Confronting Whiteness: When Critical Whites Studies and Racial Trauma Collide: An Autoethnography

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Confronting Whiteness: When Critical Whites Studies and Racial Trauma Collide:

An Autoethnography

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In

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This dissertation is dedicated to the people who have supported me along this journey. All of you have been tremendously supportive, and I could not have done this without you. To my husband Mike for your voice of reason, and to my daughters, Ashley, and Cheyenne, for the steady supply of Coke and chocolate. And to all my sisters, nieces, and nephews, thank you for your patience and understanding. I love you all!

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When the program began, classroom discussions were well beyond my comprehension; I had yet to understand my white identity or the traumatic implications of that white identity on others. I appreciate your wisdom and the lessons you offered in the classroom. We will continue your legacy of Social Justice. To my UMSL peers, Congratulations to those who have surpassed many of us, and to those still in the struggle, you can do it! You will find the impact and the
changes you made in my life on the following pages. For this, I thank you!
Abstract

This autoethnographic dissertation research explores Critical White Studies (CWS) and racial trauma and their impact on Students of Color in a higher education setting. This study aims to challenge the deficit thinking of white educators who perpetuate racism in higher education.

The relationship is examined to dismantle the white ideology of white educators who believe they have the same experiences of their Students of Color regardless of their own similar experiences. Through personal narratives the author will share the complexity of CWS and Racial Trauma. The findings suggest white educators need to examine their white identity and become culturally responsive to the needs and experiences of Students of Color.

In this text, the author purposefully capitalizes “Persons of Color,” “Students of Color,” “Black” and “Racial Trauma” as a tribute to those who have endured Racial Trauma across history. Conversely, the word “white” is intentionally written in lowercase to distance it from its historical association with power and supremacy.

Keywords: Critical White Studies (CWS), Persons of Color, Racial Trauma, whiteness, white ideology, white supremacy.
“If we do not transform, we will transfer.” (Former Student, 2024)

These are wise words and very fitting for this journey, as my transformation has begun.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

July 9, 2016, is a day I will never forget. Saturdays were our graduate class meeting days, and this was the first meeting after the murders of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling. There were graphic videos of the police murders and what led to these shootings all over social media. The situation and the images were causing a great deal of trauma to many people. That Saturday was trauma-filled; there was fear, anger, disbelief, anguish, helplessness, and hopelessness. Tears fell from everyone's eyes. As a white person, I witnessed the realness and gravity of the situation for the first time. This was not a big Hollywood production. This was and is reality for Persons of Color. I was sitting in a room with strong, educated, witty, beautiful Black people. They were crying and pouring their hearts out because of the situation and their helplessness in the situation and of their children and children's children. They were having the talk with their babies. Their babies are not safe because they are Black, their husbands are not safe because they are Black, their fathers are not safe because they are Black, and their brothers are not safe because they are Black; these strong, educated, witty, beautiful people are not safe because they are Black.

I left class that day with a heavy heart as I drove to judge a pageant in another world, a world a mere fifty-one miles from the trauma and tragedy felt in that classroom. When I arrived at my destination, I saw not one single Person of Color.
This was not exactly surprising because I was in a rural area of Missouri. I found the pageant's director, who instructed me to develop a few questions for the contestants. Since this was a scholarship pageant, I drafted questions to determine whether the contestants were knowledgeable about recent events or other pressing Social Justice issues. Only one of the ten contestants had an answer for the Social Justice question. The one informed contestant who knew about the current Social Justice issues was a Person of Color; the others were white.

On my way home that evening, I contemplated the differences between the two worlds. I thought I understood the white world. I still live in a white world, but I was only beginning to understand the differences between Black and white.

**Problem Statement**

The opening narrative provides merely a glimpse of reality for Persons of Color in the United States. It is widely known that marginalized individuals have faced persistent racism throughout history, spanning from racial profiling, police brutality, unjust incarcerations, underfunded school systems, and health disparities. Moreover, they have faced lack of opportunities in areas such as housing and education opportunities for over four centuries. This is not a mistake. This is by design. As a consequence of systemic racism, white ideology has been upheld in educational institutions.

Currently, in the United States, seventy-nine percent of teachers are white, furthermore, schools where the majority of the students are non-white, the bulk teachers tend to be white according to the U.S. Department of Education.
CONFRONTING WHITENESS

(DOE, 2020). This statistic is cause for concern due to the prevalence of, “deficit thinking among many educators, which perpetuates a racialist view of Students of Color” (Ford and Grantham, 2003, p.127). Additionally, Matias (2013) maintains that “such attitudes and behaviors are not only racist but also counterproductive, perpetuating a cycle of whiten-ing education and reinforcing white supremacy within schools and society” (p.70). Too, “There is an assumption that helping white teachers to develop cultural competence and socio-political consciousness will help them become better educators” However, there are multiple accounts of resistance to these programs” (Picower, 2009, p.199). Moreover, after completing my own program and taking a few multicultural courses I believed I was culturally competent. However, like many other white educators, I entered the teaching workforce without any comprehension of my own racial identity, the influence of white ideology, or an understanding of structural racism. Despite the assertion that “teaching about structural racism, whiteness, and anti-racists teaching is critical in developing equity minded teachers who can leverage a critical racial consciousness” (Wiley et al., 2019, p.37). I remained ignorant to these facts, until I did this research. Consequently, Students of Color may have experienced everyday racisms which (Nadel et al., 2014) explained is the “subtle, daily instance of verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, these everyday racisms can include brief and commonplace slights or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostility or negativity towards groups based on race and can contribute to racial trauma” (p.57). Furthermore, Carter (2007) suggested, “such forms of discrimination can be more harmful when they are subtle or ambiguous.
As a white educator, I did not first think about the environment that some students may have experienced daily and how these factors could be affecting their education. Therefore, I now understand how I as the “white system” am indoctrinated to potentially harm Student of Color in higher education settings and recognize the importance of dismantling my own deficit thinking, challenging my biases, and learning how my everyday contributions to racism may have caused harm and trauma in classrooms. It is crucial to acknowledge and address these issues to create a safe environment for Students of Color that is inclusive and equitable.

**Rationale of Study**

Trauma is a universal human experience, but its effects are particularly complex and unique for marginalized individuals in society. DeGruy (2005) defined trauma as "an injury caused by an unusually violent outside force, event, or experience" (p.13). Further research by Matheson (2019) suggested that due to lower socioeconomic status and the burden of negative stereotypes and expectations, marginalized groups often experience collective trauma with intergenerational consequences resulting from community and sociopolitical violence throughout their lives (p. 2). According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019), sixty percent of adults reported at least one childhood traumatic event as of 2019 with a quarter reporting three or more experiences. These statistics are believed to be underestimated, and the National Council for Community Behavioral Health (2021) indicated that seventy percent of adults in the United States have experienced trauma with over ninety percent of
behavioral health clients having a history of trauma.

Considering these alarming figures, it is imperative for higher education institutions to adopt a trauma-informed approach, and educators must develop trauma-informed curricula that are currently lacking in higher education. As Crosby (2015) emphasized, “trauma-informed initiatives have gained prominence in various public and healthcare sectors, but implementation remains inadequate in higher education. A trauma-informed environment has a positive impact on academic outcomes” (p. 225). Embracing a trauma-informed lens would lead to a society where institutions, businesses, workplaces, and communities’ benefit from understanding trauma, enabling traumatized individuals to heal from the numerous traumas they have experienced.

I would be remiss if I did not point out that according to CDC (Centers for Disease Control, 2019) statistics, up to seventy percent of adults have suffered trauma. While this is a qualitative research autoethnography using my experiences and perceptions as the primary focus, I want to emphasize that employees in higher education institutions may be trauma survivors. Thus, "we must first take account of racism and its harmful effects on people in a postsecondary setting," (Harper, 2012, p. 12). Consequently, "When the higher education institution is trauma-informed, the whole environment benefits. When students and employees are provided with a trauma-informed climate they feel connected and supported, which has positively impacted academic success" (Blum, 2005, p. 10). However, before such a shift can occur, white individuals and white educators must gain a comprehensive understanding of the systems they are conditioned not to recognize
how their white identity potentially perpetuates Racial Trauma for Persons of
Color, and actively work towards dismantling these harmful thoughts, experiences,
and systems.

In my doctoral classes, we learned about the benefits of storytelling, and how
it can help those who have suffered traumatic experiences and since I learned that
trauma often affects Persons of Color, I began to incorporate storytelling into my
community college class curriculum, where my students are mostly Persons of
Color. The assignments' results made me realize the depth and scope of the trauma
students experienced. This understanding has helped me view the traumas that my
students experience through a lens of empathy and given me an added incentive to
reflect on ways that I may further traumatize students through my white privilege
and potentially perpetuates Racial Trauma.

For this autoethnography, I examined my whiteness and the ways in which I, as
a white female educator, have been taught racism through white ideology and how I
have unconsciously upheld that ideology in an educational environment potentially
causing Racial Trauma to Students of Color.

