As we delved into the data, it was imperative to avoid making predictions about what the data might reveal while analyzing each participant's experience in depth (VanManen, 2014). Sargeant (2012) emphasizes that both the data and its analysis must be authentic for the research to be of high quality. To ensure authenticity, we analyzed the data together. This allowed us to more consistently determine how to deconstruct, code, categorize, and reconstruct the information into core themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sargeant, 2012; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

While there is no prescribed data analysis method for IPA, we followed Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic circle in analyzing the interviews, a process that is frequently used in IPA research(Smith et al., 2009). This circular process is closely related to the iterative nature of IPA, which allowed us to move back and forth between the whole and the parts of the research before new insights into the phenomenon emerged (Gadamer et al., 2004; Schleiermacher, 1998; Smith et al., 2009). We began by reading, re-reading, annotating, and even dwelling on all interviews to discern the meaning of the data as a whole (the phenomenon of how white individuals experience ethnic studies courses) (Suddick et al., 2020). We then moved on to an in-depth analysis of the parts (the interviews). In IPA, analyzing the parts involves the following: reading and annotating each transcript multiple times, converting notes into emergent themes, and making connections between themes so that they can be clustered or potentially eliminated if there is not enough data to support a theme (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). As similarities within and across interviews were uncovered, we began, "...mapping the interrelationships, connections, and patterns between the exploratory notes" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 91) and pairing like with like. This process of pattern identification, referred to as abstraction, led to the emergence of the

superordinate, or primary themes in our study (Smith et al., 2009). These superordinate themes connected a series of related subordinate themes that emerged in multiple interviews (Smith et al., 2009). From this in-depth synthesis of information, we gained new understandings and insights about the whole (the phenomenon of how white students experience ethnic studies courses) of the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009). Throughout this entire circular research process, we collectively reflected on how our interpretations of the data were influenced by personal biases and preconceptions (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Hermeneutic Circle



Note. Adapted from Timmer (2015); Suddick et al. (2020)

Limitations

As with any research, there were limitations to this study. The online nature of our interviews may have impacted our study, as a key feature of IPA research is the relationship

between the researcher and the participant (Smith et al., 2009). The fact that we did not meet face-to-face may have affected our ability to connect with our participants, which might have limited their willingness to share with us. Another limitation to our study was time, as we asked our participants to set aside at least one hour to share their experiences with no remuneration. At least one of our participants was on a work break during her interview, which may have impacted her ability to devote her full time and attention to the interview. All participants were also currently in college, so finding time for an interview outside of their other commitments may have been a challenge. Additionally, with such a small number of participants, our research findings are not transferable or generalizable to the entire population of white adults who have taken an ethnic studies course at the secondary level.

Our participants had myriad independent variables that influenced their white racial identity beyond the scope of our study, such as family upbringing, the heterogeneity or homogeneity of their social group, formative experiences growing up, and experiences advocating for racial equity. Similarly, it was impossible to know to what extent and with what fidelity our participants' secondary schools implemented ethnic studies. Another limitation of our IPA study was that it relied on people's lived experiences and memories of whiteness, which in itself is an abstract concept that is understood differently by each individual. We addressed these limitations by frequently drawing on our theoretical framework when interpreting our findings. The topics that fell under Critical Whiteness Studies provided us with a more concrete criterion against which to evaluate our participants' responses.

Our own interpretation of the data, as well as the participants' recollections of their experiences, was another potential limitation of our research. We wondered what impact the current sociopolitical climate in the United States, particularly as it relates to resistance to

learning about race and racism in schools, had on our participants' recollections and on our interpretation of their stories. Had the current sociopolitical climate changed their own interpretations of their experiences? If the current sociopolitical climate caused participants to reflect on their experiences in ethnic studies, did we end up with a more robust data set, thus providing a possible delimitation for our study?

Finally, our positioning and bias as white women could influence any study, and this is especially true for phenomenological research. We were aware that white solidarity and white benevolence may have led participants to tell us what they thought we wanted to hear. To overcome this, we again drew on our theoretical framework, particularly in relation to the methods of white distancing that participants may have used to avoid meaningful analysis of their racialized experiences.

Another limitation of this study involves navigating the difficulties that white researchers face when writing about whiteness. These include, most notably, the propensity for performative anti-racism in white social circles and the potential blind spots that arise from white privilege (Lensmire, 2017). This becomes particularly nuanced when considering that white people engage in anti-racist behavior primarily to gain validation from their white peers, inadvertently perpetuating a superficial understanding of racial equity (Lensmire, 2017). Furthermore, the privilege and socialization associated with whiteness can make white researchers less able to recognize such performative gestures, complicating efforts to critically examine the manifestations of racism and white supremacy in their own research.

Given these limitations, we caution readers against drawing causal conclusions based on our research. Instead we present this study as an invitation to examine in greater depth the experiences of white students in ethnic studies courses.

Delimitations

One of the main delimitations of our study was the specificity of our inclusion criteria. We interviewed only white adults who had taken an ethnic studies class in secondary school within the last five years. In addition, we aimed for a small sample size because the complexity of the double hermeneutic process in IPA research necessitates limiting the number of participants (Montague et al., 2020). However, in the future, we recommend a quantitative study that examines the impact of ethnic studies on white racial identity development using a much larger sample.

Another delimitation is that we chose to interview individuals based on their experiences with ethnic studies in high school, and therefore did not interview teachers or administrators. We focused exclusively on students because we were particularly interested in how ethnic studies affects white racial identity. We recommend future research on principals and superintendents with regard to ethnic studies implementation, as well as research on teachers with regard to the professional development methods that have the greatest impact on teacher preparation related to ethnic studies. We also recommend further study of white ethnic studies teachers' racial identity development. However, administrators and teachers were not the subjects of this study.

Because we used a purposeful sampling method, we were cognizant of the fact that we could potentially have interviewed participants we knew or had taught (or, via snowball sampling, participants with whom we were connected by various degrees of separation). However, we intentionally did not interview participants with whom we were familiar in order to avoid bias. Fortunately, we were able to split our interviews between two researchers who lived and taught in different states, so we did not interview participants we knew personally or were connected to in any way.

Kara Cisco's Statement of Positionality and Reflexivity

It was important that I evaluated my own connections to both ethnic studies and whiteness in relation to this study. The murder of George Floyd in May 2020 sparked conversations around the world about systemic and structural racism. Numerous organizations across the United States - including schools - have taken initiatives to address race and racism in their own communities. As a resident of south Minneapolis and as someone who had worked for school districts in and around Minneapolis, I had been deeply engaged in work related to education equity, white supremacy culture, and ethnic studies.

I have been very passionate about ethnic studies. Decolonizing traditionally white, Eurocentric curriculum had been a goal throughout my twenty years in education. I began very early in my career to rethink the standard historiography for teaching U.S. history. This was in part because I began my career in the Chicago Public Schools and then at a contract alternative school in Minneapolis, in buildings where the curriculum was designed to match the interests and ethnicities of the students. More recently, I developed an ethnic studies course for my school, was the lead teacher of that course, wrote a corresponding textbook for the course, and eventually made the curriculum and textbook available to other teachers nationwide and also facilitated professional development on ethnic studies for teachers across the country. It was through this experience that I first began to think about whiteness in the context of ethnic studies (Cisco, 2022). Prior to this program, I was aware that the roots of racism actually lie in whiteness and white supremacy. However, in this context, it occurred to me for the first time that requiring all white students to take an ethnic studies course - and creating a space for them to explore their white identity - could be truly transformative to create a more equitable society.

Studying whiteness offered me greater insight into my own positioning and reflexivity in relation to this study. What consequences and ethical dilemmas arise when white researchers study whiteness? And how might our research, despite its aim to disrupt whiteness, contribute to reproducing it? As much as I understood the existence and role of whiteness intellectually and academically, I also realized that I was both benefiting from and contributing to the perpetuation of whiteness (Applebaum, 2014). In other words, all white people, regardless of their good intentions, are complicit in maintaining the racist status quo, which inevitably impacted my role in this study as an interviewer and researcher. To make matters worse, white people's need to be seen as good and racially enlightened hinders our ability to recognize how we are complicit in systemic racial injustice (Applebaum, 2010; Lensmire, 2017), which made it even more difficult to name the impact of my whiteness on this study.

With regard to my role as a white interviewer and researcher, three reflexive considerations should be examined more closely: racial comfort, complicity, and interpretive bias. In terms of racial comfort, race is an extremely sensitive topic for most people, and the shared whiteness of myself and our interviewees undoubtedly had an impact on this study. For example, the centrality of Blackness in the white imaginations (Baldwin, 1998) was something that would not have come up in the interviews if participants had not experienced racial familiarity with me as a white person. This is reminiscent of Picca & Feagin's (2007) notion of backstage racism or the idea that white people only express their open and honest feelings about race in the presence of other white people.

In the course of my interviews, I anticipated that at least one participant would express a view or perspective that I found problematic, and the relationship between a researcher and a participant requires neutrality. Of course, my silence on these issues could have been interpreted

as complicity. As someone who is older and more experienced than the participants, and also in a position of authority, my complicity could have been perceived by the participants as validation, which could have a long-term impact on the participants' racial identity. This creates a complex paradox in which our interactions as researchers with white participants may have served to normalize and maintain whiteness while our scholarship sought to destabilize its hegemonic nature.

Finally, regarding my interpretive bias, my experiences with white students who have participated in my ethnic studies course have been positive in that the students have matured in their white identity, gained a more complex and nuanced understanding of their whiteness, and developed their efficacy for anti-racism. As I thought about this, several questions came to mind: am I focusing on these experiences because they satisfy my own desire for white benevolence (Applebaum, 2010), and am I therefore simply overlooking examples where the opposite is true? In a qualitative study with a small, purposeful sample of students, am I putting myself in a position to repeat the same biases in my interviews? Politicians such as Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis have attempted to ban classes that, as he paraphrased, make white students feel uncomfortable, sad, or guilty about racism (Jones, 2022). The efforts of DeSantis and other Republican governors to restrict ethnic studies was a central reason why I was drawn to this research question. In my experience, teaching ethnic studies had the opposite effect: it contextualized the history of racism and institutional oppression for white students, who were then better able to understand this system that they were born into and have the power to change. Because I found perspectives like DeSantis' vitriolic, would I be more likely to tune it out or trivialize it if I came across this perspective during our interviews?

My own bias, as well as my desire for benevolence, was something I considered as this study progressed.

Aimee Snelling's Statement of Positionality and Reflexivity

In this study, my whiteness and my position as a social studies teacher required frequent reflection. After the murder of Michael Brown in August 2014, I reevaluated my role as a history and current events teacher. My curriculum did not prepare my students to discuss how Brown's murder - and the protests that continued long after a grand jury's decision not to indict the white police officer who killed him - were connected to systemic racism. My students didn't have the historical background or the language with which to process what was happening in their own community. Unfortunately, despite my nearly 30 years of experience teaching middle school students, I felt unprepared to guide them in these critical conversations.

For most of my teaching career, I worked in an affluent, majority-white school district in the St. Louis school district that was consistently ranked among the best in Missouri. During that time, most of our professional development on equity and inclusion focused on the struggles and deficits of BIPOC students. Year after year, I participated in - and even led - conversations where the same deficit-oriented questions were asked over and over again (Kohli et al., 2017; Safir et al., 2021): Why do BIPOC students perform worse than white students on standardized tests? Why do BIPOC students receive more disciplinary referrals than white students? Why do BIPOC students report that they do not feel like they are part of the district's community? After Brown's murder, I joined our school's equity committee in hopes that some of these questions could be answered. I attended equity and social justice conferences around the country. I helped lead faculty discussions about restorative practices, school climate, and possible strategies that teachers could use to address the "problems" of BIPOC students. I implemented many of these

strategies in my own classroom with a white savior mentality. All of this work continued to focus on the deficits of our BIPOC students.

While I knew that racism is a product of white supremacy and whiteness, my recent research on critical whiteness, the history of American education, and the ways in which schools perpetuate white supremacy culture (Darby & Rury 2018; Givens, 2021; Jones & Okun, 2001) forced me to recognize my own deficit thinking and involvement in conversations about the "problems" of BIPOC students. When educators examine gaps, school climate, and disciplinary disparities we rarely talk about the role whiteness plays in creating these systemic inequities. With a deeper understanding of how and why traditional schools uphold white supremacy (Jones & Okun, 2001; Safir et al., 2021) and what strategies people use to maintain whiteness, I recognized that the actual problem in our schools is whiteness.

