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WHEN "BEING DOWN" ISN'T ENOUGH: EXAMINING WHITE ANTIRACISM AND RACIAL INTEGRATION IN THE ERA OF COLORBLINDNESS

by

AMANDA C. ATWELL

Under the Direction of Dr. Anthony Hatch

ABSTRACT

White supremacist racism is systemic to the structure of society in the United States. White people often minimize, rationalize, deflect, and deny contemporary acts of racism. However, there have been many whites who have actively opposed racism. As new conditions of racial segregation and inequality emerge in the United States, it is increasingly imperative that we consider which factors lead some whites to commit to antiracism. In this research, I examine how a selection of young white adults negotiate their racial and antiracist activist identities in the era of colorblindness. Utilizing feminist qualitative research methods, I explore my sample's understanding of the factors most influential in raising their race consciousness. Employing in-depth interviewing techniques, I find that early life racial messages and the quality of interracial contacts one maintains throughout their lifetime have the greatest implications for influencing young whites' involvement with antiracist activism.

INDEX WORDS: Racism, Anti-racism, Students, Contact Hypothesis, Activism, Dialogue

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AMANDA C. ATWELL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2014

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Amanda Conway Atwell
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by

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May 2014

DEDICATION

For all of those struggling to get free from structures of domination…

The only way out is through!

"Precisely at the point when you begin to develop a conscience,
you must find yourself at war with your society"
-James Baldwin

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1 INTRODUCTION

The 2008 presidential election of Barack Obama seemed to signify that the United States was in the process of fulfilling its enduring commitment to ending white supremacy and beginning a new era of racial reconciliation. The fact that a black man could become president served to support the narrative of a post-racial America, where black people can achieve the highest levels of success through their own merit and determination. Throughout the 2008 presidential campaign Obama remarked that the amount of support he received was indicative that American race relations, especially between whites and blacks, had finally changed for the better. Following the publicity generated by racially controversial comments made by his former pastor, Dr. Jeremiah Wright, then candidate Obama delivered a speech centered on the issue of race relations America:

> This is where we are right now. It's a racial stalemate we've been stuck in for years...But I have asserted a firm conviction – a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people – that working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union...But what we know – what we have seen – is that America can change. That is true genius of this nation. What we have already achieved gives us hope – the audacity to hope – for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.[1]

Although highly inspiring and motivational, it has been over five years since Obama delivered this speech and it can be argued that race relations have seen little, if any improvement.

These public comments suggest questions about whether or not racism still exists and, if it does exist, what we can do about it remains central to American contemporary race relations (Doane 2006). A recent University of Chicago study (Esposito 2010) found a considerable discrepancy regarding perceptions of racism among black and white youth, in particular. According to the survey, sixty-nine percent of blacks compared with only twenty-nine percent of whites consider racism to be a serious problem in this country. These findings suggest that whites and blacks typically conceptualize race relations in different terms and often have conflicting ideas as to what exactly constitutes racism. One

[1] Transcript of "Obama's Speech on Race", *The New York Times.*

possible interpretation of this disparity may be that many whites are unaware of the ways in which our social structural relations are organized in ways that continue to adversely affect the life chances of people of color in the United States, especially black people. Scholar activist Tim Wise (2008) also argues that many whites continue to deny the salience of racism as a social problem. Wise identifies four major ways through which whites deny the significance of racism which include minimizing acts/effects of discrimination, rationalizing or justifying the problem of racism, deflecting responsibility and blaming the "cultural inferiority" of blacks for their position in society, and finally, whites deny racism by engaging in "competing victimization" and make complaints of "reverse racism" (Wise 2008).

While whites' denial of racism as a social problem perpetuates contemporary racism, there have been and are many white people who have actively opposed and worked to end racism. In the tradition of American abolitionists like John Brown, there is a legacy of antiracism among whites that has been essential for contesting racism. In their demand for the dismantling of racism, antiracist whites have chosen resistance, protest, and agitation over collaboration, silence, and complacency (Wise 2008: 355). I define antiracist whites as white people who challenge racism through praxis by bridging their theoretical commitments to antiracism with activism that aims to disrupt systems of racial subordination and privilege. As Malcolm X astutely pointed out, the allegiance of antiracist whites is essential in dismantling institutional racism.

White antiracism played a significant role in the US Civil Rights Movement. Brown v. Board of Education is the legal decision that ended legal segregation in all public institutions. Legally sanctioned racial integration was viewed as central to reducing whites' racial hostility and promoting the idea of antiracism among whites. The effect of the end of legal segregation was that people of different racial groups would be permitted to attend the same schools, ride on the same public buses, and live in a de-segregated public sphere (Tatum 2007). The scientific research that supported the NAACP case against legal segregation suggested that segregation itself created psychological harms for black children. A racially integrated society in which people of different racial groups could live together would not only begin to repair these harms done to black youth, but would also potentially yield more tolerant attitudes

and behaviors toward racial minorities among whites (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). This idea became known as the racial contact hypothesis: that racially integrated forms of contact between previously segregated racial groups could serve to help racist whites overcome their racial biases and improve the well-being of racially subordinate groups.