**Significance of Study**

I teach remedial coursework, and many students may have been traumatized
by school systems by being placed into special education courses or issued
Individual Education Plans (IEP) that were not needed. DeGruy (2005) pointed out,
“being told that you are inferior for hundreds of years can leave a psychic impact”
(p. 158). DeGruy went on to say, “many believe that failure is inevitable, thus
stopping many students from seeking a college education” (p. 154). For instance, hooks being racially traumatized (1994), said, “I lost my love of school when I entered a racist, desegregated school where too much eagerness to learn would be seen as a threat to white authority and white teachers reinforced racist stereotypes” (p .3). Matías (2013) supported hook’s by saying, "to describe experiences of being taught by racist white teachers after racial desegregation, hooks' perception can be viewed as a clear expression of how Students of Color experience the school system and the complicit role-intentional or not-of teachers themselves” (p. 70). Therefore, many Students of Color may feel labeled when entering college, and this can cause a deficit in learning. When paired with the deficit thinking of white teachers who have been indoctrinated with white supremacy ideology, this continues to traumatize students. Taylor et al. (2009) explained, “Whiteness is invisible to a majority of white teachers while visible to many Students of Color; and it provides a nuanced understanding of how race, racism, and white supremacy operates in school and society” (as cited in Matias, 2013, p .68). Moreover, white educators must understand the ramifications of whiteness in education. Picower (2009) posited, “Education must be taken seriously because of the negative impact that whiteness can have on teachers’ understanding of children of color and urban schools. White teachers are often entering the profession with a lifetime of hegemonic reinforcement to see Students of Color and their communities as dangerous and at fault for the educational challenges they face” (p. 212). Thus, Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) was a way to begin the dismantling of whiteness and the complicity that comes with this social construct.
Theoretical Framework

Critical White Studies is theoretical framework that draws its origins from “Critical Race Theory, a theoretical framework that aims to prioritize and center the experiences of Persons of Color through personal accounts that challenge the hegemonic narrative of white supremacy” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 85). Whereas Critical White Studies “the field of scholarship whose aim is to reveal the invisible structures that produce and reproduce white supremacy and privilege reveals, whiteness lies at the center of racism” (Applebaum, 2016, p. 1). Critical Whiteness Studies is the theoretical framework of this research. As, CWS, determined “whiteness is the underlying mechanism that maintains the racist system and not acknowledging whiteness contributes to the permanence of race and racism” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 39). CWS aided me in acknowledging and deconstructing my whiteness. This autoethnography research raises awareness of how white identity and complicity contribute to the traumatic experiences that Students of Color may have suffered, how trauma affects learning, and why it is crucial to address the needs of students. It is imperative to understand “by providing a safe and supportive environment, students will feel valued and empowered” (Hoch et al., 2015, p. 63). By understanding the white narrative that we are all taught and the role that it plays in perpetuating racism allowed me to dismantle my own bias and become an ally. However, to do this I had to dig into my own whiteness, become uncomfortable with the realization that my learned whiteness has made me racist and a person who holds up white ideology. Although unintentionally, I still must do the emotional labor of unlearning the narrative that potentially inflicted
Racial Trauma on to Students of Color in a higher education institution.

Research Questions

How do I, as a white female educator, contribute to the white narrative within the classroom environment and potentially inflict Racial Trauma onto Students of Color in higher education settings?

Definitions

- **Critical Race Theory**: "Studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado et al., 2001, p.20).

- **Critical Whiteness Studies**: "Study of whiteness" (Delgado et al., 2001, p.129).

- **Historical Trauma**: "Historical Trauma or Cross-Generational is a cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma" (Brave Heart, 2003, p.8).

- **Racial Trauma**: Racial trauma has been defined as “severe cases of racism-related stress” (Truong & Muses, 2012, p. 228).

- **Racism**: “A system of advantage based on race” (Tatum, p.2).

- **Trauma**: “Trauma is an injury caused by an outside unusually violent, force, event or experience” (DeGruy, 2005, p.11).

- **Whiteness**: “Whiteness is a racial norm at the center of the U.S, problem of race” (Applebaum, 2016, p.292).

- **White Privilege**: “Stating the racism privileges does not mean individual white people
do not struggle or face barriers. It does mean that we do not face the particular
barriers of racism” (DiAngelo, 2018, p.24).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review discusses Critical White Studies and its role in understanding how whiteness contributes to Racial Trauma among Students of Color in higher education. In addition, it examines how learning about one’s race identity through CWS can aid in dismantling racism. Wozolek et al. (2022) posited, CWS is a significant tool to dismantle white supremacy in educational contexts” (p.1). Barabara Applebaum, (2016) explained the importance of the CWS objective to make whiteness visible as whiteness constructs norms and defines the standards of “difference” (p.2), thereby, interrupting perpetuating racism through the social construct of white ideology. Inevitably, Wiley et al. (2019) pointed out many white teachers have a difficult time confronting their whiteness and knowing where they fit into the systems of oppression” (Wiley et al., 2019, p 43).

I did not oversimplify the complexities of whiteness and Racial Trauma in this research, as race is a difficult and complex topic. In as much, there is currently a limited scope of research on the perspective of how white women in higher education potentially contribute to Racial Trauma in a higher education. Although, there is amply research of white teachers in education programs that convey the realities of the lack of knowledge that white teachers possess about their white identity and white ideology that is passed on to Students of Color in the classroom. Therefore, I will continue to make it my continued responsibility to contribute to the discussion of whiteness and Racial Trauma to foster a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.
The white Narrative

When I think of white supremacy, my mind has always conjured up images of the KKK in their white-hooded robes toting a burning cross and exhibiting behaviors that maintain this was their God-given right to be judge and jury for anyone who did not look like them. White supremacy is problematic, but the real problem is that white identity is invisible to the white person's naked eye. Thandeka (1999) proposed that "the process of becoming white is filled with many seemingly, small inconsequential defeats and abuses that damage the psyche of the child. The white child knows something is wrong when they do not understand the racial clues they receive from their primary caregiver however, they have no framework with which to guide them to understanding whiteness rules so they internalize that something must be wrong with them" (p.169).

Like many others, as a child I developed my white identity from my family and social environment. My immediate and extended family, who live in the south, frequently addressed Persons of Color in derogatory manners, unfortunately, these attitudes persist. People of Color were stereotyped as dangerous, lazy, the Women of Color were welfare queens, the Men of Color were deadbeats and criminals. I was disconnected from any Persons of Color never having interactions, therefore believing the white ideology I was taught. In school, I only learned of slavey, Martin Luther King during Black History Month, and the white man’s history. Malcom X, Booker T. Washington, Rosa Parks, the Tuskegee Airman, Little Rock Nine, and so much more were all absent from my curricula. I am white and lived in a box because of having NO other cultural experiences, not at home, in town, or at school.
As a result of the literature in this research, I have come to understand my whiteness and the privilege that comes with it. I understand how the cultural norm of whiteness has made me believe in my white superiority, afforded me sense of belonging, and a perceived entitlement. Although unconsciously, I have internalized the racial bias, stereotypes, and whiteness has shielded me from ever questioning my white identity. I had no need to go outside of the white color line as I was, and still, am privileged.

McIntosh (2003) described this process, "As a white person, I was carefully taught not to recognize white privilege and the unearned assets, but to remain oblivious." DiAngelo (2018) explained, "Whiteness is a social construct and is a position of social and institutional status and identity imbued with legal, political, economic, and social rights and privileges denied to others" (p. 24). Through Critical Race Theory (CRT), we learned how race, racism, and power are perpetuated in institutions such as education, and Delgado et al. (2001) explained "how racism advances the interests of elite and working class, and the lack of incentive for white people to change" (p.3). Armah (2022) further stated, “whiteness in the false narrative of the world, has built the world, and saves the world. No one is immune from the weight and toll of this narrative of whiteness that permeates every sector, industry, and aspect of our lives as people across all parts of the world…. If we do not unlearn the language of whiteness, we cannot fully dismantle the systems of inequity” (p.5).
Critical White Studies

If a white person genuinely wants to dismantle racism, they must turn the lens on their white identity through Critical White Studies (CWS). "Critical White Studies is a growing body of scholarship whose aim is to reveal the invisible structures the produce and reproduce white supremacy and privilege" (Appelbaum, 2016, p.1). Furthermore, Dyer (1997) added, "To dislodge the whiteness from its position of dominance, whiteness must be studied to make visible what is rendered invisible when viewed as a normative state of existence" (p. 3). From this perspective, racism is a white problem. Whiteness is mainly invisible to those who benefit from it." (Appelbaum, 2016, p. 9). Furthermore, "CWS focuses on the problematizing of the normalizing of hegemonic whiteness, arguing that in doing so whites deflect, ignore, and dismiss their role, racialization and privilege in race dynamics" (Matias, 2014, p.3).

As with any self-improvement plan, we must first move beyond denial and accept that we have a problem, and it is our responsibility to fix the problem, and in this case, we have a white problem. For self-improvement, I must be willing to be open to new perspectives and reality checks as, “White teachers have yet to investigate their whiteness and those who dismiss this notion of self-examination recycle the structure of race and white supremacy in education and society” (Matias, 2013, p. 68). By acknowledging my whiteness and the privilege that comes with it, I will, at times, feel uncomfortable. Trepagnier (2010) postulated, “No one is immune to the ideas that permeate the culture in which he or she is raised. Silent racism…refers to unspoken negative thoughts, emotions, and assumptions about
Black Americans that dwell in the minds of white Americans, including well-meaning whites that care about racial equality” (p.3).

As a white female college professor, who fits the above criteria and wishes to implement change, I addressed the real problem that Matias (2013) suggested, "The problem itself lies in the systemic racists practice that allows white supremacy and whiteness to reign supreme in education; while maintaining white supremacy, the root cause of this condition also hurts Students of Color" (p. 77). Thus, "Whiteness to white professors is implicated in the persistence of systemic racial injustice, often well-intentioned white people do not have to consider their complicity in the perpetuation of systemic racism” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 9).