With a new director of diversity, equity, and inclusion, our district has finally been pushed to consider the role of whiteness in our schools and classrooms. There have been challenging conversations for some of my white colleagues and I, who were new to hearing that whiteness might be holding BIPOC students back, and frustrating for some of my BIPOC colleagues, who have always known this to be true. We have been talking about BIPOC students' deficits for so long that this new focus on white supremacy culture and whiteness prompted many teachers to use the distancing strategies discussed in the literature review. Despite my personal research on white supremacy culture and whiteness, I, too, have used distancing strategies in our professional development because I have benefited from the perpetuation of whiteness (Applebaum, 2014) and I have to continually reflect on how my whiteness impacted this work.

This research study required a similar kind of reflexivity, as a researcher, interviewer, and data analyst, I did not always recognize the ways in which I was complicit in the maintenance of whiteness (Applebaum, 2014). How did this impact my interactions with our white participants? Did our research simply re-center whiteness? If the aim of an IPA researcher is to ask questions of participants and record what they share, would I be able to remain neutral if a participant said something that perpetuated whiteness? Was my responsibility more to our research or more to the participants' identity development? If I had said nothing, would the white student have left the interview feeling that they were in the right?

My age and experience in education may also have had an impact on my interactions with the participants. Did our participants feel comfortable being honest with someone who is much older and who was obviously exploring a topic that is taboo for many people? Were the participants simply telling us what they thought we wanted to hear in order to appear like good white people (Applebaum, 2014)?

Finally, my position as a social studies teacher currently exploring a new civics curriculum may have influenced my interpretation of the data. My own beliefs about the benefits of challenging traditional Eurocentric narratives had to be considered throughout the study.

It was important that I reflected on this positionality throughout the study so that my own beliefs did not compromise the integrity of our research.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of white individuals who had taken at least one ethnic studies course in high school and how these experiences shape the development of their racial identity in the present. Because there is limited research on the impact of such courses on white students (Sleeter & Zavala,

2020), the study utilized Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as a research strategy to examine the phenomenon (Smith & Sparkes, 2016; Smith et al., 2009). The research questions that guided the study focused on the participants' memories of their time as white students in an ethnic studies course and how these memories influence their racial identity development today. A small homogeneous group of six white participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Larsen & Adu, 2022) who had taken an ethnic studies course in the past five years were selected for the study through purposeful (Patton, 2002) and snowball sampling. Individual, semi-structured web-based interviews were conducted to collect rich and authentic data (Smith & Osborn, 2009). Limitations of the study include the small sample size, the online interview format, and potential researcher bias. However, the study provides valuable insight into the experiences of white students in ethnic studies courses and the development of their racial identities.

CHAPTER 4: Findings

As a research methodology, IPA aims to gain new insights into how people give meaning to their experiences (Grossoehme, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). An in-depth analysis and comparison of the data collected in an IPA study leads the researcher to uncover themes that contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. In this study, the researchers examined the lived experiences of white individuals who had taken an ethnic studies course in high school and how these experiences shaped their racial identity today. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do white individuals reflect upon their experiences in a high school ethnic studies course?
2. After graduation, to what extent do white individuals continue to reflect on the insights gained about whiteness from their ethnic studies course?

As mentioned in Chapter 1, some courses in secondary ethnic studies are explicitly labeled as "Ethnic Studies" (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020) or "Critical Ethnic Studies" (Elia et al., 2016), but ethnic studies courses may also focus on specific groups in the United States, such as Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies (Day, 2022), African American Studies (Edwards et al., 2018), and Mexican American Studies (Acosta, 2014). For the purposes of this study, all courses that fit this description are considered “Ethnic Studies.”

This chapter presents the results of the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of six white individuals who shared their experiences with us. It provides an overview of our interview process and presents basic background information about our participants. Following the descriptions of our participants, we present the four superordinate and seven subordinate themes

that emerged from our analysis of the collected data, as well as excerpts from the interviews to substantiate each of the themes.

The Interviews

The interviews in this study represent the memories of six participants who reflected on their experiences as white students in a high school ethnic studies course and how the course shaped their racial identity after the course. Participants were recruited through both educational networks and contact with former students. Interviews were conducted via Skype with video recordings that were later transcribed by the researchers. Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to learn more about how they remember their experiences in an ethnic studies course and the extent to which they continue to reflect on what they learned about whiteness. The following section includes descriptions from each participant, including their reflections on why they took an ethnic studies course, how they viewed the demographics of their course and school, and what memories they had of the teacher and the predominant structure of the course.

The Participants

For this study, six former ethnic studies students who identified as white were interviewed. Four participants were female and two were male. All participants had taken an ethnic studies course in high school within the past five years. All six participants were from large midwestern cities. Four of the participants were taught by one of the researchers in this study, but that researcher did not conduct the interviews.

Participant 1 enrolled in an ethnic studies course because of her personal interest in history and was encouraged by a teacher to specifically study Black history. She described her public school district as academically focused and noted that she attended a school where approximately 50% of the students identified as white. Her course was designed to have one white and one BIPOC teacher teaching the class. Originally, the course was taught by a white female and a Black male, but he accepted a position at a university and was replaced by a white teacher. This participant recalled that the class consisted of about 20 students, two of whom were white. The course was project-based and Participant 1 stated that she did not believe her district would have approved an action-based curriculum.

Participant 2 enrolled in an ethnic studies course because she felt that her knowledge of Black history was incomplete. She described her public school district as majority white, affluent, and resource-rich due to tax revenue from large businesses in the community. A Black female teacher taught this AP African American history course as part of a pilot program. Participant 2 believed that some of the students in this pilot course had previously taken a non-AP African American Studies course with the same teacher. This participant was one of two white students in the course and described it as a course that consisted primarily of lectures, projects, and presentations with approximately 10% of class time spent in discussion.

Participant 3 took an ethnic studies course in his senior year of high school because he needed additional electives to fulfill graduation requirements due to extended absences for personal health reasons. He described his school as predominantly white, but with a large Somali and Latino population. He also pointed out that his school was religiously diverse, with strong representation from the Jewish and Muslim communities. This course was taught by a white female teacher. The participant believed that some of the students took the course because they

struggled with traditional history classes. He recalled a class composition of 10 - 15 white students, which he believed was not the entire class, but still not a small number. Participant 3 noted that the focus of the course was on group learning and student presentations.

Participant 4 took an ethnic studies course after participating in a summer internship program that addressed racial inequality in his community. He described his school community as 50% white and 50% BIPOC. His ethnic studies course was taught by a white female teacher and he recalled that the course had few white students (approximately 25% of the 30 students). The course was collaborative and interactive and involved a lot of small and whole group discussions.

Participant 5 transferred from a small private school to her public high school and was encouraged by her high school counselor to take an ethnic studies course that was offered for the first time. She was a student with a learning disability and shared that not all of her teachers followed her accommodations. Her ethnic studies course was taught by a white female teacher. While she did not describe the population of her high school as majority white, the composition of many of her AP and IB courses were 98% white. However, she believed that she was one of three white students in her ethnic studies course. The course was discussion and project-based.

Participant 6 was motivated to take an ethnic studies course because of her previous positive experiences with the teacher. She described that her school consisted of white, Somali, Asian American, and Native American students. Her course was taught by a white female teacher and she was one of two white students in the class. She recalled that the course was primarily discussion-based, and that there was a clear discussion protocol for the course.

Themes

Although the stories participants told about their experiences with their ethnic studies course were unique, there were themes that emerged more frequently than others. An in-depth analysis of the data revealed four superordinate themes related to all or nearly all of our participants: critical consciousness, historical understanding, critical whiteness pedagogy, and white supremacy culture. These superordinate themes and their corresponding subordinate themes (divided into categories) are described in this section (see Table 1).

Table 1

Superordinate Themes, Subordinate Themes, and Categories

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme	Categories
Critical Consciousness	Reflection	Reflecting on White Identity
		Reflecting on Being the Minority in Class
		Tarrying about Race, Racism, and Oppression
		Moving Past and Reframing White Guilt
	Efficacy	Critical Hope About Change by Searching for Counter Narratives
		Critical Hope that One's Actions can Bring Change
	Action	In Ethnic Studies
		Beyond Ethnic Studies
Deeper Historical Understanding	Problems of Traditional U.S. History Curriculum	Frustration over Learning Deficits
		The Desire for Counter-narratives

	Academic Understanding of Systemic Oppression
Critical Whiteness Pedagogy	Seminar, Dialogue, and Discussion about Race Social Emotional Learning and Distress Tolerance
White Supremacy Culture	Fear of Open Conflict Paternalism Quantity Over Quality Right to Comfort

Critical Consciousness

The development of critical consciousness through ethnic studies emerged as a superordinate theme based on the participant interviews, with all six participants indicating the aspects of developing a critical consciousness as identified in Diemer's research (Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer & Rapa, 2015; Diemer et al., 2016): reflection, efficacy, and action (Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b). As a result, reflection, efficacy, and action naturally became the subordinate themes of this superordinate theme. Ethnic studies courses develop critical consciousness through meaningful engagement in lessons and activities that promote reflection on race and inequality, build efficacy through the use of modeling, mentor texts, and other activities, and

create opportunities for social action in their classrooms (Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer & Rapa, 2015; Diemer et al., 2016).

Reflection. The first subordinate theme of critical consciousness is reflection. Research shows that ethnic studies cultivates critical consciousness by challenging students to reflect on the history of systemic oppression (Kelly, 2020), understand the complex, interconnected systems of oppression and how they function together and separately (David & Derthick, 2017; Diemer et al., 2020), and to provide students with opportunities for reflection through journal entries and other written reflections, one-on-one conversations with the teacher (Kelly, 2020), and seminar and dialogue formats that allow students to share and hear multiple perspectives (Yeung et al., 2013). This was confirmed in our study, as all six participants identified moments when they reflected on white identity in their ethnic studies course.

Reflection on White Identity. Research on developing critical consciousness in the classroom shows that it is extremely important for white students to develop their ability to critically reflect on themselves, their school, and the world (Yeung et al., 2013). The participants in this study all indicated that they had reflected on their own whiteness in relation to their ethnic studies class, and that they continue to reflect on whiteness and white identity today as a result of their experiences in ethnic studies.

All participants mentioned that they thought about their whiteness as part of their identity in ethnic studies, and many noted that their ethnic studies course was the first time they thought critically about their whiteness. For example, Participant 3 stated that it was, “at that moment in my life I was really thinking a lot about myself, my identity, who I was, and I think that this course really helped me with that…,” and Participant 5 noted that she had never thought about her race as part of her identity before taking ethnic studies. Before the course, she had always

thought that whiteness was just her appearance, and through the ethnic studies course, she learned that her race had a lot to do with her identity. Other participants talked about the experience of learning about the history of whiteness itself, such as Participant 4, who recalled learning about the idea of whiteness and how whiteness has changed throughout American history. He shared that he was not aware of this prior to the course.

Through the act of learning and reflecting on whiteness, all participants talked about the process of understanding and recognizing white privilege in areas where they were previously unaware of it, and reflecting on how they benefit from whiteness. Participant 2 in particular noted that she was beginning to understand "...the existence of white supremacy and like my white privilege in situations where I maybe wouldn't have realized it before."

These reflections on white privilege are consistent with deeper reflections on the impact of whiteness and white privilege in the classroom. Four of the six study participants indicated that their ethnic studies course prompted them to think critically about how their role as white students in a class with a majority of BIPOC students was to listen rather than talk. Participant 2 noted that her ethnic studies course helped her understand the systemic power she had in class discussions and made her more willing to listen and take a step back as a white student in a course with predominantly Black students. She expressed that, "it's not really my place to speak on Black issues and it's really my job to listen uh and sort of like follow the lead of Black voices." Participant 1, who described herself as a "very talkative person," reflected on her role as a white person learning about Black experiences with Black students. While she continued to participate in class discussions, she also recognized the need to listen to her Black classmates as they shared their experiences and feelings before forming her own opinions or sharing her thoughts. She recalled situations where she thought about how much she spoke in class

compared to her Black classmates and thought, “I'm annoying…I think I need to take a step back and not speak.” Participant 5, who admitted to, “always being vocal and speaking out” realized that the stories she was learning in her ethnic studies course were not her stories, and understood that she, “shouldn’t be speaking on…behalf of them I should be listening to their stories.” Because of her experiences in her ethnic studies course, this participant claimed that her, “perception of leadership has totally changed” and that she needed to, “take a step back” and listen more. Like Participant 5, Participant 6 recognized that the stories in her ethnic studies course were not her stories, so she, “usually just sat back and wanted to listen because I didn’t necessarily…I’ve never experienced something” and she recognized that her voice as a white student in the classroom does not, “need to be heard in every situation…it’s okay to sit back and hear other people’s perspectives without saying your own.”