In our current racial context, many public institutions like schools and prisons are increasingly becoming re-segregated, a reality that threatens to undermine white racial awareness[2] and the potential for whites to commit to antiracism. Thomas Sugrue (2010) highlights the most compelling disparities that continue to persist between blacks and whites. Whites still fare better than blacks in areas of income, employment, education, residence, health, and wealth despite popular rhetoric that convinces most whites that institutionalized racism is a thing of the past. As new conditions of racial segregation and inequality emerge in the United States, it is increasingly imperative that we consider which factors lead some whites to object to these trends and commit to antiracism. If whites' antiracism is a direct result of increased racial integration, policies that threaten to isolate whites from other racial groups represent a serious challenge to white antiracism. For instance, the state of Arizona recently banned ethnic studies programs in public schools which stands to limit the ways in which whites may become more race aware. Concerning the list of banned Chicano scholars, a nineteen year old white student describes why being one of three white students in an ethnic studies course was invaluable to her educational experience, "I took the classes because I was constantly hearing from the same white male authors...I thought, 'there has to be more'" (Feldman 2012). Indeed there is more, but recent educational policies inspired by the ensuing backlash against apparent racial progress threaten to further isolate whites from people of color, both physically and psychically. In order to resist racism it is essential that whites commit to antiracism that moves beyond simply supporting the premises of racial equality nominally by actively engaging in

[2] Tatum (2007:14) found that, "For both Whites and Blacks, the likelihood of having either a multiracial social network of acquaintances or at least one close interracial friendship was linked to the experience of attending racially mixed schools in childhood." If having a close friend of another race is essential for whites to commit to antiracism and the re-segregation of public schools seriously hinders the number and quality of interracial friendships that whites have, it is essential that we interrupt this process and demand that Brown v. Board of Education be properly implemented.

efforts that legitimately challenge discriminatory attitudes, behaviors and institutional policies. Awareness of racism and inequality are not enough to qualify one as antiracist because silence around and complicity with the premises of racism are futile for dismantling the ideas and structures that reproduce systemic racism. Understanding how young whites become antiracist in the context of re-segregation and colorblindness is necessary for enriching sociological knowledge about racism and expanding transformative efforts that work to undermine racism. The primary research question guiding this project is, what is the relationship between the degree of racial integration and antiracism among young white adults? In other words, how does the quantity and quality of whites' social relationships with black people impact their commitment to antiracism?

2 THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Understanding American Racism

Contemporary race relations in the United States are complicated and have their roots tangled in the manner by which this nation was founded. In order to grasp the complexities of US race relations and to distinguish the features of white antiracism it is essential to have a socio historical context for American racism. In this section I will review the development, manifestations, and implications of racism in the United States as conceptualized by race scholarship. The United States was created largely with an investment in white supremacist logic that utilized imperialism and colonization to subordinate people of color to Western European whites (Wingfield and Feagin 2009). While progress that has been made in way of civil rights should not be devalued, today, nearly sixty years after the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), we still remain confronted with the legacy of enslavement and Jim Crow segregation (Tatum 2007). Though not as easily identifiable as in the era prior to the CRM, racism continues to permeate this society and racial inequality, particularly between whites and blacks, persists (Korgen 2002; Brown et al 2003; Childs 2005).

At the center of our fractured and schizophrenic racial relations is the lack of a consensual definition of modern racism (Doane 2006). Competing understandings of historical and contemporary forms of racism contribute to what Korgen (2002:xii) refers to as the "racial divide" between whites and blacks. Drawing on Du Bois' classic formulation that the problem of the twentieth century is "the problem of the color line" (Du Bois 1903: 54), Korgen (2002) argues that this racial divide is a socially constructed separation that relegates most whites and blacks to separate social and political worlds. Although a prominent feature of our society today, this racial divide is not simply a contemporary phenomenon. In fact, Martin Luther King Jr. (1968:8) drew attention to the evolution of this pattern and argued that when it comes to whites and blacks, "There is not even a common language when the term 'equality' is used. Negro and white have a fundamentally different definition." Research conducted by Sigelman and Welch (1993) illustrates how this divide impacts interpersonal relationships between whites

and blacks. They found that blacks tend to be less optimistic about the possibility of forging meaningful relationships with whites, while whites are less critical of the potential turmoil that such relations could conjure. Essentially, the researchers found that blacks were more likely to perceive white/black interracial relationships as problematic whereas whites, largely operating under the assumption that racism is no longer an issue in need of reparation, view these relationships as smooth and compatible (Siegelman and Welch 1993).