This reality, regardless of my well-meaning, is an ugly truth. I have thought of silent racism and practiced white supremacy. I was raised in a white rural area, had little to no contact with any Persons of Color, and still address stereotypical microaggressions today in the same rural area. Thus, "Individuals raised in a racist society absorb attitudes and stereotypes often without knowing. Such racism is deeply embedded in white people's psyches and influences behavior and subtle yet pernicious ways" (Appelbaum, 2010, p.11). McIntosh (2003) explained, “The knowledge she gained about white privilege enabled her to understand why white people needed a list of all the things that we cannot readily see from” (p. 32-34). As I continued unpacking my whiteness and privilege, I found the list a helpful starting point because I was oblivious. "For whites, the process of racial identity development is typically far slower than a Person of Color as whites have the luxury of ignorance for years" (Wise, 2011 p. 27). Moreover, as I began to realize the
extent of my ignorance, as Wise explained, I began to consider the perspective of
Critical Race Theory (CRT), although heavily debated as anti-whiteness or reverse
racism, it clarifies how different identities intersect. Delgado et al. (2001) guides
scholars and others to analyze racism by using the following five tenets of CRT.
First, CRT explains racism is ordinary, it is the notion that racism is accepted as a
normal part of a colorblind society. Second, is the idea of interest convergence
which is supported by the dominant group as they reap the benefits of racism. Third,
race is a social construct as it is not biologically determined. Fourth
intersectionality, which explains the identities can be shaped by multiple
intersections such as race, gender, and sexuality. And lastly, differential
racialization which recognizes how different groups are either privileged or
marginalized depending on their status in society” (p.191). Furthermore, Crenshaw
(1991) articulates CRT as an "Intersectionality that captures the dynamic
relationships between race and other "differences," including gender, sexual
identity, disability, and social class" (p. 1242). While Delgado et al. (2001)
explained "intersectionality means the examination of race, sex, class, national
origin, and sexual orientation and how the combinations play out in various settings"
(p. 51). To further explain the intersectionality of race, white people need to learn
that white is a race, and that whiteness plays out in white supremacy ways.
Thandeka (2013) stated, "CRT interrogates the ways in which the societal function
of white privilege works to maintain white supremacy in various forms, which can
be parlayed into greater social and economic advantages for white citizens" (p.
101). Talwar (2010) posited, “as individuals, we each experience our lives through
culturally defined categories; through them we may occupy positions of dominance or subordination, and sometimes both simultaneously. Thus, identity is not a fixed category, but rather a complex set of intersections that shift and change” (p.15).

To this point, “Racism is about the system of advantages built on race. These advantages involve cultural messages, institutional policies, and practices that benefit the dominant group” (Talwar, 2010, p. 15). Moreover, since race is a social construct, and CRT teaches as such, it is an opportunity for everyone to recognize the dangerous forces of racism that erode our societal fabric. Tatum (2013) urges for an, “ongoing examination of who we are in one full humanity, embracing all of our identities, creates the possibilities of building alliances that may ultimately free us all” (p. 6). Wallis (2016) also expressed, “only by morally dying to our false identity as white people, an identity created for violent oppressive profit can we come alive to our true human being identity” (p. 80). To build an alliance through these multiple identities, Talwar (2010) suggested, “one of the core principles of intersectionality is self-reflexivity, especially in research and scholarship, when confronting the experiences of the Other. For example, the scholar deliberately makes explicit his or her role, motivations for undertaking the research, and the dimensions of power and privileges that may be enjoyed based on race, class, gender, and sexuality” (p. 11).

Through this research, I have found that I, too, have had the luxury of ignorance even though I have spent almost thirty years serving Students of Color. A foundational understanding of Critical Race Theory has helped me understand whiteness as a social construct and by implementing Critical White Studies as my
theoretical framework, as the” dynamics of whiteness is better explained through CWS” (Matias et al. 2017, p. 9). I examined my race and gender as it is an essential step in understating the advantages I have as a white woman and how this identity continues to potentially harm Students of Color.

**Structural Racism**

Since the Middle Passage, there has been no point in history that Persons of Color have not experienced structural racism. Scott-Jones et al. (2020), defined, Structural racism in the U.S. as “the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics that stem from historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal aspects that routinely advantage Caucasians while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for Persons of Color” (p. 81). As such, “Blacks are impacted economically through discriminatory hiring practices, have little or no access to capital, are seen as lacking in business acumen, they are limited in health care. They are impacted by over-representation in the criminal justice system and under-representation in the university system. They are impacted by redlining and other discriminatory practices barring them from finding housing in the areas of their choice” (DeGruy, 2005, p. 22).

Lawrence and Keleher (2004) powerfully explained, "Structural racism lie underneath, all around and across society." Additionally, it initiate that structural racism encompasses: (1) history, which lies underneath the surface, providing the foundation for white supremacy in this country; (2) normalization and replication of racism and, (3) interconnected institutions
and policies, the key relationships and rules across society providing the legitimacy and reinforcements to maintain and perpetuate racism.

Structural racism creates trauma” (p.2).

Scott et al., (2020) emphasized “Structural racism continues to perpetuate trauma for African Americans today. Many African Americans in the United States have been impacted by structural racism since slavery and continue to experience trauma because of health disparities, economic disadvantages, and segregation” (p. 80). This violence impacts community health, and according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “people's health outcomes are influenced by these social determinants and the Communities of Color experience a disproportionate number of negative conditions” (CDC, 2022). Consequently, the plethora of violence against Persons of Color for centuries has resulted in Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome. DeGruy (2005) defined this as "a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigeneration trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism of today” (p.1).

Pope (2009), an advocate for domestic abuse victims postulated, “Institutions and social systems, were built by and for white men; Persons of Color were never intended to have the same access or experiences of these institutions” (p. 43). White privilege is the backbone of structural racism, and I, a white woman, need to be held accountable and work to dismantle my beliefs, behavior, and systems that continually cause trauma to Black and Brown people and not remain complicit. Pope (2009) wrote, “Suzanne Pharr reminds us that as white people, our privilege puts us in the
position of having the ability and access to change institutions and social structures that hold power in the hands of whites” (p. 44). Understanding trauma and how it affects our communities is essential in promoting healing. White people, institutions, and social structures must dismantle the white privilege narratives that potentially continue to cause traumatic harm.

Moreover, our incoming first-year college students have witnessed numerous counts of police brutality against Persons of Color, everyday racism, a deadly pandemic, multiple school shootings and a sizable number of natural disasters. Regardless students frequently will still try to navigate their traumatic experiences and go to college at the same time. Educators must be aware that these experienced traumas can affect learning, but additionally, white educators themselves need to understand they potentially could be adding an additional layer of Racial Trauma if they are not working to acknowledge their own whiteness and privilege.

**History of Trauma**

In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman (1992) wrote, “historically, there have been several significant studies on trauma, the first by patriarch French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot during the late 19th century, where he conducted research on hysteria. Charcot thought hysteria to be an archetypal psychological disorder of People” (p.19). Second, after World War I there was a study of combat veterans, and they were diagnosed with shell shock and combat neurosis due to traumatic experiences due to war, and what we now know as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. After that, another trauma research study was conducted in the 1970’s on how the Women’s Liberations Movement raised political awareness about women’s sexual
and domestic violence (p.19). After these studies, interest in trauma studies declined; however, there has been a reemergence of interest in trauma and research, “Trauma is attributed to the mental healthcare crisis, including child welfare, physical, military, schools, and universities, along with many other intuitions and society” (Becker-Blease, 2017, p.131). Herman (1992) explained, “The systemic study of psychological trauma depends on traumatic events such as civil unrest, war, or natural disasters” (p. 9). Herman also added, “For the larger society, the social context is created by political movements that give voice to the disempowered” (Herman, 1992, p.9).

In recent years, we have seen such political movements, and the importance of trauma research is so relevant that Congress passed bill H. RES 443: Recognizing the importance and effectiveness of trauma-informed care in 2017-18. However, even with this increased attention, there has been little accomplished in higher education supporting students suffering from traumatic life events. It would behoove higher educational institutions to pay attention to the need for a trauma informed environment. As “a trauma-informed environment positively impacts the achievement of academic outcomes” (Crosby, 2015, p. 223) Therefore, supporting adult students who suffer trauma would increase the likelihood of them becoming academically successful.

Not surprisingly, Students of Color are exposed to a plethora of trauma, after the election of Donald Trump, “Educational institutions saw, terrifying evidence of whiteness being re-centered and racism moving from the covert to the overt” (Aaronson et al., 2018, p.3). Moreover, Students of Color may live in and
experience a multitude of environmental disparities. As referenced previously, 70 percent of adults have suffered some form of trauma within their lifetime. (CDC, 2020).