Participant 5 recalled an instance in which Black students were punished for something she felt was unfair. She thought that her white privilege gave her more power in this situation because it was unlikely that she would have been punished for the same offense. This consideration also caused her to reflect on her current college experience. She noted that as a white woman at a predominantly white university, she would, "feel safe because…I'm white, like, I'm privileged… they're never going to arrest me.” Similarly, Participant 4 reflected on the systemic academic advantages afforded to white students, noting that, “as a white student too…I'm benefiting from this in a lot of ways...that was definitely uncomfortable to like come to terms with.”

Four participants continued to think about their privilege after the course based on everything they had learned about whiteness and white privilege in ethnic studies. For example, Participant 3 wondered if he should have been considered for a civil rights internship because, as

a white person, he didn't want to take a spot or an opportunity away from a BIPOC person, and Participant 5 noted that her intersectional privileges likely led to her nomination for a prestigious internship on Capitol Hill because if she had been a Black woman, she might not have gotten the internship after her first interview.

Reflecting on Being the Minority in Class. Another category of the subordinate theme of reflection is the reflection on being in the minority in the class. All participants said they had developed a new awareness that they were in the minority in the class and that this was atypical for them. All the participants also noted that they never expected to be in the minority in a class or that they had never experienced this in their education prior to taking ethnic studies. Participant 5 recalled that she was, "caught off guard…" and Participant 1 noted that being one of the only white students in the class was the first time she thought about her own race. Participant 2 noted that, "whenever you're around like people who look like you, you don't notice it," and also expressed that since her ethnic studies class, she tends to notice when she is the only white person, which she did not before. All participants attended schools with racial diversity but four participants explained that many of their classes, with the exception of ethnic studies, were majority white because they had taken AP, IB, and other higher-level or advanced classes in the past, which tended to be racially predictable. One participant reflected on this experience and wondered, "how did I go through high school and not interact or even know the names of these people? Like, how did I not meet these people?" Participant 6, who identified as white and Native American, reflected on her intersectional identity in a class with predominantly Black students and understood that:

> what they see on the outside is what they see on the outside and … I had to be less vocal about my opinions in the class because [the history topics in class] didn't directly ever affect me or my ancestors …I usually just sat back and wanted to listen and learn…

Participant 5 remarked:

> I was so used to always being vocal and speaking out but for the first time in that class I realized that there was a majority of people who have had experiences that I haven't had and that I shouldn't be speaking on… behalf of them. I should be listening to their stories and empathizing with them and trying to advocate for them.

Similarly, Participant 2 commented, "a lot of [white] students are very confident in the way that they speak, like, a lot of students will talk and talk and talk without really saying anything just because they have a platform..." and that she tended to monitor the amount she spoke in class because, "there's a lot of value in having that class be a safe space for Black students." Participant 1 said that while she still participated in the discussions, as a white person in the room, she tended to consider her role within the system before speaking.

Tarrying about Race, Racism, and Oppression. The act of tarrying, or the intentional and reflective act of dwelling in discomfort, and persistent, patient, and critical reflection, was a category of reflection that was evident in all six participants in this study. Specifically, participants cited instances in which they had grappled with how an incomplete or inaccurate history was taught in other history courses prior to this class. For example, Participant 2 stated that she, "never really had the opportunity to learn about and I feel like there's a lot of gaps in my knowledge about history…regarding… how Black people are involved in… history," and Participant 1 noted the importance of, "not letting history be taught just like from white perspectives to white students." Participants also indicated that they had more in-depth

discussions with people in their lives outside of class about the topics covered in the course. Participant 5 also shared that the act of tarrying with others led her to conclude that these gaps in the traditional history curriculum have an impact on public policy, which she noted is largely written by white people who learned history in traditional classrooms. Similarly, Participant 3 expressed frustration that some public policy writers try to deny history because, "there's so much information that they're just sweeping under the rug and… they want to glorify actions that were atrocious or awful…"

Participants also appreciated the opportunities to engage in class discussions to share ideas with others. Participant 3 described how his teacher gave students time to talk with their classmates and encouraged students to ask her questions when they had questions to expand their knowledge. He also noted that this opportunity to tarry together led to questioning each other's belief systems and demonstrating how those belief systems were created by slavery or racism and why slavery and colonization have implications for today. Participants reported how this act of tarrying together in class led to an environment where everyone felt comfortable asking questions, making mistakes, and accepting feedback. Tarrying together in class also led to an awareness that classmates' ancestors had experienced the history covered in class. Participant 2 particularly noted that she became aware of who might be sitting next to her in class and how that must feel for those students. She noted that:

> this is really really serious and like personal to so many people that I'm sitting next to [and] just to sort of be aware that like this [history] is just super real and like super personal for a lot of people.

Moving Past and Reframing White Guilt. The final category which falls under the subordinate theme of reflection is overcoming and reframing white guilt. Many proponents of

efforts to limit discussions of race and racism in the classroom claim that their goal is to prevent teachers from introducing material that might trigger fear or guilt based on race (Schwartz, 2021). However, Matias & Mackey (2016) argue that an excellent curriculum can deconstruct students' emotionality to move beyond discomfort, guilt, sadness, defensiveness, and anger when it comes to topics related to race and systemic oppression. Annerud (2014) argues that when familiar and predictable emotional patterns of shame and guilt emerge, teachers can design curricular interventions that connect to students' current sense of anti-racism to move beyond traditional narratives of shame and guilt (Casey & McManimon, 2020). Bailey (2014) argues for a pedagogy that treats fear and discomfort as sources of knowledge and connection rather than sources of guilt and shame.

The topic of guilt came up frequently in the interviews with the participants. We note that some participants said that the feelings of guilt were quite natural and sometimes even productive, as these feelings helped them to stay engaged. Participant 3 recalled feeling guilty in the course, but he talked about it with the teacher, reflected on his guilt, and ultimately viewed it as a teachable moment where he didn't necessarily have to get over those feelings, but had to, "sit in the discomfort.” Participant 2 recalled that, “I did experience like a lot of a lot of guilt,” but the course:

> helped a lot like to just sort of make yeah a more productive way of thinking about my role as a white person um rather than just like sit and feel sorry for like the things that my ancestors have done.

Participant 4 reflected at length on white guilt, expressing that guilt is natural, and that it is actually normal to feel guilty to some degree about white privilege and that you can use those feelings for something good. He shared that, “I think it's important to to like let people know that

that guilt doesn't mean that it's like that like you've done like something terrible...It just means that you know there are things that need to be changed and you know...we should do that." Finally, Participant 4 stated that it was important for white people to recognize the difference between unproductive guilt and productive guilt that leads to change. He wondered if it was necessary to be uncomfortable and feel guilt in order to effect change, and posited that people who avoid guilt are simply afraid of facing the realities of white supremacy in history and today.

Participants also noted that the feelings of guilt and discomfort in the classroom were a driving force for them to stay engaged, learn more, and get involved in social justice movements. Participant 1, for example, recalled that the course, "was uncomfortable however just because it was uncomfortable didn't mean I wanted to stop learning it." Participant 1 also said that there were times when she felt uncomfortable, but that she never looked at the actions of white people in history and in the present and thought she was a bad person because of it. Instead, it was an opportunity to learn and think about the need for systemic change.

Efficacy. Efficacy is both the next stage of critical consciousness development and the second subordinate theme (Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer & Rapa, 2015; Diemer et al., 2016). Efficacy is the belief that one's actions can contribute to eliminating racial injustice and institutional oppression (Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b). In this context, a sense of self-efficacy is an indicator that students have critical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2016) that the world can change for the better and that their actions can help bring about that change. Efficacy was consistently evident in the interviews, although not as pronounced as the other two components of critical consciousness: reflection and action. Overall, four participants reflected on their sense of efficacy based on their experiences in ethnic studies.

Critical Hope about Change by Searching for Counter Narratives. The first category that falls under this subordinate theme is critical hope for change through knowledge. Several participants spoke about their desire to learn more about the history and culture of BIPOC individuals and communities based on their experiences in ethnic studies in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of American history. Participants 1 and 2 spoke at length about their study of Black, Asian American, and Indigenous history, which was guided by a desire to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the United States of America in order to positively impact the future of the country. Participants 1 and 2 also spoke about the importance of place-based history in understanding the history of their communities. Participant 2 noted that ethnic studies classes are, "super, super valuable like especially in big cities like in areas where… you just interact with all kinds of people… it's really really valuable to know the history of different cultures." Participant 4 shared that by learning history in ethnic studies, he learned that there were times in American history, such as before the institutionalization of slavery and during Reconstruction before the election of Benjamin Hayes, where Black people experienced a higher level of equality with white people in some regions of the country, and that he thought that, "if like if [systemic, institutionalized oppression] hasn't always been a thing, that means it doesn't need to always be a thing…but at the same time it's important to [understand] the reality… now, so we have to…understand that."

Critical Hope that One's Actions can Bring Change. The second category, which falls under this subordinate theme, is the critical hope that one's own actions can bring about change. Participants expressed a desire for change and a belief that systemic change is possible. Participant 5 noted that the ethnic studies course helped her realize how racist and systemically

oppressive the education system is, which prompted her to get involved in politics to change that system. Participant 4 reflected on change in relation to white guilt, saying:

> I think it's important to to like let people know that that guilt doesn't mean that it's like that like you've done like something terrible, with you know something like terribly wrong. It just means that you know there are things that need to be changed and you know… we should do that.

Four participants also expressed the belief that they have the will, ability and capacity to make a difference. Participant 5 specifically noted that she, "didn't know how much an…impact that I could be having without learning [ethnic studies]." Studying ethnic studies has prompted her to continue to seek out opportunities to speak up and speak out because it has given her the skills to educate herself about systemic oppression.

Action. The final stage of developing a critical consciousness - and the final subordinate theme of this superordinate theme - is action, which refers to the actions students take in their school and community to interrupt systemic injustice. Students benefit from pedagogy that connects them to action in the community so that they can advocate for racial justice outside of the classroom (Matias & Mackey, 2016).

Action in Ethnic Studies. The first category of this subordinate theme of critical consciousness is taking action in an ethnic studies course. Three participants talked about action projects they had done as part of their ethnic studies course, but this was not the case for all participants. Participant 3 talked about working in groups to co-facilitate lessons with the teacher of his ethnic studies class. Participant 4 described how he researched systemic inequities within the school system in his class, developed a presentation and presented it to a school board member. Participant 5 recounted a class project in which the entire class worked togethers to

write, publish, and distribute a newspaper to the entire school in response to an incident of racially exclusionary discipline that had occurred in the classroom. These three participants noted that these classroom actions helped them to listen better and think more critically about their role as a white person. They learned to take a step back as a white person and avoid speaking on behalf of BIPOC individuals and instead work with BIPOC individuals to effect change.

While these three projects clearly had a lasting impact on the three participants, participants were far more likely to talk about actions they themselves had taken following their ethnic studies course. All six participants mentioned specific actions they had taken and attributed them to the ethnic studies course.

Action Beyond Ethnic Studies. The second category of action centers on action taken beyond an ethnic studies course. Participants gave examples of myriad actions they had taken in their personal lives, in their communities, at their universities, and in their careers as a result of ethnic studies. In Storms' (2012) qualitative study of students enrolled in a social justice education course, students attributed their greater willingness to engage to higher levels of awareness, empathy, racial consciousness, and confidence in speaking and leading. For example, all six participants described becoming more involved in their communities by attending school board meetings and joining student groups that advocate against racism, or increasing their involvement by speaking at school, participating in discussion groups, and similar actions. Participants also indicated that they approach situations they experience in their work, education, and life with a greater critical awareness because of their experiences in ethnic studies.

Participant 3 gave several examples of actions he had taken as a result of his experiences with ethnic studies. He participated in a civil rights pilgrimage organized by his university three

times, studied education with a minor in special education, and introduced the topic of Rosh Hashanah to the school where he currently works as a student teacher because the town, “is actually the head of the KKK of [my state]... so there are possibly students that their family are a part of that group.” Because of her experience in ethnic studies, Participant 2 sought out a summer internship with a nonprofit organization that helps Black families make down payments on homes to combat the effects of redlining. Participant 2 noted that she would not have sought out this organization and would not have been interested in the internship if she had not taken ethnic studies. Participant 5 recalled the capstone project of her leadership minor and noted that she had chosen a topic specifically related to educational inequities in special education based on her experiences in her ethnic studies course. Participant 5 also recalled giving a speech as class president at her high school graduation. She gave a speech on the topic of racial injustice and the murder of George Floyd and received pushback from her classmates, noting that, “the graduation speech that I wrote would have never been written if I didn't take that class.”

Other participants noted that after the course they had a new level of knowledge and confidence to have conversations about race, which led them to have courageous conversations with family, friends, and colleagues. Participant 1 expressed that the course has given her more knowledge and tools to have conversations about race outside of the course and that she feels much more confident as a result. Participant 3 also described this benefit of ethnic studies, stating that he talked to his parents and friends about topics related to ethnic studies that he would not normally discuss without the influence of the course. Participant 5 recalled having difficult conversations with her best friend’s mother based on things she had learned in ethnic studies. Finally, Participant 6 recalled a situation in which she confronted her manager at a restaurant who was, “being rude to a person who comes in that looks homeless and is asking for

water," and noted that without the class she, "wouldn't be able to… call in people's mistakes." She recalled explaining to her supervisor that, "we live in a colonized generation and it shows that you are still in the colonized mindset by doing this and…we can work on decolonizing ourselves and the people around us."

Pursuing Social Justice Careers

Two of the six participants pursued careers in social justice and a third completed a social justice internship after taking ethnic studies. Because of his knowledge of disability rights and the disability movement, Participant 3 minored in special education. He also planned to apply what he had learned about the cultural and linguistic consequences of colonization as a French teacher. Participant 5 cited her ethnic studies course as one of the reasons she became passionate about politics. She worked in Washington D.C. with two members of Congress. She wanted to use her political platform to, "really change the education system because I felt like the education system is a core of everything." After her experience in ethnic studies, Participant 3 sought out an internship with a nonprofit organization that helps Black families make down payments on homes to combat the effects of redlining in her city.

Deeper Understanding of History Through Ethnic Studies

The second superordinate theme that emerged across all six interviews was how developing a deeper understanding of history prompted participants to think more critically about historical and contemporary systemic oppression.

Recognition of the Problems of Traditional U.S. History Curriculum. The first subordinate theme in developing a deeper understanding of history is recognizing the problems with the traditional U.S. history curriculum. Across the country, students are learning a U.S. history curriculum that consists of a primarily white narrative that marginalizes

counter-narratives and leaves students with the impression that white people are responsible for all notable progress (Givens, 2021). Both racism and oppression are downplayed, while there is little mention of BIPOC contributions and BIPOC resistance (Applebaum, 2014). Additionally, white teachers are often hesitant to talk about race in their classrooms because they feel unprepared or unsafe discussing the topic (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Wills, 2019; Castagno, 2008). When traditional history textbooks and teachers in traditional history courses make racism invisible, students remain uninformed about the history of race relations and, as a result, are often unable to analyze the racism they encounter in their everyday lives (Loewen, 1995; Hagerman, 2018).

Frustration Over Learning Deficits. One category that emerged from this subordinate theme was the participants' references to their frustration with their own learning deficits. All six participants expressed frustration with inadequate instruction in their traditional history courses and shared that they felt uninformed about certain historical content that, according to Participant 3, had been swept, "under the rug." Participant 2 expressed concern that hard truths, including details about the treatment of people during the transatlantic trade of enslaved people, were not taught in the traditional world history curriculum, even though this was something that all students were expected to learn. She felt that she had a learning deficit when it came to Black history in general, and specifically recalled learning about the New Negro Movement and Black Wall Street for the first time. She related that she, "just honestly didn't know I didn't…know how much I didn't know which was the biggest thing for me it was just discovering like how much of a deficit I had um was really like eye-opening." Participant 4 was surprised at what had been missing from his three other history courses, including redlining and housing covenants, and wondered why he didn't know this information before taking ethnic studies. While he expressed

understanding that some teachers avoided certain topics that made them uncomfortable, such as lynchings and executions, he still felt that it was important to talk about them. He also stated that he was unaware of the concept of whiteness before taking ethnic studies. Participant 5 expressed concern that she was, "implicitly taught history that was wrong."

The Desire for Counter-narratives. Another category of the subordinate theme of recognizing the problems of the traditional U.S. history curriculum was the desire to learn counter-narratives. Participants agreed that learning counter-narratives to history should be required. Participant 2 felt that all white students studying history should take a course in African American history because it is, "just like such a missing piece that…really affects…everything we do." Participant 3 felt that ethnic studies courses - including Black history, Jewish history, and LGBT+ history - should not be an elective. He noted that these topics are not mandatory in traditional history courses, depriving students of the opportunity to have critical conversations in a safe environment. Participant 3 was also frustrated that the issue of what can and cannot be taught in social studies classes has become so politicized. He expressed concern that recent laws in Florida restricting the teaching of history allow people to deny that certain events ever happened (DeSantis, 2022). Participant 6 shared that she felt uncomfortable for the first time in school because she was learning so much about history in her ethnic studies class. However, it wasn't a "bad uncomfortable" but rather a "good uncomfortable" and something she should have experienced in sixth grade, because, "if you are comfortable you're never going to make a change."

Academic Understanding of Systemic Oppression. With a new understanding of what was missing from their traditional history classes, participants in this study became more critical of systemic oppression. This new academic understanding of systemic oppression is the second

subordinate theme of a deeper understanding of history through ethnic studies. According to Participant 1, her ethnic studies course first helped her recognize the systems that created racism and then gave her the language, tools, and confidence to have, "conversations about race…because I could look more critically at it." She also described becoming more critical of the messages portrayed in the media, noting the differences in the coverage of Black tennis player Coco Gauff and her white opponents. Both Participant 1 and Participant 2 used what they had learned in their ethnic studies courses to think more critically about historical and current segregation in their city. Participant 1 discussed the impact of redlining and described the destruction of a Black neighborhood for the construction of a stadium. Participant 2 connected her understanding of segregation in her city to inequalities in education and healthcare. This personal connection led her to pursue a summer internship with a non-profit organization working to eliminate the effects of redlining. Participant 3 learned more about the history of colonization and the subsequent destruction of people's lives and cultures. This inspired him to learn more about the impact of colonization and enslavement of people around the world. One of the key takeaways Participant 4 had from his ethnic studies course was "how racial inequity manifests itself in education" and how students are tracked from elementary school with gifted and talented programs based on standardized test scores. Participant 5 described recognizing "how really messed up the education system was" after an incident of racially exclusionary discipline occurred at her school. Together with her fellow classmates, she investigated the incident. This moment led her to get involved in politics to tackle these inequities in education through public policy.

Critical Whiteness Pedagogy

The third superordinate theme that emerged from our study was the importance of critical whiteness pedagogy. White students benefit from pedagogy that aims to increase students' critical consciousness (Watts et al., 1999; Thomas et al., 2014; Harvey, 2018). However, Applebaum's (2019) research shows that a pedagogy of critical consciousness alone is not sufficient for white students because epistemologies of ignorance and conscious unknowing perpetuate systems of social injustice (Applebaum, 2019). This is the case when white students willfully ignore epistemological sources that demonstrate the persistence of racial injustice and insist on using dominant epistemological views that distort the realities of racial injustice (Applebaum, 2019). Therefore, educators teaching white students need to combine critical consciousness pedagogy with critical whiteness pedagogy to help students name and acknowledge systemic racism and develop a sense of self-efficacy that motivates them to take action. All of the participants in this study were taking ethnic studies courses in classes that were predominantly comprised of BIPOC students and had very few white students. For this reason, it is unlikely that the teachers of their courses purposefully and intentionally engaged in a critical whiteness pedagogy. Nonetheless, each of the participants recalled using strategies recognized by critical whiteness scholars as key strategies of critical whiteness pedagogy. These included seminars, dialogue and discussions about race, social-emotional learning and distress tolerance.

Seminar, Dialogue, and Discussion About Race. The first subordinate category of critical whiteness pedagogy is seminar, dialogue, and discussion about race. Yeung et al. (2013) and Bandy et al. (2021) use analysis of student journals to show that talking about race yields the greatest gains in understanding racial injustice, empathy for others, intellectual development, and critical reflection compared to all other pedagogical strategies. Singleton & Linton (2006) emphasize the importance of skillful facilitation to ensure that conversations about race are

productive and do not get lost in white talk. Casey & McManimon (2020) also advocate for discussion protocols, and Kohli et al. (2017) argue that students' ability to process and confront racism in discussions in the classroom and elsewhere ultimately depends on the racial literacy teachers infuse into their pedagogy, in conjunction with their social-emotional capacity to facilitate interracial dialogue. Five of the participants in this study cited examples of frequent in-class discussion, clear discussion protocols, and skillful facilitation in their ethnic studies courses.

Guidelines for conversations, protocols to ensure that all students get to speak, and restrictions on how often students speak were some of the structures that participants talked about as they recalled their ethnic studies course. Participant 6, for example, recalled that the seminars were structured with two or three guiding questions that usually transitioned from very "generic" questions to a very "deep" question. Her teacher used talking tokens, or cards, to ensure that every student spoke in the seminar and that students did not speak more than twice. These structures created a predictable and structured environment for the class, even though the discussions were sometimes very emotional. Participant 6 also noted that her teacher used the Courageous Conversations protocol and compass as a template and was able to describe in detail the templates and diagrams used in this class. She noted that students were encouraged to use "I statements" and that there were other measures her teacher took which, "kept us in a very calm environment while talking about things that are not calm at all."

Participant 4 also recalled the measures his teacher took to ensure that discomfort was minimized and that most students were not afraid to speak:

> I remember she just went over like the fact that you shouldn't, you know, that no one should like feel uncomfortable like sharing their like opinions and stuff in a respectful

> way of course…I just remember it being like a very, um...I feel like people were most people were not scared to to talk…I just remember it being like very like sort of as relaxed of an environment, as it could be for like the the topics that we were covering.

Participant 6 noted that her teacher recognized that this was challenging and that it was unlikely that class discussions would come to a conclusion, but that it was a normal part of the process.

Participants commented that in order to create a calm, relaxed environment, the teacher interrupted when certain words were used, and reminded students that it is okay to make mistakes. Participant 6 recalled that when a student said something that was problematic, her teacher, "would immediately shut it down and would talk to the whole class about why that word was bad or instead of using this word, use this word," but this was done in an environment where she emphasized:

> it's okay to make mistakes, so it felt very much like it's okay…that I'm not a hundred percent sure with what I'm doing because I know that we're going to get to the point where we're learning and it's okay that I'm making mistakes.

Participant 6 also described how her teacher created a calm environment by providing a safe space for students to share about real world issues, which was not the norm in other classes, and by addressing issues with an academic understanding of bias, microaggressions, and internalized racism, students were able to intellectually unpack statements made in class discussions in a calm and curious manner. Participant 5 also noted that in order to create a safe environment for class discussion, her teacher spent the first few days of class:

> letting the kids get to know each other because you can't really talk about personal things like that and be vulnerable if you don't…know me like I don't want to know you…I think

> a lot of times in school people are like well then you're just not learning [but] building relationships is learning in my opinion.

Social Emotional Learning and Distress Tolerance. The second subordinate category of critical whiteness pedagogy is social-emotional learning and distress tolerance. Godfrey & Grayman (2014) found that a psychologically safe learning environment is critical to the success of a course that addresses issues of race and systemic oppression. This includes building positive relationships and creating a safe classroom environment in which the emotionalities of whiteness can be unpacked. Matias & Mackey (2016) advocate for a social-emotional curriculum and pedagogy that focuses on deconstructing students' emotionality to overcome discomfort, guilt, sadness, defensiveness, and anger when addressing issues related to race and systemic oppression. Otherwise, they argue, students fall back into white distancing and undermine the goals of the course (Matias & Mackey, 2016). Bandy et al. (2021) argue for direct instruction in active listening, conflict resolution, and distress tolerance, as well as direct instruction in the benefits of discussing race and privilege as opportunities for growth. Five participants described classroom environments that integrated these approaches into their ethnic studies instruction.

Participant 5 not only noted the importance of building relationships first before engaging with the curriculum, but also that her teacher created a classroom culture where the teacher was also a student in the sense that the teacher modeled the act of learning alongside her:

> we were all having conversations with one another like it would didn't even feel like [the teacher] was like ‘I know all this information,’ because she knows herself that as a white woman she doesn't…she can't speak…so she definitely also influenced the way that I want to talk about like how can I encourage conversation and start a conversation as someone who's not you know about that specific group.