**Racial Trauma**

Ironically, there is a discrepancy regarding the definition of Racial Trauma. Saleem et al., (2019) explained, “While one singular definition does not exist, it is important to understand the major arguments underlying race. At the center of the argument is the notion that because race is not a biological construct, it should not be proposed as a categorization in scientific research. Race scholars, however, note that the ramifications of perceived races are real, thus, categorizations are useful in codifying the systemic outcomes in relation to different groups” (p. 2). That being acknowledged, Racial Trauma has been defined as “severe case of racism-related stress” (Truong et al., 2012, p.228) Furthermore, Racial Trauma is also defined as a form of race-based stress, refers to Persons of Color and Indigenous individuals’ (POCI) reactions to dangerous events and real or perceived experiences of racial discrimination. Such experiences may include threats of harm and injury, humiliating and shaming events, and witnessing racial discrimination toward other POCI. Notably, “African Americans are more exposed to racial discrimination than are other racial groups” (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019, p.1). Moreover, the American Psychology Associations (APA, 2016) renders, “over seventy-five percent of African Americans reported daily experiences of discrimination while characterizing Racial Trauma as cumulative, persistent, systemic, vicarious, and historical in nature” (p.7). As a result, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s CDC Director has “declared
racism a public health threat, citing how racism is the root cause of many health
disparities due to the structural factors of racism, discrimination, and historical
disenfranchisement” (CDC, 2024). Despite this acknowledgement of racism's impact
on public health, “there is evidence of their experiences with Racial Trauma being
misperceived, dismissed, or unacknowledged” (Saleem et al., 2019, p. 3).
Consequently, this supports why Persons of Color do not want to talk to white people
about race. White people “invalidate their experiences or become defensive”
(DiAngelo, 2018, p. 96.).
In a study with undergraduate college students, it was found the cognitive response
to a racial Black partner’s blatantly racist or race-neutral attitudes, Blacks high in
racial centrality (i.e., those whose racial identity was central to their self-concept)
showed greater cognitive impairment. (Murphy et al., 2013, p. 562). Meaning the
students could not think clearly due to racial stress. Perry et al. (2021) pointed out,
“Fear shuts down thinking” (p. 37). In another study conducted at a “predominantly
white university revealed Students of Color were not familiar with the term Racial
Trauma or racial stress but recognized their experiences upon learning the
definitions. The experiences the students revealed in the study were being triggered
or stressed by situations such as talking about their race, not feeling supported in
class, and lacking confidence. The students also recognized the higher death rate
among Black women during childbirth and that Racial Trauma is so severe it
transcends from one person to the next” (Hargon et al., 2022, p. 7).
Students in the university study were referring to what Joy DeGruy (2005) terms as
the legacy of trauma and defining it as “behaviors and debilitating beliefs that were
adopted for survival” (p.117). DeGruy continued to explain the trauma legacy is passed down through the community, and as a result the African American community is made up of individuals and families who have collectively passed down differential anxiety and adaptive survival behaviors” (p.119). Furthermore, research has indicated that “those who live through high levels of toxic stress will alter the genes of their children, and the life they will live” (Love, 2019, p 76). Kira, (2001), define this as” Historical Trauma, which is generational family transmission and is indirectly transmitted through traumatic practice such as slavery and can be transmitted in and across generations” (p.79). Therefore, we can conclude that “historical trauma can include a recollection of enslavement, colonialism, and state sanctioned violence” (Hargons et al.,2022 p.2).

As a white educator, knowing the implications of Racial Trauma and how it can show up in the classroom, it is imperative to not further contribute to its harmful effects. It is up to me to continue to educate myself, recognize my implicit bias, listen, validate Students of Color experiences, and provide a safe and supportive environment. Additionally, when the opportunities arise, I will advocate for offering trauma informed curricula and structural change within my educational institution.

**Trauma in Education**

Educational disparities among marginalized communities are a significant form of Racial Trauma. A few of the contributing disparities include a lack of funding, access to quality teachers and resources, dominant cultural perspectives and teaching, more severe punishments, and experiencing everyday racisms.
However, even within disadvantaged backgrounds, white students still reap the benefits of whiteness. DiAngelo (2018) stated, “although working class whites experience classism, they are not also experiencing racism…. I grew up in poverty and felt a deep sense of shame about being poor. But I also knew that I was white and that it is better to be white” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 19). Unlike DiAngelo, I only knew I was poor. Until this research, I did not realize that I was privileged and only had experiences of whiteness. In fact, I felt oppressed because of the classism. However, now I recognize that I overcame barriers and had opportunities because of my white privilege. One of which was because I attended all white schools. Schools that had the resources for students to be successful. Darling-Hammond (1998) wrote, “Within Urban school districts students receive fewer instructional resources than others. Minority students have fewer and lower-quality books, curriculum materials, laboratories, and computers; significantly larger class sizes; less qualified and experienced teachers; and less access to high-quality curriculum. Many schools serving low-income and minority students do not even offer the math and science courses needed for college, and they provide lower-quality teaching in the classes they do offer. (p.2).

In addition to the less-than-ideal circumstances in urban education systems, adult students who have experienced traumatic events in their life can have challenges in learning. Often, we as educators do not recognize how the trauma can manifest in our adult learners and frequently attribute the behaviors to poor students or lack of motivation. However, as Kerka (2002) states,

Behaviors such as missing class, avoiding tests, spacing out, or having
inappropriate or extreme reactions to class discussions or activities may be traumatic responses. It is true that learning may be impeded by fear, anxiety, poor concentration, and the enormous energy involved in hiding abuse or struggling with immediate survival needs (p. 2).

Trauma specialists Streeck-Fisher and van der Kolk's (2014) research has found the “negative consequences to the student's learning abilities due to chronic stress can include problems with attention, sensory perception, reduction in reasoning while learning by experience, and memory problems. Consequently, resulting in poor academic performance due to trauma” (p. 913). Dyregrov (2004) included, “intrusive material makes it hard to concentrate on school subjects, change in information processing, depression that slows down cognitive functions, loss of motivation, disturbing intrusive memories or fantasies interfere with concentration and memory, difficulty to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information, moods overwhelm the ability to self-regulate and lead to behavior problems and control” (p. 77).
Furthermore, Perry et al. (2021) explained “long-term exposure to stress diminished the hippocampus, causing neurological changes that are likely related to functional problems with memory and learning” (p.22).

Adding to the complex trauma that many minorities' students experience is they are not being taught by someone that does not look like them. The U.S. Department of Education statistics (DOE, 2020) estimates that about eighty percent of teachers are white. This becomes further problematic because “white teachers who teach in urban schools often do so from a deficit-based perspective” (Miller, 2018, p. 2). Furthermore, “white teachers operate from a deficit perspective which suggests the student and not the system needs to be fixed” (Horsman, 2000, p.19). Donna Ford (2003), Chair of Education and Human Development at Vanderbilt University, stated, “deficit thinking exists when educators hold negative, stereotypic, and counterproductive views about culturally diverse students and lower their expectations of these students accordingly” (p. 217). Lacking the knowledge of racism white teachers can further perpetuate racism and complex trauma, thus Ladson-Billings (1998) advised “adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity will expose racism in education and propose radical solutions for addressing it” (p. 22). Matias et al. (2014) clarified, “whiteness is the underlying mechanism that maintains a racist system, and acknowledging whiteness contributes the permeance of race and racism” (p. 291). Moreover, Wallis (2016) emphasized, “This compelling narrative is reinforced through educational and economical experiences daily” (p. 25). For example, in higher education institutions, according to data collected at Georgetown University and published in
the *Separate and Unequal* publication (2018) emphasized,” more than half of the seats are taken by whites.” Out of these seats, “only seventeen percent of the African American students graduate compared to the 31% of white students” (Wallis, 2016, p. 44). Additionally, most students and faculty at these institutions were and remain white. Furthermore, “Some faculty have low expectations of Black students and a range of assumptions about them, and white undergraduate students benefit more than minority students in higher education” (Harper, 2012, p.19). Moreover, white graduates will reap on average, $10,000 more a year in earnings than a Person of Color according to the U.S. Department of Education, (2019). Thus, “Blacks have greater financial burdens than whites with comparable degrees” (Harper,2012, p.16). The economic disparities between Persons of Color and whites are astounding. Wallis concluded “the median household difference is more than $27,000 a year, and the wealth gap is a staggering $130,000 as of 2013” (Wallis, 2016, p. 43).

Many of the unearned advantages I experienced have been due to educational opportunities, which have allowed me to build wealth, obtain lucrative job opportunities, buy property in neighborhoods of my choosing, obtain a home loan, live in a well-funded school district, and have access to ample healthcare. These unearned advantages among many others are what, I, as a white person have taken for granted daily because of my white privilege yet are denied to many Persons of Color. Wallis (2016) articulated, “You can never escape white privilege in America if you are white” (p.35). The unearned advantages of being white are given regardless of the adversities that you may face, yet these same advantages are denied to Persons
of Color, regardless of how far they have come.

In summary, this literature discussed research that supports using Critical White Studies to dismantle white privilege and change the narrative that upholds the systemic injustices for Students of Color. The theoretical framework of CWS explained how the white narrative potential caused trauma to those who are Persons of Color, and supports systemic racism that is embedded in our educational systems. As educators, we need to recognize not only the trauma students may have experienced and how it affects their academic performance, but we must be conscious of our deficit thinking and how we can potentially perpetuate racism that causes further trauma to students.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of qualitative research is to understand a cultural phenomenon that happens within our society. In doing qualitative research “inquirers state research questions, not objectives, that seek to understand how a phenomenon functions in society.” (Creswell, 2013, p.125). The purpose of this study was to seek to understand how I as a white female educator potentially perpetuated the white narrative in classrooms of which I am part of as a student and a teacher, which may have caused harm to Students of Color in the classroom environment.

In this chapter I described how I used autoethnography as a method to research the cultural norm of whiteness and the underlying structures that continue to perpetuate racism through the ideology of whiteness. This chapter is divided into sections that will include Research Design, Data Analysis, participants, site information, researcher’s role, and limitations.