Participants also emphasized that their teachers created a welcoming environment that made it easier to have difficult conversations and to emphasize that it is okay to make mistakes. Many participants also noted that their teachers used modeling strategies in order to work through the emotionalities of white guilt and reinforced the idea that discomfort is natural, an important part of the learning process, and not synonymous with a lack of desire to learn. Participants 1, 3, 4, and 6 all indicated that their teachers addressed the feelings of discomfort and ensured that students had the space, time, and skills to sit in discomfort, process their emotions, understand that discomfort is a part of the ethnic studies learning process as a white student, and reframe white guilt. Participant 6 specifically noted that this modeling and direct instruction:

> opened…an emotional support type of thing for me. Like, it was okay to express my feelings. It was okay to talk about what I think personally, so it like opened up like a like a softness of my personality, which was super nice. It's okay to talk about my emotions…okay to do all these things when you're having really hard conversations.

Participant 6 also noted that through the process of learning ethnic studies, she came to the realization that, "you're never learning… if you're comfortable. You're never going to make a change if you're comfortable."

White Supremacy Culture

White supremacy culture also emerged as a superordinate theme. White supremacy culture defines the cultural values typically upheld by white supremacist systems (Jones & Okun, 2001). These include: perfectionism, paternalism, either/or thinking, worship of the written word, valuing quantity over quantity, power hoarding, defensiveness, a sense of urgency, progress means bigger, there is only one right way, fear of open conflict, individualism, and a belief in

objectivity (Jones & Okun, 2001). While the participants did not exhibit all of the characteristics of white supremacy culture, each of the six participants exhibited at least one of the characteristics identified by Okun & Jones (2001) over the course of the interviews.

Evidence of White Supremacy Culture. In preparation for this study, we examined the characteristics described by Jones & Okun's (2001; Okun, 2021) framework for white supremacy culture. In Chapter 3, we described some of these characteristics on the assumption that they would help us to better understand the experiences and feelings that our participants shared with us. Although these characteristics did not all emerge as superordinate or subordinate themes, there was evidence of some of the characteristics in more than one participant's interview.

Fear of Open Conflict. In three interviews, we identified what Jones & Okun (2001; Okun, 2021) referred to as fear of open conflict. Participant 3 described moments in class when some students did not take the lesson seriously, but he did not feel comfortable confronting them because, "it was usually like the popular kids and you couldn't really societal or socially couldn't call them out because they're popular kids." Participant 4 regretted not talking to his friends about the class as he heard them, "sometimes say things that were just like a little bit off" and he stated that he had "some friends who like would have potentially like looked down upon that like who would definitely have never taken that class."

Paternalism. Signs of paternalism also emerged when participants described their interactions with classmates. Participant 6 expressed a desire to be, "sort of an ally and an advocate at the same time for other kids that didn't necessarily like even care about it" and Participant 5 shared that she "realized that these kids who were in this regular social social studies class were not it's not that they were dumb or didn't care about school it wasn't that they

weren't trying hard enough it was that because they didn't have the same resources and tools that I had that allowed me to be function as a typical student."

Quality Over Quantity. Both Participant 1 and Participant 2 made references to quantity over quality when they indicated that they typically took AP courses to earn college credit. Participant 2 said:

> You can't get AP credit for it um so like I could have taken another class and…saved myself you know a whole credit…so like I think that that would also motivate a lot more people to take it if they were able to get credit and would take it more seriously as an AP course.

Right to Comfort. Finally, the right to comfort emerged when two participants described a lack of interactions with BIPOC students at their colleges. Participant 2 described that she wanted:

> to interact more with people who are different from me…and it just really isn't happening. There's this sort of like like grouping up thing that people are doing right now I think out of comfort and just like being in a new place.

Participant 4 talked about the conversations happening at his college about racial equity but said that he hadn't, "really been involved in any particular like action in that regard."

Helms' Model

Helms' (1990) model of white racial identity development provides a framework for learning more about white identity (Moffitt & Rogers, 2022). Although some critics note that Helms' model does not account for the recurring changes in white racial identity that naturally occur in a person's life (Malott et al., 2015), Helms (2017) notes that racial identity is not rigid and linear, but fluid and situationally dynamic. Helms' (1990) model proposes a general

developmental process in two schemas: moving from a lack of awareness of racism and the meaning of race to an increased awareness and effort to live as an anti-racist white person (Malott et al., 2015). Helms' (1990; 1993) model provides an organizing framework for identifying and interpreting the nuanced ways in which white youth and adults make sense of race and develop a racial identity (Moffitt et al., 2021). Helms (1995) further argues that maturation in racial identity development is triggered by personal encounters with meaningful racial material and that moments of racial discord can lead to a racial identity that begins to develop (Helms, 1995; Puchner et al., 2012).

In this study, there were no participants who showed consistent indicators of a single schema or sub-schema of white racial identity development according to the Helms model. Instead, it was common for participants to fall into different stages of the Helms model, often depending on the topic of discussion. While most participants could be categorized in the second schema of the Helms model (pseudo-independence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy), there were also times when participants showed signs of disintegration and reintegration. Overall, this data support a fluid interpretation of Helms' model, described by Helms (2017) as normal, in the sense that white racial identity does not develop on a fixed continuum and instead it is common for white racial identity to develop dynamically, recognizing that individuals may exist simultaneously in different stages of racial identity development due to the complexity of their experiences, influences, and ongoing self-reflection as they grapple with the nuances of their racial identity. This dynamic reflects the fluid nature of personal growth and the continuous influence of various factors on a person's racial consciousness.

Schemas of Development.

Contact. The first schema of white racial identity development, contact, can be characterized by white people benefiting from racism and doing little to challenge or resist the structures that enable racial privilege (Moffitt et al., 2021) and is often represented by the term colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Wise, 2010). In this study, there were no participants who reported any signs of the contact phase. This is significant because it speaks to the ability of ethnic studies to help students critically examine systemic inequalities, challenge biases, and foster a deeper understanding of racial dynamics by encouraging students to move beyond initial awareness.

Disintegration. Moffit et al. (2021) describe the disintegration stage of racial identity development as nebulous feelings of guilt, shame, confusion, and ambiguity about one's whiteness, as well as shame and guilt about historical racism. Disintegration in white identity development also involves internal conflict and a sense of moral discomfort as people struggle with contradictions in their beliefs and behaviors regarding racial issues (Helms, 1990). One participant in this study showed occasional signs of disintegration, particularly when discussing his position as a college student on a campus currently grappling with racial issues stemming from the Supreme Court ruling that overturned affirmative action (Totenberg, 2023). Participant 4 noted that he was aware of the movement for equity at his college and that he did not want to participate in any particular action in this regard. This statement seemed to reflect the disintegration stage of white identity development, as he acknowledged the racial issues at the school but did not personally engage or take action, possibly indicating internal conflict or confusion about how to address the issue. When reflecting on the possibility of ethnic studies becoming a compulsory subject, the same participant remarked,

> I was like not necessarily doing everything I could to like to like learn about these like really terrible things that happened in the past. I think a big part of that was because I was just avoiding you know having to feel like uncomfortable about it and guilty about it, and I think… that's a very common thing… let's say this class did become a required class, I think it's important to to like let people know that that guilt doesn't mean that it's like that like you've done like something… terribly wrong.

In this case, he admitted that he avoided engaging with historical injustices out of discomfort and guilt, referencing a common struggle of white people who may refuse to engage with ethnic studies in order to avoid confronting these feelings. Interestingly, as the same participant continued to talk about the topic, he seemed to transition into the state of reintegration according to Helms' model, suggesting that the development of white racial identity is indeed a fluid process.

Reintegration. Helms' (1993) reintegration schema refers to an unconscious or subconscious belief in white superiority. According to Shuster & Giesemann (2021c), this occurs when people are confronted with alternative interpretations of their society, such as counter-narratives about US history and white supremacy. They are then faced with the choice of either sticking to their existing beliefs or rethinking them. In the reintegration schema, people tend to cling to their prior beliefs and actively seek evidence to validate them. This includes attempting to justify white privilege as a myth and finding ways to socially or biologically justify racism while blaming BIPOC individuals for current racial injustices (Case & Hemmings, 2005; Hagerman, 2018; Harvey, 2018). Selective attention to stereotype-confirming information and the perception that there are no right answers characterize the challenges individuals may face at this stage.

Reflecting on the possibility of making ethnic studies a required course, Participant 4 noted that ethnic studies would be of great benefit if everyone took the class seriously, but since not everyone would take it seriously, he thought it, "could really be a big problem and that could be like really uncomfortable." Instead, he advocated for integrating ethnic studies topics into AP history or IB history. This more nuanced view recognizes the avoidance of discomfort, and relegated ethnic studies topics to higher level history classes, where ethnic studies topics would likely lose focus and importance amidst all the other curriculum covered in those classes.

In another example of reintegration, Participant 2 described that class discussions included, "discussions about the class being controversial about Critical Race Theory," but noted that current events were not often discussed in class because, "this was just last year, so I mean, police brutality…it hasn't been…I mean, it's obviously still prominent…but we did talk about that a little bit…even though it hasn't been so much of a like hot topic this year." The statement could be interpreted as reflecting elements of reintegration, particularly because she consciously chose to downplay the ongoing problem of police brutality, despite being aware of its existence. Mills' (2014) concept of conscious unknowing is consistent with the idea that individuals can choose to turn away from uncomfortable truths or downplay the importance of certain issues. In this case, she may have engaged in a form of reintegration by actively downplaying the significance of police brutality.

When describing BIPOC students in their ethnic studies classes, both Participant 1 and Participant 5 made statements that indicated a contradictory mix of recognizing the systemic inequities that have hindered student success and blaming BIPOC students for their lack of academic achievement, which could also be an indicator of reintegration. Participant 1 noted that her AP classes are predominantly white because, "a lot of our Black students are coming from

out of district and they're being bused in from schools that have lost their accreditation, they're usually not in a position where they can be in upper level classes." Similarly, Participant 5 noted that at her school:

> the kids at [the school]....talk about how they felt unheard…these kids would say like the school just like thinks we're dumb or like don't try hard enough…and I'd always recognize that…they might have stuff greater than just learning disabilities, mental health stuff, stuff at home, all going on at the same time...

Participant 5 attributed students' difficulties primarily to individual problems (learning disabilities, mental health, personal struggles at home) rather than addressing systemic issues within the education system, reflecting a lack of critical examination of systemic factors contributing to educational inequities.

Pseudo Independence. When white people are able to move beyond reintegration, one outcome may be to recognize racial oppression and privilege without fully understanding the ways in which one is complicit in the systemic and institutional manifestations of racism (Helms, 1990; Puchner et al., 2012; Flynn, 2015; Flynn, 2018). Pseudo-independence is largely characterized by an acceptance of racial inequities and systemic oppression without a solid understanding of how these inequities play out on a systemic or interpersonal level. This ultimately leads to an immature sense of agency and activism that is superficial and/or performative and does not take into account personal responsibility for racism (Moffitt et al., 2021).

Three participants in this study gave examples of pseudo independence. The most common theme in these examples was the notion or presence of performative allyship. Participant 2 said she wanted to take an ethnic studies course because:

> I feel like like there's a lot of gaps in my knowledge about history um regarding like how Black people are involved in the history that I've learned from my perspective, and I also like just wanted to be a better ally to Black people, and I think learning black history is a huge way to do that.

This suggests a superficial interest in learning about Black history and viewing it as a means "to be a better ally" without fully acknowledging or addressing the systemic issues and barriers that contribute to the gaps in knowledge or academic quality of the course. Focusing on personal development as an ally without a deeper commitment to addressing broader structural inequities characterizes a form of performative engagement. Similarly, in describing her social justice internship, Participant 2 noted that she did not have much direct contact with clients, as she was primarily engaged in event planning and fundraising, noting, "I wish I could have like actually gotten to work more like with the people that they were working with and their their clients." The emphasis on the feeling of contributing to a good cause without directly involvement with those affected suggests a possible disconnect between her intention to engage and her actual level of engagement or understanding, and raises questions about her motivations for securing the internship. Participant 2 also noted that she had chosen her postsecondary institution in part because she wanted to, "come to a place like this…. not only just to interact with Black students…we also have like a really huge International population…," and although she admitted that it was only her second week, she expressed disappointment that:

> I have really like wanted to interact more with people who are different from me just because like there's um 60 different countries represented in my class, like, I have like this this like incredible resource of diversity to like learn about other cultures, and it just really isn't happening. There's this sort of like like grouping up thing that people are

> doing right now I think out of comfort and just like being in a new place.

She was only in her second week of school, but it's worth noting that she may not have taken proactive steps to connect with the diverse community at her college. If she expected others, particularly BIPOC individuals, to initiate interactions without actively seeking out opportunities herself (e.g., joining clubs, sitting at other tables, etc.), this may indicate a lack of proactive engagement rather than a genuine effort to connect with diverse individuals, suggesting a possible disconnect between expressed intentions and proactive steps to engage in diversity.

Participant 5 presented several complex examples of pseudo-independence, such as when she described that her BIPOC classmates:

> never [wanting] to take school seriously [but in ethnic studies], I think for the first time I saw a shift a little bit where it was like when I'm able to lead and I'm able to like learn, like in this way, I want to take school a little bit more seriously … in that sense... there was a sense of them wanting to be there, because a lot of time those kids would leave school and just like ditch class … but it wasn't like half the class was ever gone [in ethnic studies]...so that was definitely that was like something I definitely noticed, that it was more like kids wanted to be here.

Her observation suggests that she is aware of the impact of teaching methods and leadership on student engagement and assumes that the initial lack of seriousness lies with the students, rather than considering possible systemic factors that may contribute to disengagement. Overall, her statement reflected a mixture of genuine recognition of positive change and possible subtle biases or generalizations about the behavior of her BIPOC peers. On several occasions, Participant 5 also spoke about the actions she had taken to help a BIPOC classmate and ensure that she passed the class. Participant 5 admitted that her motivation, “wasn't me being like I'm

gonna make this girl excel. It was me being like I need to excel this way for myself, like this is what I have to do, and I can show the group…the tools that I use." On the one hand, Participant 5 acknowledged that her own learning disability led her to develop a set of skills and strategies that she could model to the class and indicated that it was not her intention to ensure that her classmate excelled in class, but on the other hand, her statement indicated an implicit saviorism that is often associated with pseudo-independence. Again, this shows that white people often oscillate between different stages while exhibiting concurrent schemas of Helms' model. Participant 5 also reflected on her work to support her classmates in ways that suggest the next stage of Helms' model, immersion/emersion.

Immersion/Emersion. The next phase of Helms' (1990) model, immersion/emersion, occurs when white people commit to developing an understanding of white complicity in racial oppression and privilege (Puchner et al., 2012; Flynn, 2015; Flynn, 2018). Essentially, this stage occurs when white people realize that whiteness is the product of powerful social forces that have become naturalized over time and ask themselves how they can challenge, resist, and overturn white hegemony (Nayak, 2007). People at this stage are intensely concerned with issues of race and racism. They may actively seek out information, literature, and experiences that heighten their awareness of racial dynamics and inequalities. Immersion involves an increased sensitivity to racial issues and a desire to understand them more thoroughly. This stage reflects a process of coming to terms with one's own racial identity and beliefs.

All participants in this study showed signs of the immersion/emersion schema of white identity development and it was the most dominant schema which emerged in all interviews. Many participants showed signs of immersion/emersion by acknowledging their white privilege and providing examples of how they intentionally use their privilege in meaningful and authentic

ways. For example, Participant 3 was hesitant to accept a spot on the Civil Rights Pilgrimage because he felt it would be better for a BIPOC student to have the opportunity, and he did not want to take an opportunity away from anyone as a white person. Participant 4 often reflected on the systemic inequities he learned about through examining his school's disproportionate data, particularly in relation to the number of BIPOC students enrolled in AP and IB courses. He reflected that as a white student, he benefited from this disproportionality and expressed that this was an uncomfortable reality for him to come to terms with. Participant 5 recalled an instance in which a Black classmate was suspended after an emotional outburst related to a panic attack the student had experienced. She expressed that:

> seeing my peers faces, like, their vulnerability and emotion… physically was so impactful like to know that someone in our class was getting suspended because... their emotions were a little bit high and they don't always have the resources to control them and… the teacher puts his hand, like, if anyone put their hand on me while I was having a panic attack, I would just [makes a clicking noise and uses elbow to gesture a push].

Participant 5 also recalled an incident in which she realized that she could use her white privilege to ensure that her classmates' voices were heard. After the aforementioned suspension, the entire class worked together to write, organize and publish a newspaper and have it professionally printed for distribution throughout the school. As class president and student council president, she was asked to write an article for the front page.

> I remember that when I was writing that article, I knew that it was something that I really wanted to do because I knew that it was super, super wrong, but I really struggled with the fact of whether I could, whether if I was going to speak out against the school…if they were going to take away the position that I had …if it was better for me

> to stay like a little bit more compliant and then work within the system to like then create the change.

Ultimately, she decided to write the article for the front page.

Another example of immersion/emersion that was evident in many participants was the way in which they actively evaluated their own participation in the lesson. They recognized that for the first time in their academic careers, it was not appropriate to take up a large portion of the classroom to ensure that their classmates' voices were heard. Participant 2 reflected on her experiences in AP classes where most students feel that "this is my space to like express myself and like I'm smart and I know what I'm talking about." She recognized that this was not her place in this class and instead her role was to listen to her classmates and learn from their perspectives. Participant 1 also noted that as a very vocal person, she had learned that it was important to listen to the people around her because the Black students already had an idea when they came into the class, "it's like they have the prerequisite for the class, almost um and so, um I'd say like I was still like very much a part of discussions, but I was a part of discussions, like, very clearly as the white person in the room." Participant 5 also noted that ethnic studies helped to redefine what it means for her to be a leader because

> when you grow up you're taught that being a leader is speaking out, being a leader is using your voice, so I would say that my perception of leadership has totally changed within that class…being a leader, if you truly want to become a leader I would take that class to see how…you listen.

These examples demonstrate a process of self-reflection, adaptation, and deeper understanding of one's role in an academic environment characterized by racial diversity, and indicate the immersion/emersion stages of racial identity development.

Participants also actively questioned the history that they had learned at this stage, especially when it was presented from a white narrative, which all of the participants did. For example, Participant 2 noted that:

> world history is just so blatantly told from a white perspective and…the things that they mention about Black people are the ways that Black people are related to white people, or like how how people have utilized like Black people as a tool, um and it's really not like for Black people or about Black people…. it's not like an authentic, you know, um description of I think of the events that have happened.

With this nuanced statement, Participant 2 questions the authenticity of the history she learned prior to her ethnic studies class, noting that history is taught in a way that both objectifies Black people and serves white supremacy culture. This shows that Participant 2 is exploring her own racial identity and critiquing the narratives she has been taught.

Autonomy. White racial autonomy is characterized by an understanding of the humanist ideals of equity and social justice at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels. (Helms, 1990; Puchner et al., 2012; Flynn, 2015; Flynn, 2018). Moffitt et al. (2021) clarify that this presupposes a certain level of comfort with one's anti-racist white identity. In their analysis of white racial identity development, they note that the autonomy-related traits referenced in Helms' (1990, 1995) theory include awareness of structural racism and internalized white superiority. In the autonomy stage of white racial identity development, people actively work to develop a secure and internally defined sense of their racial identity, challenge societal norms, and strive for authenticity in their understanding of race and privilege.

Two participants in this study provided examples of actions that can be categorized as belonging to the autonomy stage of white racial identity development. When Participant 6

confronted her manager about his rude behavior toward a unhoused customer, she recognized the importance of calling him in on his mistakes even though it was a social risk to reprimand a manager, stating, “we live in a colonized generation and it shows that you are still in the colonized mindset by doing this and that so we can work on decolonizing ourselves and the people around us by doing this.” In this case, her decision to confront her supervisor, recognize the internalized racism, and commit to becoming more anti-racist shows a sense of autonomy. She actively took action that aligned with her own values and principles, demonstrating her willingness to challenge and change discriminatory behavior.

Participant 6’s sense of autonomy was also evident in her reflection on how her racial identity was perceived. Although she partially identified as Native American, she reflected on the fact that she was perceived as white and realized that how others perceived her from the outside was out of her control. This realization corresponds to the autonomy stage of caring less about external judgments and focusing more on one's internal understanding of racial identity. She also described a change in her behavior, becoming less vocal about her opinions and choosing to listen and learn more actively. She not only acknowledged her limited personal experiences, but also demonstrated a willingness to understand and learn from the experiences of others. Participant 6 also mentioned instances of systemic oppression in the school context and expressed her willingness to support and validate the experiences of others, especially when it comes to the unfair treatment of Black students, by actively recognizing and addressing systemic issues.

Participant 6 also demonstrated autonomy when she described the self-described good and negative conversations she had with white peers about her decision to take ethnic studies. In some cases, she noted, “people giving me kudos to be in that class, like, ‘Oh, you're so strong

and so brave for being in a class that's mostly filled with minorities,'" suggesting that even as a white student, she was interested in taking the class to be more anti-racist. This demonstrates a reflective self-talk in which she recognized that she was taking steps to become more anti-racist, even if she did not fully agree with certain experiences. This shows a level of autonomy in which she evaluates her actions based on personal values rather than external validation.

Participant 6's white racial autonomy became even more apparent as she reflected on the fact that her parents received food stamps and were directly impacted by the system, and that her mother identified in part as Native American, yet benefited from white privilege because she was white and used that privilege in ways that she could use to advantage others:

> I just really wanted to learn from other students because other students' opinions to be better for the school, and if I could do better for the school, and if I'm privileged, then all I need to do is listen and understand that what these kids are going through that might not directly affect me I can maybe make make a change.

This demonstrates a more secure understanding of her racial identity as well as a desire to learn from other students, indicating a willingness to listen and understand other perspectives.

Participant 5 not only reflected on her white racial identity, but also demonstrated autonomy as she wrestled with the decision of whether to speak out against the school or work within the system to effect change in the newspaper project. This internal deliberation showed that she thought carefully about how to approach a problem, indicating a degree of autonomy in decision-making. She considered the potential consequences of speaking out directly against the school, such as the fear of losing her position, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of how to navigate systems to achieve effective change.

Chapter 4 Summary and Conclusion

To summarize, this study used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine the experiences of six white individuals who had taken an ethnic studies course in high school. Using in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the researchers identified four superordinate themes—critical consciousness, deeper understanding of history, and critical whiteness pedagogy—each with corresponding subordinate themes and categories that shed light on how the participants reflected on their racial identities and the impact of the course on their perspectives. After analyzing these superordinate and subordinate themes in detail, the study also identified characteristics of white supremacy culture, such as fear of open conflict, signs of paternalism, a focus on quantity over quality in academic choices, and the right to comfort. This chapter then applied Helms' (1990) model of white racial identity development to examine the experiences of ethnic studies participants. Although none of them exhibited consistent indicators of a single schema, participants frequently shifted between Helms' schemas and sub-schemas, particularly pseudo-independence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy. The findings highlight the fluidity of white racial identity development and emphasize the need for a nuanced understanding and recognition of the influence of ethnic studies in promoting critical consciousness and addressing systemic inequities. Chapter 5 provides connections to the literature, recommendations, limitations, and implications of this study’s findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

This study grew out of our interest in examining and understanding the impact of ethnic studies on individuals who identify as white. Although there is no evidence that ethnic studies instruction harms white students or causes them to hate the United States (Harris, 2021; Jayakumar et al., 2021; Liou & Alvara, 2021), many policymakers continue to misrepresent the work on equity and culturally relevant pedagogical practices in K-12 schools (Harris, 2021; Liou & Alvara, 2021). Efforts to prevent the teaching of the historical and contemporary effects of race, racism, and systemic oppression in ethnic studies courses are based on assumptions about students' experiences rather than their actual experiences.

In this chapter, we report what we discovered in our in-depth interviews with six white participants. The four distinct themes that emerged from these interviews - critical consciousness, historical understanding, critical whiteness pedagogy, and white supremacy culture - helped answer our research questions. This chapter discusses how the answers to these questions have implications for educators, administrators, curriculum supervisors, and policymakers.

Discussion of Research Findings

What follows is a discussion of how our Chapter 4 findings answered our research questions:

1. How do white individuals reflect upon their experiences in a high school ethnic studies course?
2. After graduation, to what extent do white individuals continue to reflect on the insights gained about whiteness from their ethnic studies course?

Research Question One

The first research question of this study was: how do white individuals reflect upon their experiences in a high school ethnic studies course? A significant theme that emerged in the conversations with all study participants was that they became more critically conscious of whiteness and their own white identity through their participation in ethnic studies. Additionally, as they learned more about whiteness and gained a deeper understanding of history, they expressed both frustration with their historical learning gaps and a desire to learn the counter-narratives that are often missing in traditional history courses. As they gained a more academic understanding of history and oppression, participants described moments when they felt guilt and/or discomfort. However, participants shared that these moments were not counterproductive, especially in psychologically safe learning communities. Instead, participants described feelings of critical hope and a belief that their actions could affect change (Duncan-Andrade, 2016; Shuster & Giesemann, 2021b; Yeung et al., 2013).