Research Design

Autoethnography was first referenced in 1975, but researchers began to use the methodology more in the 1990’s to validate social science research. “Autoethnographers turned to narratives and storytelling to give meaning to identities, relationships, experiences, and to create relationships between past and present, researchers and participants, writers and readers, tellers and audiences” (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 23). Moreover, autoethnography allows researchers to share
firsthand experiences, “rather than silence or disguise the personal reasons that lead to an array of research topics, such as traumatic interactions or health conditions” (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 28). In consequence, by sharing their research, “autoethnography allows participants to gain a better understanding of cultures, to change oneself, and to reach a wider audience” (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 5). While other qualitative research methods require the researcher to keep personal bias out of the research, autoethnography is composed in first person, “and is in fact bias in favor of presenting a worldview” (Poulos, 2021, p. 29). Using first-person narratives gives readers valuable insight into important events, people, and cultures. Patten (2004) described this experience “as somewhat of a collaborative journey between the reader and the author” (p. 2). As the researcher, I shared multiple stories in which I analyzed my whiteness. In the first story, I did not validate the feelings of students who expressed fear of me as a white dominate figure, in the second, I expected Students of Color to educate me about racism and did not realize this is my sole responsibility. In the third story, I analyzed how I buy into Black and Brown male stereotypes. In each story, I did not recognize the power of whiteness and how this shortcoming can potentially inflict Racial Trauma on to Students of Color.

Notably, autoethnography can also be used as intervention and implemented to promote change, as it is a form of storytelling. Stories help us connect, and connections help us heal. “Storytelling has been a long-standing tradition in many communities for centuries to promote community healing” (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998, p. 60). Ellis (2007) reiterates, “Writing difficult stories is a gift to self, a
reflective attempt to construct meaning in our lives and heal or grow from pain” (p. 26). Bochner et al. (2016) explained, “Our lives are rooted in narratives and narrative practices. We depend on stories almost as much as we depend on the air we breathe. Air keeps us alive; stories give meaning to our existence. One of the main goals of autoethnography is to put meanings into motion, and the best way to do that is to tell stories” (p. 76). Thus, employing autoethnography as my research method became essential to completing this research as I needed to construct the meaning behind my white racial identity, race as a social construct, and how my race played a part as the dominate figure in the classroom, potentially harming Students of Color.

Autoethnography is the research method that I used to complete this study. Autoethnography, as described by Wolcott (2010), it “is an autobiographical genre of academic writing that draws on and analyzes or interprets the lived experience of the author and connects researcher insights to self-identity, cultural rules and resources, communication practices, traditions, premises, symbols, rules, shared meanings, emotions, values, and larger social, cultural, and political issues” (p.4). Consequently, this research entails, “reading, and writing to develop a better understanding of our cultural experience” Ellis et al. (2011) explained, “using autoethnography goes beyond the realm of an autobiography and requires the author to examine lived experiences through the lens of a cultural phenomenon” (p.12). Furthermore, “autoethnography intentionally uses firsthand experiences to create nuanced, complex and comprehensive accounts by challenging the ways in which norms are taken for granted” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 33). Thus, “the goal of an autoethnography project is to embrace the vulnerability of asking and answering
questions about experiences so we as researchers, as well as our participants, and readers might understand the experiences and the emotions they generate” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 39). However, to do this we must understand the purpose of each element of autoethnography. Adams et al. (2023) breaks down each element explaining, "Auto-" is closely tied to oneself, which includes the researcher's subjective perspective, as well as, drawing on personal lived experiences. This approach allows for a more in-depth examination of a specific issue or topic which does not occur with other research methods. The element of "-ethno-" is fundamental in autoethnography, by serving as a vital component that will push the auto- ethnographer outside of their personal perspective and create a compelling-thick-description of cultural life, a primary purpose in ethnographic research. Adams et al. (2023) further elaborated, “When -graphy is used as a suffix, it is used to emphasize the art and practice of engaging and creating specific processes and representations. Auto-ethno-graphy is comprised kinds of -graphy: the -graphy of autobio-graphy, which is the art of writing about one’s life; and the -graphy of ethno-graphy, which is the art and science of representing by producing a vivid and concrete, thick description of cultural expectations, beliefs, and practice” (p. 3). Typically, using this approach will result in a well-written autoethnography producing a thick description of a single event or multiple experiences surrounded by a common theme and tapping into strong human emotions. To produce quality autoethnography, Chang (2016a) recommended “autoethnographers be authentic and include trustworthy data, have an accountable research process, observe ethical considerations toward self and others, conduct a sociocultural analysis and
interpretation, and make scholarly contributions” (p. 448). Consequently, I adhered to Chang’s recommendations to author a quality autoethnography, I engaged in authentic self-reflection, acknowledging my biases and ways in which I potentially perpetuate racism, strove to be as transparent as the memory would allow in the stories I authored. Through Critical White Studies, and other literature, I examined my whiteness, now understanding how history has developed the social construct of whiteness. I explored how I have learned to embrace white ideology and comprehend its impact on Students of Color. I was honest, but sensitive to any ethical concerns, and committed to continuous learning beyond the completion of this research. I am committed to change myself and actively engage other white educators in conversations as part of an effort to eradicate Racial Trauma in the educational environment and beyond.

**Data Collection**

Collecting data for this autoethnography was a difficult process, as I did not view myself as racist, and in my own mind resisted the fact that I had racist thoughts and behaviors, possessed white privilege, or upheld white supremacy. DiAngelo (2018) aptly noted, “it is a major effort to get white people to acknowledge that our race gives us special privileges and we most often respond defensively, deny, and resist this claim” (p.83). I was, and in some ways still am, precisely the white person that DiAngelo described. Denial for me was strong, therefore, I had to dig deep to not only discover the ways in which I was exhibiting racists thoughts and behaviors but how and why I had developed such a strong
denial. Therefore, the autoethnographic stories used in this data collection are specific lived experiences that are following much research, interrogation, and deepened understanding, which led me to understand the truth, though challenging and difficult to accept, I had to confront my whiteness and the role it plays in the reality of racism.

**Data Analysis**

I designed this research to explore, analyze, and explain how I learned whiteness and how it may inflict harm on Students of Color. As a theoretical framework I examined Critical White Studies and through this lens of CWS I was able to examine how my whiteness was constructed and how that whiteness upholds power, privilege, and oppression in higher education institutions. Exploring and analyzing Critical White Studies gave me the opportunity to examine and learn the nuances of my whiteness and how that whiteness potentially contributed to racial harm for Students of Color. Using autoethnography as my research method, I analyzed my lived experiences with Students of Color through autoethnography stories of which I have been the dominant white teacher in the room, where I have been the oblivious privileged white student in the room, and another story, where I was a white woman who has bought into the stereotypes of Black and Brown men. Throughout these stories I was able to analyze the power and privilege that I possesses and how it upholds white supremacy. Furthermore, I began to recognize and deconstruct the learned racist thoughts and actions of which I was complicit and preserving the cultural norm of the white ideology narrative while continuing to potentially perpetuate Racial Trauma. The cultural phenomenon I examined was
whiteness and the potential for Racial Trauma because of said whiteness. Whiteness and Racial Trauma are a prevalent part of our society. Therefore, I examined the benefits of my white identity and how those benefits may traumatize Students of Color.

This qualitative research aimed to deconstruct my white identity and to raise other white educators' awareness of the effects of traumas that Students of Color may experience because of whiteness. We must recognize we are a nation in a traumatic crisis and intervention must occur to address the problem. One such intervention is to encourage white educators to examine their own white identity. Some of the complex issues they may examine are how they have inherited white privilege, why they experience deficit thinking, buy into stereotypes, and how they potentially perpetuate racism in their classrooms and contribute to the trauma potentially experienced by Students of Color. Using this autoethnography methodology, I used Critical Whiteness Studies to identify and deconstruct these complexities in my own whiteness.

Thus, I selected autoethnography research method as my data collection because it brings together a personal storytelling narrative and the cultural phenomenon of whiteness which allowed me to examine my white identity and a Racial Trauma culture. As a result, I rightly expected my vulnerabilities would be exposed through this research, writing, and storytelling. This research narrative also allowed me to examine how my educational practices have evolved since becoming trauma and white identity aware, along with understanding the complexities of harm caused to the mind, body, and soul of Students of Color in a higher education
Participants

I used autoethnography as my methodology and my narrative for my data. Ferdinand (2009) posited “lived experiences lie at the heart of auto-ethnography” (p. 5). Therefore, as the only participant in the study, I focused on my own lived experiences with whiteness and advantage. Though I am the only participate in the study it is important to note that I was not the only person in the stories “Poulos (2021) explained, “it is a misconception that autoethnography is only about the researcher's life; as humans, we are always in contact with other humans” (p.23). Thus, allowing me to tell the stories from my perspective and how learning about my white identity in the stories has changed my perception of whiteness and the role in which I play. Moreover, through this research, I focused on the cultural and social aspects of being a white privileged female educator, as it encouraged me to think critically about why and how my white identity might racially damage Students of Color.

Site Information

My career in education began when I obtained a position as an administrative assistant at an urban community college. I have remained an employee of this same community college for the past thirty years in St. Louis, Missouri. During this time, I have advanced to full professor and have continued my journey as a student for a vast amount of these years. Here, in St. Louis, Missouri is where the stories of my lived experiences come. I have stayed in education for one reason. I want to help
students change the trajectory of their life through education, however, I have come
to learn that my whiteness could be impeding their education due to the potential of
imposed Racial Trauma and only contributing to their possible lived Racial
Trauma.

Researcher's Role

In the U. S. it is estimated that “80% of the teachers are white” Howard et al.,
(2016, p. 8). I am one of them. I am a white middle-class college professor, who has
worked in an educational field for more than thirty years, where I have engaged
with many Persons of Color. During this time, I have been complicit and potentially
perpetuated racism unintentionally. As the researcher of this study, I examined my
whiteness and the power dynamics of that identity and what it means in society and
how that may affect the lives of Students of Color, in which I interact. I challenged
my learned racist bias and gained a deeper understanding of the complexities and
nuances that contribute to racism and trauma within the educational settings. I also
examined how my racist bias influenced my teaching practice and curriculum.
Furthermore, through sharing the narrative of my own autoethnographic stories, I
hope to engage other white educators in a critical conversation about whiteness and
Racial Trauma, and how they can challenge their own beliefs.

In this autoethnography, my personal narratives were the data sources for this
research. My narratives were analyzed throughout this research by discovering the
ways in which I may contribute to racism. This helped me better understand the
barriers I put in place for Students of Color due to my whiteness. When I can begin
to break down harmful trajectories, I can develop better connections and
relationships with Students of Color. Adams et al. (2015) state, “When we make connections, we move from what is happening inside our bodies, hearts, minds and lives and out into what is happening in culture” (p. 47).

My intent with this research was to radically check my white privilege, promote a trauma-informed environment, and advance change in higher education for Students of Color.

Limitations

Autoethnography narratives can be a window to the soul, therefore, other's interpretations of the narrative may not be the intended perception thus limiting the author's goal. If the intent is not in accord with the author, it may be a missed opportunity to raise awareness and promote change. As Chang (2016b) explained, “Telling one's story does not automatically result in cultural understanding of self and others, which only grows out of in-depth cultural analysis and interpretation” (p. 13). Consequently, due to my white privilege lens and the bias that I possess as a white female educator, I have a limited understanding and perception of the lived experiences of Persons of Color. DiAngelo, (2021) explained, “We make sense of perceptions and experiences through our particular cultural lens and lived experiences and being white in this country is fundamentally different from the lived experience of being Black” (p.8). Therefore, inevitably, the author's lens may challenge the reader's preconceived beliefs regarding a specific cultural phenomenon. Regardless, the writer composed the most authentic and ethical narrative that memory would allow.
In summary, this chapter on methodology discussed how autoethnography could change the researcher's and the readers' perspectives on a cultural phenomenon and used Critical White Studies (CWS) and Racial Trauma to examine the cultural phenomenon of a trauma culture due to white ideology.
Chapter 4: The white Truth

Through the narration of autoethnography I explore my personal journey with race and privilege, discovering the power of whiteness and unveiling the ugly truths of ingrained racism and other systems of oppression that can potentially inflict Racial Trauma on to Students of Color. Though uncomfortable at times the stories held me responsible for my racist actions and challenged my realization of complicity and perpetuating racism in educational environments. With the help of Critical White Studies and Racial Trauma research, I have discovered how white ideology has prevailed through society and how I have continued to uphold the white narrative.

When this research began, I was learning the benefits of storytelling. Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) described storytelling as a community healing traditional practice. Additionally, “Historically, storytelling has been a kind of medicine to the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression” (Tate, 1997, p. 221). Therefore, knowing the benefits of storytelling I began to incorporate storytelling into the courses I taught at the community college. Students would choose a storytelling topic and write about an event that impacted their life. Although I anticipated students would discuss traumatic events, I never asked them to write about trauma. In fact, I never used the word because I did not want to lead them. Regardless, the impactful events written about were traumatic, and this was a way to help students who had suffered from trauma begin to heal. Consequently, the assignments' results made me realize how deep and wide trauma was experienced, though unknowingly,
through my whiteness I was a fellow conspirator.

**Unveiling white Dominance**

Through my teaching position I am the white dominant figure of authority, and although that is not the way in which I view myself, I am beginning to recognize my white dominant privilege. Tatum (2000) explained, “The dominate group holds the power and authority in society relative to the subordinates and determines how the power and authority may be acceptably used” (p. 3). I have learned that white people continually hurt the minds, bodies, and souls of Persons of Color through the abuse of white privilege and power. This was confirmed when I first started teaching. I was still working full time in my role as a Health Science Admissions Coordinator, and I met a Black male student who contemplated taking a class that I was teaching. We had developed a good relationship, and he told me he was concerned about taking the class because I reminded him of his white high school English teacher, and he did not like her. In fact, she vehemently said that he hated her. To me that was a strong statement and although I could understand disliking a teacher, I did not have the same experience that would drive me to hate a teacher. If fact, I was well liked by my teachers, who looked like me, and regardless of my lack of academic achievements they often selected me to do special projects for them. Once again, proving my white unearned advantage. The student explained the white English teacher marked up his paper in a red pen and ripped it to shreds as she berated him. I, of course, found the behavior of the English teacher deplorable, but at that time did not recognize the behavior for the white dominance that it was. I believe this story has stayed with me because I never wanted to be that person.
However, not until I began the research for this dissertation did I realize the student had experienced trauma at the hands of a white teacher who held a position of authority. Thus, making the student hesitant to take a class that I was teaching. However, now recognizing how our mind and body remember traumatic experiences it makes sense that the student would not want to put himself into what could be a similar traumatic experience. van der Kolk (2014) rationalized, “We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present” (p. 129).

Sensing the trauma, the student had experienced, it taught me early on in my teaching career to be aware of how I gave student feedback, and it has never been with a red pen. Additionally, I have had Students of Color tell me they are afraid of me and because I did not understand the concept of white domination amid the fears for them, I dismissed those feelings, and did not validate what was happening. It is imperative for white educators to listen and believe what Students of Color tell them. I lacked any sort of empathy because I did not understand the power my whiteness held until this research. Utt (2020) explained, “White teachers who do not see their racial identity as meaningful often allow unchecked expressions of white privilege, such as microaggressions, create un-safe and un-welcoming classrooms for students” (p. 128). Thus, Students of Color may be failing courses because we as white teachers fail to recognize trauma associated with our whiteness. Fine, (2004) said, “What may be missing from this literature
and from various interventions is a better understanding of the role that Whiteness plays in the knot of minority student failure” (p. 237). Moreover, “focusing on educational gaps, dropout rates, and low-test scores are symptoms of the problem. The problem itself lies in the systematic racist practices that allow white supremacy and whiteness to reign supreme in education; and while maintaining white supremacy, the root cause of this condition also hurts Students of Color” (Mathis, 2013, p. 77).

Whiteness has been historically dangerous for a Person of Color and generations have suffered at its hands: “It has been unsafe for Persons of Color from the slave environment, through reconstruction, and Jim Crow, if a Person of Color even questioned a white person they were in danger” (DeGruy, 2005 p.15). White people need to “consider racism a matter of life and death because it is for Persons of Color” (DiAngelo, 2018, p.145). I have learned that the Black experiences and the white experiences are vastly different.

I now empathize with the trauma that happens to Students of Color and why they fear the white dominate culture because they have learned that white people cannot be trusted, thus being silenced, and oppressed by them for centuries. I deeply regret and apologize that my ignorance may have caused further trauma to my students. I recommend that all white educators make educating themselves about their own racial identity and the complexities of Racial Trauma a priority. Also, educators must include culturally responsive material in their curriculum, encouraging all students to critically examine oppressive ideologies and structures. By doing so, we can begin to build a more inviting and inclusive environment.
Shattered Illusions

I grew up in a rural area of Missouri and was not exposed to any Persons of Color. If I saw a Person of Color, it was on television. The only show I recall watching that had a Person of Color was the Lone Ranger, whose trusty sidekick was Tonto the Indian. Though I was not a fan of the show it was the only time I saw a person who did not look like me. Otherwise, the only shows I can remember consistently watching, which was a big weekly event, were The Magical World of Disney and Merlin Olson’s Animal Kingdom. I cannot recall any characters who did not look like me. Thus, I did not know a world existed outside of my whiteness.

The first time I remember seeing a Black man in person I was around six or seven. The man had come to our house to buy my stepfather's old yellow pick-up truck. It was a short interaction from afar, but I was intrigued. I did not talk to the man, I only stared, as children will do. Regardless, I vividly remember the event as if it were yesterday. He had very dark skin, it was a hot and sunny summer day, wearing only a t-shirt and jeans, and sweat was making his dark skin glisten in the sun. He was different from any person that I had ever seen. I am not sure if I was afraid or if I was simply curious, but I know I was mesmerized by this different-looking person. I was around eleven when I had my next encounter with another Person of Color. We had moved to a small town that was segregated. The Persons of Color lived on one side of town while I lived on the other. Regardless of it being a small town there was little to no interactions and even though I attended the same school I cannot recall any interactions with Persons of Color. I cannot recall any students, teachers, or staff that did not look like me. I do, however, remember being
afraid to go to the other side of town and how my imagination ran wild. I believed that everyone was scary and dangerous, it was dirty, and the houses were in ruin. The message I received was that was where the Persons of Color live. (You know POC was not the term used.) That was a place that white little girls did not go visit. In fact, that was where no white person of any moral character visited. Fear was deeply ingrained into my brain, fueled by stereotypes, and learned from family, friends, and the media. In alignment with this, Picower (2006) conveyed findings from a survey given to white teachers, revealing that, “Fear was by far the most prevalent hegemonic story shared. Explaining the participants expressed sense of anxiety in situations with Persons of Color, based on stereotypes from their earlier experiences and influences from their family and the media” (p.202). Thandeka (1999) elaborates on this stating, “We white people are sent messages by parents and others that we are superior, and others are inferior to whites and to befriend a Person of Color, is to go against the white racial rules that we are governed by and if we choose to go against the racial rules we take the risk of annihilation from those we love” (pg.2).

We moved again and this time the town’s population was completely white until my junior year of high school, and we had one Black male student who had moved into the area. I knew who he was, but I did not befriend him.