While enrolled in their respective ethnic studies courses, all participants reflected on their white identity and how their whiteness afforded them privilege in the classroom. The majority of participants identified that they had become more aware of the power and privilege that their whiteness provided them in the classroom and reported a greater awareness of the dynamics of classroom discussions related to white privilege and systemic power. They described moments of realization that the time they spent talking about their own experiences and opinions during classroom discussions limited their BIPOC classmates' opportunities to be heard. Participants recognized that as minorities in the ethnic studies class, they needed to talk less and listen more.

All of the participants realized that ethnic studies provided a study of history which they had never learned in their traditional history classes. They were surprised and frustrated by what they hadn't been taught about the past and its impact on our world today. They blamed the

traditional history curriculum and inadequate instruction for either not teaching them about past events or teaching them incorrectly, and expressed the belief that teaching historical counter-narratives should be mandatory. To the extent that participants in this study learned these counter-narratives in ethnic studies, they became more critical of systemic oppression. For example, they became aware of differences in media coverage of Black and white athletes, recognized the impact of redlining and racially restrictive housing covenants, and analyzed educational disparities. Participants indicated that their ethnic studies course provided them with the knowledge, language, and tools to recognize and talk about systemic oppression, and they reported that they were more willing to talk about systemic oppression with others outside of the class after taking an ethnic studies course.

Reflecting on whiteness and a deeper understanding of history and systemic oppression led to feelings of discomfort or guilt for four of the participants, but these feelings did not lead them to disengage from the learning. One participant noted that she felt uncomfortable learning about the actions of white people in history, but that she never felt like a bad person. In fact, participants described moments of discomfort or guilt as productive and even necessary to effect change. Through these experiences, participants accepted their discomfort as a natural response to the subject matter, and came to the realization that people who are comfortable are generally not motivated to change systems.

Participants appreciated the opportunities their ethnic studies courses provided them to dwell in moments of discomfort or guilt. Together with their classmates and teachers, they were able to tarry (Yancy, 2013) with what they had and had not learned in their traditional history courses, what they were currently learning in their ethnic studies course, and what it must feel like to be a BIPOC student experiencing history from a non-traditional perspective. Participants

admitted that it was not always easy to discuss these topics with their classmates, and they talked about the importance of the protocols and guidelines created by their ethnic studies teachers to facilitate these conversations. Five participants described how their ethnic studies teacher created a safe learning environment for classroom discussions. They recalled specific conversations in which the teacher addressed their feelings of discomfort and reinforced that discomfort is part of the process for white students learning ethnic studies. They described a classroom environment where relationships were valued, mistakes were expected, and moments of discomfort could lead to growth and change.

As participants reflected on time in their ethnic studies courses, they recounted moments when they felt critical hope that systemic change was possible and that they could be a part of bringing it about (Duncan-Andrade, 2016). Half of the participants expressed a desire to learn more about the history and culture of BIPOC individuals and communities. They indicated that a more comprehensive understanding of the history of the United States would enable them to have a more positive impact on the future. One participant expressed the critical hope that by entering politics, she could affect reform in a systemically oppressive education system. For three participants, the hope that they could make a difference led them to take action in the classroom by starting a class newspaper and making a presentation to a school board member. All six participants engaged in some form of action outside of the classroom by having conversations with family members or joining groups that fight injustice and racism.

Overall, participants described their experiences in ethnic studies in a way that directly reflects Diemer's research (Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer & Rapa, 2015; Diemer et al., 2016) on the development of a critical consciousness. Participants described how they reflected on history and systemic oppression, tarried with each other and with others in their familial and social

environments (Yancy, 2013), developed a sense of critical hope that change is both necessary and possible (Duncan-Andrade, 2016), and took action in both their classrooms and their communities to bring about that change.

Research Question Two

The second research question was: After graduation, to what extent do white individuals continue to reflect on the insights gained about whiteness from their ethnic studies course? Based on the research findings, participants in this study developed a critical consciousness and became aware of their whiteness in ways that continue to have a significant impact on their lives today. In addition, participants sought ways to engage in social justice in their lives and careers, which is evidence of the ongoing impact of ethnic studies. Finally, in terms of white identity development, participants in this study demonstrated that white identity development is largely situational and fluctuates depending on circumstances and prior positionality. However it is evident that participants' white identity development (Helms, 1993) was influenced by their experiences in ethnic studies.

All participants in this study continue to think about their privilege as white people today, and all participants provided specific examples of how they continue to make sense of and critique their privilege as white people throughout their lives, careers, and in the context of their postsecondary institutions. Three participants also shared that they particularly notice when they are the only white person in a room, and that they become more aware of their privilege in these spaces because of their experiences in ethnic studies. This has impacted the way in which they listen rather than speak and realize how much space they take up when they are in the minority as a white person. All participants also indicated that they are more aware of systemic, institutional oppression in their schema and have developed a critical consciousness about the

impact of this oppression as a result of their experiences in ethnic studies, which has led them to develop the ability to read the world (Freire, 1970) in a way that they did not have prior to their study of ethnic studies. In this sense, participants have realized that history is not just in the past, but manifests itself in their lives and in the world.

All participants indicated that they continue to think about and talk to others about social justice issues as a result of their experiences in ethnic studies. In addition, more than half of the participants have continued to be involved in social justice as a result of ethnic studies, with half of the participants choosing internships and careers in the social justice field. This shows that the study of ethnic studies continues to have an impact on their lives today.

In terms of white racial identity development, participants in this study demonstrated that white racial identity is extremely fluid and situational (Helms, 1993; Moffit et al., 2021). As the participants reflected on their past experiences in ethnic studies, the ways in which they spoke about these experiences reflected the development of their white racial identity in the present. There were no participants who were firmly in a single schema of their white racial identity development. Rather, participants often exhibited multiple schemas of white racial identity development simultaneously (Helms, 1993). This is evidence that white racial identity development is not rigid (Helms, 1993; Moffit et al., 2021). Furthermore, the data from this study showed that it is relatively easy for participants to fall into the same patterns and behaviors of white racial identity and white supremacy culture (Helms, 1993; Okun, 2021; Jones & Okun, 2001) that they had before thinking about and learning about ethnic studies when ethnic studies was not part of their everyday lives and practices. This indicates that developing critical consciousness and understanding the role of oppression and liberation in U.S. history and in the present requires continued study and practice. It was clear from the interviews that some, but not

all, participants reflect on white supremacy, oppression, and liberation as a part of their daily practice. Furthermore, those who did were more likely to be in the immersion/emersion and autonomy stages of white racial identity development. Additionally, this study seemed to indicate that participants' relative status and privilege in terms of gender, socioeconomic status, health, etc., influenced their white racial identity development in the sense that those participants who identified with multiple intersectional marginalized identities (Malott et al., 2015; Crenshaw, 2020; Moffitt et al., 2021) were also more likely to be in the immersion/emersion and autonomy stages. These findings seem to confirm the assertion of Helms (1995) and Malott et al. (2015) that individuals tend to use their dominant schema, and this schema will most likely influence the person's behavior. However, there are also secondary schemas that are potentially accessible and influence a person's identity development (Helms, 2020). The schemas and sub-schemas are also influenced by the individuals and groups that are in a person's overall social context at any given time. Helms (2020) therefore clarifies that racial identity is never fixed and is always influenced by external forces.

Implications for Practice

Recommendations for Educators, Administrators, and Curriculum Supervisors

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend first and foremost that educators, administrators and curriculum supervisors support ethnic studies in their schools and districts. Ethnic studies implementation will undoubtedly look different from classroom to classroom, school to school, district to district, and state to state, but we offer several recommendations for each type of ethnic studies implementation. Based on interviews with participants in this study, we offer recommendations and considerations for implementing ethnic studies in U.S. history, civics, or as a stand-alone course.

When embedding ethnic studies in U.S. history classes, we recommend weaving counter-narratives into the U.S. history standards. However, we caution that there is a risk that these counter-narratives may be lost in the rush to cover all U.S. history standards, especially when teachers embed counter-narratives into a standard U.S. history course that utilizes a traditional textbook (Girard et al., 2021). For this reason, we encourage educators, administrators, and curriculum supervisors to forgo traditional U.S. history textbooks and instead focus on counter-narratives through the strategic use of primary and secondary sources to cover the U.S. history standards. Based on this study, we further recommend that a U.S. history class that incorporates ethnic studies must also include theoretical frameworks related to critical consciousness, systemic oppression, whiteness, and social-emotional learning. We also recommend that these courses integrate discussion protocols (Casey & McManimon, 2020) and community-based action (Matias & Mackey, 2016), as these components of ethnic studies were among the most important aspects of the course for the participants in this study. These components could be included as an introductory unit in the course, but also need to be revisited throughout the course. If these aspects of ethnic studies are not included in the U.S. history course, the course will ultimately not include the most salient components of ethnic studies and thus the course may not impact students in the way it impacted participants in this study.

If ethnic studies is offered as a stand-alone course, we recommend that it be required for graduation. Based on this study, we also recommend that this course be offered concurrently with or immediately following a standard U.S. history course to ensure that students have a foundation in U.S. history during the course, as the participants in this study who were most able to discuss the historical topics covered in their ethnic studies course clearly had a strong understanding of American history during their course. We recommend that in a stand-alone

ethnic studies course, a theoretical framework related to systemic oppression, critical consciousness, and critical hope also be woven into the course, and that discussion protocols and social-emotional learning be pedagogical components of the course. Participants in this study made it clear that training teachers in discussion protocols, community building, and critical whiteness pedagogy has a significant impact on student outcomes and should be mandatory for ethnic studies teachers. We would also recommend that the course include a critical action component so that students are engaged in some form of community-based action during the course, as this was a strong theme that emerged during this study (Nagda et al., 2003; Nagda et al., 2009; Gurin-Sands et al., 2012). Finally, we would recommend that a stand-alone course should still integrate in-depth history, ideally focused on local, place-based history, as well as a history study that speaks to identities, as students were most likely to reflect on historical themes from ethnic studies which were related to their location or identity (Luntao & Anderson, 2023).

Finally, in the course of this study, we found that community-based action was a strong and salient component of the course for four of the participants. We recommend incorporating an action component into the course that takes local communities into account, regardless of the course location. We also recognize that this is a political challenge in some geographic areas due to local board policies and state legislation (Thomason & Smith, 2022). One possible option would be to combine civics and ethnic studies, a practice that has been recommended by scholars in the field (Kelley, 2019). A combined civics and ethnic studies course would not only include theoretical frameworks related to systemic oppression and critical hope, discussion protocols, social-emotional learning, historical case studies, etc., but would also teach standards related to U.S. government through the lens of ethnic studies and include vetted action civics projects such as ULEAD (Smith et al., 2017) Project Citizen (Morgan, 2016), or programs such as Generation

Citizen, Public Achievement, Mikva Challenge, Project Youth on Board, and Youth Participatory Action Research (Levinson & Solomon, 2021). By combining ethnic studies and civics, students can choose and design their own projects. Regardless of whether the action civics projects are directly related to ethnic studies, it is a means of teaching students how to take action in their communities to accomplish this important goal of ethnic studies in any political setting.

Recommendations for Policymakers

Based on the results of this study, we also have several recommendations for policy makers. First, we recommend that ethnic studies should be a compulsory subject. Claims that white students feel uncomfortable in ethnic studies courses (Jones, 2022) were not supported by the findings of this study (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Instead participants characterized feelings of discomfort and guilt as opportunities for growth rather than limitations. All participants in this study wanted to learn hard things, and none felt they had been ideologically influenced or politically indoctrinated. In fact, the participants in this study indicated that by developing a critical consciousness, they improved their ability to think for themselves. This included questioning all sources of knowledge, including ethnic studies material, to develop their own critical thinking skills. Based on their experiences in ethnic studies, participants reported that they felt they had a knowledge deficit about U.S. history because they had often learned a one-sided perspective in previous courses. Half of the participants reported feeling frustrated with policymakers for preventing the inclusion of counter-narratives in U.S. history classes.