A few years out of high school I started working at a credit union and this was my first consistent exposure to many of the members who were mostly Men of Color. If I am honest, at first, everyone looked alike to me. However, over time, I started to be able to distinguish the distinctive characteristics. Skin tones were
different, hair styles and colors were different, facial features would vary. The clothing styles were different, and the smiles were different. I would see the same members weekly, and we developed a cordial relationship and would even joke around, regardless, the microaggression was there and still embraced my internalized racism and like many white people believed, they were lazy, they came from a bad part of town, and they were dangerous. When I left the credit union, I carried with me my internal racism and began working at the college where I am still employed. During this time, I have worked with many Persons of Color in roles from colleagues, supervisors, and students. Microaggression is there too, and some Persons of Color are considered lazy, cannot be trusted, live in the bad part of town, are uneducated, and dangerous. While I have not witnessed these experiences, I continue to struggle against the deep seeded belief that Persons of Color are dangerous, live in dangerous neighborhoods in dilapidated homes, and have drunks and drug dealers on every street corner that continues to persist in my psyche. Therefore, I continue to reproduce racism. Olivos (2006) offers insight to why this deficit mentality continues, he explained, “the historical trajectory of race relations in our country has greatly influenced how nonwhites are currently perceived and treated in contemporary society and continues with the belief that culturally diverse communities are deficient in one way or another and racism is reproduced in the public’s psyche without much resistance, in both whites and nonwhites” (p.42). Therefore, it is no surprise that this belief system is still practiced.

I currently teach class at a local justice center and when people learn that I teach the male detainees the first question I always get is, “What is it like and am I
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“afraid?” They want to know if the stereotypes that we have historically been exposed to are true. The media plays a key role in the negative representation of Black and Brown men. Dr. Joy DeGruy (2005) elaborates on this theory explaining, “Television, movies, newspapers, and magazines project negative images of black males as pitiable, ignorant, violent, overly sexualized, gangbangers, and criminal.” (p. 13). Bryan Adamson further explores how “Blacks are over-represented as crime perpetrators and more likely than whites to have their mug shots displayed on the news and having criminal records reported during the broadcast” (p. 192). Additionally, it is no secret the United States has the highest incarcerated population in the world. Of that population, “sixty percent are Persons of Color.” (Wallis, 2016, p.139). Reenforcing the negative portrayals we are fed through multiple medias of Black and Brown men. When I first began teaching at the justice center my deficit thinking anticipated that the men would be poor students intellectually and not possess the academic fortitude to be successful in college classes without some interventions such as my white savior complex. My thinking gave way to my superiority and their inferiority, not only academically, but once again believing they came from bad neighborhoods, were dangerous, and lazy. Although I know some of the students have committed serious crimes, I have not witnessed the stereotyped behavior.

To combat my internalized racism, I need to continue to educate myself, reflect on my experiences, which do not justify my racists thoughts and actions. It is crucial to take responsibility for dismantling my white ideology and challenge other white educators to engage in difficult conversations. Furthermore, listening and
believing Students of Color when they express feelings of marginalization is essential in fostering a safe and inclusive learning environment. Consequently, my experiences with Persons of Color erode the accuracy of racial stereotypes, which further highlights my role in following the **white racial rules of which we are governed** and perpetuating racism and potentially causing Racial Trauma.

**Oblivion to Awakening**

It was commonplace for the doctoral class to have visiting speakers to discuss various social justice issues, on one such visit we had a young women visit, and after her visit the Persons of Color in the room began to discuss her race. I was surprised because she was so light skinned that I thought she was white, and I never speculated about her race. Additionally, I was uncomfortable with this discussion because I had not been privy to such dialog on race previously amongst Persons of Color. I was and am still learning to embrace race discussions and although I was uncomfortable, I was fascinated by the conversation because of the importance that was put on the young woman’s race. For me, as a white person, race was a taboo subject not to be discussed, and I was oblivious to the fact that race was of such importance within Communities of Color. Of course, I knew race was important because of the experienced discrimination and historical trauma of Persons of Color, what I did not expect was how important race was and is among Communities of Color from the perspective of how they are treated due to skin pigment. DeGruy writes historically, “Usually, lighter skin was associated with an improved quality of life” (p. 136). This lack of knowledge also demonstrates how I as a white person did not need to consider my race nor was I even aware of my race
being a social construct. I am not sure I ever gave my race a second thought and why would I? I was taught that I could ignore race and didn’t need to acknowledge it and did not need to know about the different experiences of race and colorism nor how it affected Persons of Color. On the rare occasion that race was discussed, prior to this discussion, I gave the standard white person response, “I do not see race.” This was the standard response I thought I was supposed to give to be politically correct and non-racist, but of course I see race. I did not believe I was racist and did not understand that my response caused harm to the Persons of Color around me. Consequently, I have since learned that acknowledging a person’s race is vitally important because Persons of Color have suffered for centuries at the hands of white people due to their racial identity. The importance of racial identity became even more clear on another class day when we had two Women of Color visitors. The conversation began and one of the speakers began speaking on the ill treatment of Black Women. At first, the discussion was on the pigment of skin and the differences of treatment for people from light to dark skinned and the lighter the skin the better the treatment. Again, I found the conversation intriguing because it was a topic of conversation as a white person that I never would have discussed in a room full of Persons of Color. Eventually, the speaker began to talk about rape and how horrendous rape was for Women of Color. I remember thinking, “What does the pigment of skin have to do with such a horrendous act.” I was also offended and thought “how dare this woman say that Women of Color had a worse rape than a white woman.” In my eyes, we were woman and women should support women regardless of race and there was
absolutely no way Women of Color suffered any more than a white woman. However, DiAngelo (2021b) expounds on the differences between Black and white women explaining, ”maternal mortality rates are higher, empirical evidence of racism exists in healthcare and educations, they send their children to schools filled with teachers who fear them, and textbooks ignore them, and they live in terror for their children's lives anytime they interact with the police” (p. 80). Unfortunately, I did not understand the depth of the complex trauma that Women of Color experience, nor did I take into consideration the historical experiences of Women of Color. Upon reflection, I realized it was not just about rape; it went much deeper. Dorothy Roberts, author of Killing the Black Bodies, postulates, “The rape of slave women by their masters was primarily a weapon of terror that reinforced whites’ domination over their human property. Rape was an act of physical violence designed to stifle the black women's will to resist and to remind them of their servile status” (p.29). Through such acts of violence and domination, Armah (2022) recounts, ”Black women have been taught they are of little or no value” (p.81). “Their body commoditized to serve the narrative of whiteness” “whiteness-imposed joy on cruelty, weaponizing the emotional to contrive this joy on Black folk doing brutal labor and stolen freedom” (Armah, 2022, p.74-75). To add insult to injury, Women of Color feel they must in some way protect the men who rape them because of the “historical backdrop of black men being tortured and murdered because of white women’s distress” (DiAngelo, 2018 p.132) and the unfair justice system for Men of Color. This complexity, for Women of Color rape victims feel they cannot file charges for rape, and this further traumatizes the Women of Color.
At the time, I could not wrap my head around why rape was worse for Women of Color than for white women. I felt attacked and inadvertently made a statement such as, “if you, (Women of Color) don’t have a conversation and teach us (white women) how are we to learn about how we are perpetuating racism and making it worse.” I was promptly told, “It is not my job to teach you.” I was taken back. I was hurt. I did not understand the angry attack. I was shocked. One of my student Peers of Color, came to my defense saying, “She didn’t mean anything by it.” Once again, I was protected and oblivious to my complacent behavior and the power of whiteness. In retrospect, I have learned I was wrong to have the expectation that Women of Color or any Person of Color should teach me. Wallis postulates, “white Americans must also take responsibility for their self-education and not burden their colleagues and friends of color” (Wallis, 2016, p.7). When I was looking for a teachable moment, I unfortunately got in the way of their education and quite possibly a healing moment, “being put in the position of educating others meant that they were not learning what they hoped to in class” (Kelly, 2010, p.82). I have since learned it is my sole responsibility to learn and dismantle my own whiteness and discover why and how my white identity causes trauma to them. Not the other way around. Through my own reflectivity, I learned I was being a Becky because I was putting whiteness into the equation and believing that white women and Women of Color shared the same experiences. Additionally, I had the expectation that Women of Color should continue to teach me about their soul crushing experience. Consequently, I gained a great deal of respect for these women because I now know the harm white people (I) have caused them, they were being extremely vulnerable,
and it took a great deal of courage for them to engage in the conversation. I appreciate the learning experience that came from this situation, and I know in the future I will be respectful, listen, and believe. As a result of the situation, I have learned more from author Elizabeth McRae about the evilness of white women, their power, and how they have held up white privilege and supremacy for benefit. McRae (2018) posited, “For decades in rural communities, in university towns, and in New South cities, white People performed myriad duties that upheld white over black: censoring textbooks, denying marriage certificates, deciding on the racial identity of their neighbors, celebrating school choice, canvassing communities for votes, and lobbying elected officials. They instilled beliefs in racial hierarchies in their children, built national networks, and experimented with a color-blind political discourse. Without these mundane, everyday acts, white supremacist politics could not have shaped local, regional, and national politics the way it did or lasted as long as it has” (p. 5).

Moreover, “white people perpetrate white supremacy by upholding the patriarchy of the white man’s relationship to power and race” (Armah, 2022, p. 43). Thus, white women are only concerned for white men to keep their white privileges. Whilst “Historically Black People are expected to take care of the feelings of white people, white people and men, of all men-no matter the cost or consequences to her, her body, her well-being” (Armah, 2022, p.76). Furthermore, Walker clarifies, “we know systemic white supremacy produces a society where whites are given privilege, but that alone is not enough to traumatize us on the level of our soul. Instead, the emotionality of whiteness upholding institutional white supremacy
dehumanize us. We witness this when girls of Color are denied their humanity by
their white teachers, many of whom render them as ‘smart mouths’ with attitudes. 
Suffocated by these atrocities, we are traumatized because we know that when we
assert our humanity, the emotionality of whiteness becomes unfettered and will do
anything to put us back in our place. If Ms. Becky wants to support students, they
must drop their ‘smart thought’ about Black and Brown girls and develop a
‘smartear’ to listen to them” (Walker, 2017, p. 2).