Based on these findings, we recommend that policymakers, such as state legislators and local school boards, consider ethnic studies requirements based on research and data rather than conjecture and emotion, and ensure that all policy decisions about ethnic studies are made in partnership with students and families. Policies mandating courses in ethnic studies should be

developed with, not for, students, families, and community partners. For example, during the course of this study, the Minnesota Department of Education adopted an ethnic studies requirement as part of the social studies standards (Shockman, 2024) and assembled a similar working group of educators, ethnic studies experts, families, students, and community stakeholders to explore the implementation of ethnic studies standards that could be considered for interested policymakers (*Ethnic studies working group assumptions for adults*, 2024).

Study Limitations

We recognized that our study had some limitations. All six participants were from one of two major cities in the Midwest. Due to the limited geographic location and small sample size, our research findings are not transferable or generalizable to the entire population of white adults who have taken an ethnic studies course.

Four of the participants indicated that they typically took advanced, honors, and AP courses. Based on recent College Board data published by the Brookings Institute (Kolluri et al., 2023), only 35% of high school students in the United States have taken an AP course, suggesting that students who have taken advanced courses were overrepresented in this study compared to the general population of high school students in the United States.

Each of the study participants chose ethnic studies as an elective subject. It is therefore possible that the participants began their study of ethnic studies with a schema of white racial identity development that was more developed than that of white students who had not chosen to take ethnic studies and/or were reluctant to enroll in the course. Furthermore, the fact that they chose to participate in our study without remuneration must be considered a limitation of our research. Before we began this study, we expected to encounter more examples of white talk, which is why white talk was covered extensively in the literature review. We suspect that we did

not encounter as much white talk as we had anticipated because all of our participants were predominantly in the second schema of Helms' (1993) model of racial identity development. We believe that this data points to the larger limitation that this study contains the memories and experiences of participants who both chose to engage in ethnic studies and volunteered their time and energy to participate in this study without receiving anything in return, and who therefore felt efficacious toward the subject of the study. For this reason, we recommend repeating this study with white participants who were reluctant to participate in ethnic studies.

Another limitation is that all six participants in this study were taught by highly qualified teachers who had been teaching ethnic studies for some time and chose to teach ethnic studies without being mandated to do so by state or district requirements. In fact, we explain the absence of white talk in this study in part by the racial modeling and metacognition that was done by the teachers and recalled by the participants in this study. For example, Participants 3 and 6 specifically mentioned moments in class where their teacher interrupted their classmates' white talk with grace and humility and modeled and redirected that white talk in a way that was instructive to the entire class. This is similar to Matias' (2013) model of racial metacognition as well as Case & Hemmings' (2005) "metadialogical" (p. 623) work in which teachers share their own ways of speaking to draw attention to the ways students talk about race and racism in order to make them aware of their discursive choices (Whitt, 2015). We point out this limitation because we recognize that the experiences of the students in this study were exceptional and may not represent the standard and typical experiences of all ethnic studies students across the country. A Brown University study found that the state of California would need to more than double the number of ethnic studies teachers to meet graduation requirements (Penner & Ma, 2023). Considering the number of new ethnic studies requirements nationally and the relatively

young age of many ethnic studies programs, as well as the fact that many ethnic studies teachers are at the beginning of their practice, it is statistically remarkable that all of our participants had such positive experiences with experienced practitioners who incorporated many elements of critical whiteness pedagogy into their practice.

The lack of white talk could also be related to the duration of the interviews we conducted for this study. We wonder whether the short duration of the interviews - 45 minutes to an hour - limited the need for our participants to use rhetorical semantic menuevers. We acknowledge that it is not unusual for white people to perform anti-racism for each other (Lensmire, 2017) and wonder if longer interview times might have elicited more white talk.

Finally, during our study, resistance to learning about race and racism in schools was a prevalent topic in the news, and we understand that the sociopolitical climate in the United States may have influenced both the interpretation of participants' experiences and our interpretations of the data.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has led us to reflect on many questions and consider recommendations for future research. Recommendations for study include topics related to Critical Whiteness Studies including white supremacy culture and white talk. We also recommend research on place-based history, participants' experiences in college, and working to maintain white racial identity development after ethnic studies.

For participants who were resistant or ambivalent about taking a mandatory ethnic studies course, we suggest further research related to white supremacy culture and white talk. In preparation for our study, we spent considerable time researching the characteristics that Jones & Okun (2001; Okun, 2021) described as white supremacy culture. We also examined white talk,

which included the denial of privilege, denial of complicity (Whitt, 2015), an overemphasis on nativism or classism as opposed to racism (Matias, 2013), evasion of questions (Bailey, 2014), resorting to the rhetoric of colorblindness (Case & Hemmings, 2005), credentialing to prove one is not racist (DiAngelo, 2021), objectifying BIPOC individuals (DiAngelo, 2021), and boomerang discourse (Bailey, 2014). We had expected to find much more evidence of white supremacy culture and white talk during the course of our interviews. We were therefore surprised that these topics were much less prominent. Although the extensive evidence of white supremacy culture and white talk that we expected did not emerge, we also recognize that due to the limitations of this study, all of our participants chose to be interviewed for this study about their experiences in ethnic studies, a course that was not required for graduation. Therefore, we would recommend repeating this study with white participants who did not choose to take their ethnic studies course and were required to take the course for graduation. We believe that a new study focusing specifically on white participants who resisted the course or were ambivalent about the course would provide an interesting opportunity to compare perspectives with the results of this study.

On the other hand, we did not delve deeply into place-based history and community co-created history (Ehrman-Solberg et al., 2020; Luntao & Anderson, 2023) in preparing for this study and were surprised when local history and local events emerged in almost every participant interview. For example, Participant 1 mentioned that she was surprised when she learned about the displacement of Black residents in her neighborhood due to gentrification and urban renewal, and Participant 2 mentioned that she had been interested in both redlining and racially restrictive covenants and their effects on her home and neighborhood in her ethnic studies course. Similarly, Participant 5 and Participant 6 mentioned an important and tragic national news event that

occurred in their city at around the time of their ethnic studies course that became an important aspect of the course. Clearly, place-based history brings realness and relevance to ethnic studies instruction, and we recommend further research on the important intersection of place-based history and ethnic studies.

In addition, we were left with several questions about participants' experiences in their college courses after taking an ethnic studies course in high school, and we believe these questions represent an important consideration for future research. For example, we were curious about whether some of the participants had taken similar courses in college in which they were the minority and whether there was evidence that ethnic studies pedagogy persisted in any of their college courses. We recommend further research that examines white students' experiences in ethnic studies in high school and college and that looks at their longitudinal white identity development.

Regarding the development of white racial identity, we believe there is ample opportunity for further research on the flexibility and lack of consistency in the development of white racial identity. None of the participants had a consistent schema within Helms' (1990) model of white racial identity development. Although some critics note that Helms' model does not account for the recurrent changes in white racial identity that naturally occur in a person's life (Malott et al., 2015), we relied on an interpretation of Helms that racial identity is not rigid and linear, but fluid and situationally dynamic (Helms, 2017; Moffit et al., 2021). However, we believe there is a great need for further research to better understand why some participants appeared to embody many schemas of Helms' model within a relatively short period of time and what situational, circumstantial, and identity-based factors might predict which overlapping schemas our participants were likely to fall into.

Similarly, we recommend further research on the social-emotional and distress tolerance skills that participants cultivated during their ethnic studies course. In what ways were these skills maintained after the course, in college, in the workplace, and/or in their personal lives? In their research study on the conditions that improve participants' scores on the Harvard Implicit Association Test, Banaji & Greenwald (2013) found that the changes their participants experienced were elastic and required frequent repetition. Without this repetition of conditions, measures of implicit association and bias fell back to participants' original scores. Similarly, we found evidence that participants may lose the lessons they cultivated during ethnic studies if they do not consistently study and practice ethnic studies, anti-racism, and social justice activism. We recommend further research on how the lessons about distress tolerance, systemic oppression, whiteness and critical hope that participants learned during ethnic studies are or are not maintained.

All in all, the six participants in our study benefited from ethnic studies and walked away with a better understanding of systemic oppression, counter-narratives in history, and a critical consciousness that has shaped who they are today. That being said, all of the white students we interviewed spoke of having processed some distressing emotions, showing us that the feelings of guilt and shame cited by conservative partisans as justification for banning ethnic studies do indeed occur among white students. However, despite their feelings of guilt, all of our participants had a good experience overall due to very specific pedagogical strategies that created a positive learning environment. These included place-based history, community-oriented action projects, social-emotional learning, distress tolerance skills, highly facilitated discussion protocols, a strong theoretical framework, an awareness of the reflect-efficacy-action cycle of critical consciousness, and compassionate teachers who were

attuned to the characteristics of whiteness overall. This tells us that ethnic studies is particularly beneficial for white students when teachers are well-trained and highly skilled. The majority of participants we interviewed were already in the second schema of white identity development, and we recommend a second study focusing on white students who are resistant to ethnic studies. We hypothesize that teacher training and skills will be even more important for these students.

Chapter 5 Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of six white individuals who had taken at least one ethnic studies course in high school and to examine how these experiences have shaped the development of their racial identity in the present. In analyzing our participants' reflections, four themes emerged that directly related to our research questions: critical consciousness, historical understanding, critical whiteness pedagogy, and white supremacy culture. Each theme had corresponding subordinate themes that provided further insight into the ways in which participants reflected on their racial identity and the impact of their ethnic studies course on their perspectives. Specifically, research findings suggest that participation in an ethnic studies course led participants to become more critically conscious of whiteness and their own white identity, which fostered frustration with historical learning gaps and a desire for counter-narratives absent in traditional history courses. These experiences, which took place in psychologically safe learning environments, instilled feelings of critical hope and belief in their ability to effect change, while raising awareness of white privilege and systemic oppression. They credited ethnic studies with providing the knowledge and tools to recognize and discuss systemic oppression, leading to increased engagement in social justice efforts. Despite occasional discomfort, participants saw such moments as necessary for growth and change. The study underscores the need to include ethnic

studies in secondary graduation requirements, with an emphasis on teacher training, community-based action, and place-based history. Based on our research with the participants in this study, we have made recommendations and considerations for the implementation of ethnic studies and believe that our findings could inform various stakeholders in education about the importance of implementing ethnic studies. This research could also inform current and future policymakers about the value of ethnic studies for all students.

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Appendix A

University of Missouri–St. Louis
Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Project Title: Ethnic Studies and White Identity
Principal Investigator: Aimee Snelling and Kara Cisco
Department Name: College of Education
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Thomasina Hassler
IRB Project Number: 2098171 SL

1. You are invited to participate in a research study. Our research has two goals: First, we will examine the lived experiences of white students who took at least one ethnic studies course in high school. Second, we will study the extent to which their memories of having been a white student in that course shape their racial identity development in the present day.

2. Your participation will involve one sixty minute interview conducted over Skype and recorded for transcription purposes.

3. There is a very minor loss of confidentiality risk associated with this research. This will be minimized by the use of pseudonyms when the research is shared. In addition, any identifying personal information will be kept in a password protected file on a password protected computer.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or withdraw your consent at any time. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or withdraw.

7. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this study. In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the Office for Human Research Protection) that would lead to disclosure of your data as well as any other information collected by the researcher.

8. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Thomasina Hassler, at 314-516-5181. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your rights as a research participant to the University of Missouri–St. Louis Office of Research Compliance, at 314-516-5972 or irb@umsl.edu.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol Outline

Research Topic: Ethnic Studies and White Identity

Each interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Before the interview, participants will complete a 5 minute survey via email or text to verify that they took an ethnic studies course and to set up a time for the interview. Participants will be selected via purposeful, and if necessary, snowball sampling. Participants need to be recent high school graduates who participated in an ethnic studies course.

What we will say to begin our interview:
Thank you for meeting with us today. We want to remind you that your participation in our study is voluntary and that you can opt out at any time. Feel free to pass on any questions we ask. Is it okay if we record today's conversation? We will transcribe the interview and share it with you in a few weeks so that you can review and edit it as needed.

Do you have any questions before we start?

- Where did this ethnic studies class take place?
- Describe the school where this class happened.
- Describe the classroom where the course took place.
    - Describe the other students in the class.
- Describe the teaching style and curriculum of the course.
    - What did you learn about in your class?
    - What types of activities/lessons do you remember?
- Describe the experience of being white in this course.
    - Did you experience any discomfort or difficulty? If so, can you describe specific experiences that caused discomfort?
- What did you learn about yourself from this experience?
    - What did you think about your whiteness from this experience?
- How did this course impact you?
    - How did this course impact your experience of being white?
- Did anything in your life change because of this class?
    - Do you think your life would be any different if you had not experienced this course?