We indeed need to develop a “smart ear” as white educators. White
educators need to listen to their Students of Color. Miller (2018) explained, “When
Students of Color share their experiences, they are inviting us into their world and in
listening to our students, we cultivate empathy and begin to dismantle our white
supremacist thinking” (p. 9).

I have realized the importance of talking about race, not only for dismantling
racism, but to form honest and open discussions. Just as taboo topics like mental
health and domestic violence issues, once contributed to trauma when ignored,
ignoring race leads to significant, and sometimes deadly harm. Deadly harm, just
as not discussing race can be deadly. Racial Trauma is real, and though we have
been conditioned to avoid race talk, it is time to break that stigma and embrace
open and honest conversations. It is imperative that I actively work toward
dismantling the systems of racisms and, as McRae (2018) articulates it is, “white
people uphold the systems that harm” (p.5), therefore, it will take white people to
disarm the systems of oppression.
Chapter 5: Reflexivity Conclusion

In the concluding chapter, I will reflect on my personal journey of race and privilege and address ways in which I and other white educators can learn to deconstruct our whiteness and not further perpetuate racism that is causing harm to Students of Color. Lastly, I will discuss what I hope to come next.

I never considered

Racism, whiteness, white privilege, white supremacy, white narrative, white ideology, the language of whiteness, unearned advantage, Becky, Karen. All are terms which I believed were not me. Furthermore, I believed I was not racist nor privileged. I compared myself and my humble beginnings to that of Persons of Color often confusing classism with racism. I was wrong in my perceptions and belief systems and unintentionally contributing to the white ideology narrative perpetuating racism. It has at times stabbed me in the heart, and been uncomfortable, but that is a necessary step in dismantling the ways I have been taught to uphold white supremacy. As Fox (2019) asserts, “Writing about self in an unfavorable light is dirty work in autoethnography” (p.252). I did not like the aspects of writing that I possess deficit thinking, have unfair advantage, or contribute to upholding white supremacy and it hurts my heart to know that I have caused harm to those who I care about because of it. I have recognized so many things that I have done that were disrespectful and now make me check myself, such as interrupting conversations to interject something about me, understanding that I do not have to constantly be aware of my surroundings, and thinking to
myself, “Wow, he is well spoken.” Although, I do not like to admit that I am racist, I must. I have learned from DiAngelo (2018), “Addressing racism is not without effort” (p. 144). Additionally, I must admit that my white experiences have been and will continue to be far different than Persons of Color. Wallis (2016) taught me, “Believing that black experiences are different from white experiences is the beginning of changing white attitudes and perspectives” (p. 6). Dismantling a lifetime of whiteness is going to continue to take a lot of effort and be a lot of dirty work.

Conducting research and reading literature for this study is a beginning, it has promoted my personal and professional growth, yet there remains a never-ending road ahead. To get here there was a great deal of research, literature, and other media that aided my learning, but was not relative to this study. However, it was necessary learning that had to be conducted before I could even begin this project. My definition of racism was completely incorrect, I had very little knowledge about Critical White Studies, whiteness, racial identity and so much more. I had to build a solid foundation before I could even begin to grow or reflect what this research meant for me as a white person. I was truly oblivious and had to find resources that explicitly explained what has been invisible to me my whole life. Thankfully, there is a plethora of information available, yet white people must be open and willing to begin the rocky and emotional journey.

Through this research my feelings and beliefs have changed because I never considered how I was taught, and blindly accepted, the ways I was learned whiteness was superior. I did not question it and was so ignorant that I did not
understand race or whiteness as a social construct. I did not understand that through my white supremacy I held unearned advantages which perpetuate racism. I never considered why a Student of Color would fear me, as I was not a Karen or so I thought. I never considered I was a dominant white woman. Although I knew historically white people have caused Racial Trauma, I never considered the current and generational trauma that persists and thought that racism came from those who hate Persons of Color and wear white hoods. I never considered myself racist.

**A call to action**

In my research I was utterly disappointed that I had not learned the truth about racism and white supremacy throughout my years in education. I have been a student myself for at least thirty years and have completed two master level education programs. Never in these programs was anything ever taught similar to Critical White Studies, therefore, perpetuating and learning white ideology that I have continued to carry with me in educational settings for more than thirty years. That is thirty years of potentially contributing to Racial Trauma. Nevertheless, as a white female educator, I now recognize my complacency and responsibility to pursue the truth and engage other white educators. My experiences in higher education institutions have led me to believe most white faculty and administrators, me included, do not fully grasp systemic issues, and oversimplify them by superficially addressing them with diversity, inclusion, and equity training. Therefore, if we genuinely would like change then we must address the real issue of how institutions are upholding whiteness by employing white ideology within the educational settings. To do this, we must make a commitment to change. I
understand the challenges involved in making these changes, and experience has taught me institutions are often resistant or slow to change but we can begin on a personal level by changing ourselves and then working outward. As Miller (2018) explained, white educators do not have to wait for administrators to institute professional development, or for universities to offer a cultural competency course to create radical change. We can simply begin with a curiosity about our attitudes towards race, examining from where those beliefs derive (p.2).

As a call to action, I encourage all of us to continue to educate ourselves by seeking out information about Critical White Studies and other relevant material and read, watch films or documentaries, and listen to podcasts. Examine and reflect on your experiences with your own race and keep reflective journals about it. Understand, by upholding white ideology, we are inflicting harm on to those we care about by inflicting physical, emotional, and mental harm due to our racist actions, and this is unacceptable. Persons of Color deserve to have the truth of their history revealed, be treated equaling, and not live with “everyday racisms.” They should not be in fear, and we white people must do better to change that trajectory. I believe that once we turn our racial lens on ourselves and acknowledge the history of white supremacy and our complicity by educating ourselves about the nuances of racism we can then really advocate for change at our institutions. In the meantime, we can start by employing a diverse population, ensuring students will see someone who looks like them in every position in all educational institutions. Furthermore, with critical self-reflection and accountability to our colleagues of color, we can help create safer and more inclusive environments for everyone on campus.
Additionally, we can begin curriculum revisions to include diverse perspectives, histories, and recognize contributions of Persons of Color. Moreover, colleges can make culturally relevant courses a requirement instead of an elective and encourage students to develop the critical thinking skills to analyze the world and see all races equally, and not whiteness as superiority. By being proactive, we can change ourselves, thus changing our world for the better.

**Storytelling in Education**

Drawing from research and class discussions, I chose autoethnography for my research method for my dissertation because of the storytelling aspect. Stories are a way for us to connect, understand we are not alone, healing, confirming, and as demonstrated in this work, help us uncover our identity and recognizing a truth.

We all have our stories to tell, the future stories for white people will be to discover the ways in which they maintain the language of whiteness and contribute to racism. Ellis (2007) teaches us through the art of autoethnography, we must, “seek the good” (p.23). In this situation, to seek the good we must do the “emotional labor to unlearn the language of whiteness so that racial healing can occur and be sustained for all races” (Armah, 2022, p.45). Moreover, telling one’s story can be important for one’s health as Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) described storytelling as a "community healing traditional practice" (p.60). For those who experience trauma this healing practice can be a way to move forward from the past. van der Kolk (2014) stated, “if silenced, trauma leads to death of the soul” (p.234). By sharing, “we lesson our isolation by sharing our trauma stories and writing to yourself is one of the most effective ways of healing” (p. 239). In
fact, van der Kolk says “writing to ourselves is more important than sharing our stories because we confront what we have been trying to avoid” (p. 245).

Knowing the importance of storytelling, I will include storytelling in my pedagogical practice as an outlet. By implementing storytelling and other healing practices in our workplaces and educational institutions we can create safe spaces where everyone can tell their story. The practice will help us connect through a lens of empathy and begin to break down the barriers that continue to separate us due to racism perpetuated by whiteness. Additionally, I will continue to share my story, when appropriate, to invite white educators into conversations about whiteness to dismantle racism in education and potentially prevent further Racial Trauma onto Students of Color.

**Recommendation for future research**

There appears to be a significate gap in qualitative research to examine the prevalence of Racial Trauma inflicted by white women educators. Additional gaps include the lack of perspectives of lived experiences of both educator and Students of Color, as well as inadequate research on the behaviors and attitudes of white female educators. Furthermore, there seems to be an absence of research surrounding how educational institutions contribute and perpetuate racism, through curriculum, policies, and administrative practices. Addressing these shortcomings is critical, particularly when we know that graduation rates for marginalized students are dismal at many colleges. Therefore, my next research will explore the effects of trauma on learning and the outcomes in higher education. I will continue the reflective journaling practice to engage in self-reflection and exploration to
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depen my self-awareness in these areas, this will prevent me from becoming complacent, and allow me to share my experiences with others who are doing the same emotional labor. This qualitative research could provide valuable insights into how these dynamics play into and potentially contribute to Racial Trauma and what interventions could be explored to combat implicit bias, foster cultural competence, and promote equitable educational institutions.

Based off this current research, I anticipate that embedded racism among educational institutions will be a significant contributor to these barriers. Therefore, I will make it my continued responsibility to contribute to the discussion of whiteness and Racial Trauma to foster a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Remember, we must transform not transfer.
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