An understanding of the status of contemporary American race relations requires consideration of both the micro and macro levels of racism. Micro level or individual instances of racism typically consist of overtly racist acts carried out by one person or small groups of people who are easily identifiable as the perpetrators of said acts. Macro level racism is thought to be more institutional or systemic[3] which makes identifying the causes of racism a difficult sociological problem. Carmichael and Hamilton (1967:4) defined the distinction between individual and institutional racisms in the following manner,

> When white terrorists bomb a black church and kill five black children, that is an act of individual racism, widely deplored by most segments of the society. But when in that same city-Birmingham, Alabama-five hundred black babies dies each year because of the lack of proper food, shelter and medical facilities, and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally and intellectually because of conditions of poverty and discrimination in the black community, that is a function of institutional racism.

Distinguishing between manifestations of individual and institutional racism is also important for understanding how each form of racism functions. Overt examples of racism, such as the brutal lynching of James Byrd in 1998, are not typically challenged as constituting racist acts to the extent that institutional forms of racism are contested, but still speak very much to the claim that racism is in fact an easily identifiable occurrence in this society. For instance, the FBI indicates that in 2009 there were approximately four thousand reported hate crime victims in the United States. Out of those whom crimes

[3] Wingfield and Feagin (2009:7) explain the nature of racism from a critical perspective, "...the systemic racism perspective developed by Joe Feagin and his colleagues suggests that white racism is not an incidental part of this society, but is endemic and foundational. It is much more than an undesirable component of an otherwise healthy whole. Building on the work of visionary research and activism of earlier black intellectuals like W.E.B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Charles Hamilton, Stokely Carmichael, and Oliver Cromwell Cox, these systemic racism theorists argue that white-on-black oppression and inequality were built into the foundation of this society in the 17th century and have been manifested for centuries in its basic institutions-including the legal and political system, the mass media, the educational institutions, the labor market, and other economic institutions."

were committed against, 71.5 % were black (FBI Hate Crime Statistics 2009). Institutional racisms are not as blatant and generally do not elicit public outrage or widespread demands for racial justice. Recent predatory financial lending schemes are a relevant example of how institutional racism functions today (Squires 2005). In short, predatory lenders take advantage of the overall lower socioeconomic status of blacks and offer those with lower credit scores financial loans at unmanageable interest rates so that, in many cases, the borrower ends up defaulting on the loan; but this does not typically garner public sympathy because in our individualistic, self-reliant culture it appears as though the loanee defaulted because of a lack of responsibility. In the case of predatory mortgage lending, this can have devastating effects[4]. The described levels of racism have qualitatively different methods by which they operate, but both serve to further the racial subordination of blacks to whites.

Some race scholars have argued that it may be more effective to think about micro and macro levels of racism operating along a continuum because differentiating between these two levels of society potentially removes the individual actor from their role in perpetuating racism at the institutional level (Essed 1991). Furthermore, this reduces the issue of what critical race scholars (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967; Essed 1991; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bell 2005; Doane 2006; Feagin 2006) consider to be institutional racism to an individual problem, more closely linked to a character flaw of bigotry, rather than considering racism to also be a product of and intertwined in how our institutionalized social relations are organized. Essed (1991:28) explains, "To understand the specific nature of contemporary racism, it is necessary to proceed from the level of individual attitudes to the larger economic, political, and ideological processes in society." Approaching racism in this way allows for a more holistic understanding of how individuals' attitudes shape and are shaped by our social institutions, which also explains how white supremacist ideology has become taken for granted in our society.

The literal and figurative divide that fundamentally separates whites and blacks from one another indicates that the conceptual debate about racism is not simply an issue of semantics, rather such

[4] For a thorough explanation of predatory lending and how it arguably constitutes the new/reverse form of "redlining" see Squires, Gregory D. 2005. "Predatory Lending: Redlining in Reverse."

contestations reflect that whites and blacks hold radically antithetical views of the U.S. racial order (Doane 2006). The dominant racial frame[5] that whites adhere to has supported the emergence of a new form of racism referred to as "colorblind" ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2003). The concept colorblindness generally evokes images of a society in which racial equality has been achieved because in such a society, ideally speaking, we would be "blind" to race because it would no longer qualify as the basis for any kind of categorical distinction. The prevalence of this colorblind ideology allows whites to claim that they do not see race while arguing that people should not be judged by the color of their skin, and as such race should not be a prevention or consideration for employment, housing, education, etc. Theoretically, a commitment to colorblindness in which no one would notice or talk about race seems desirable, however it is most often quite problematic.[6] For instance, attitudinal survey research has consistently demonstrated that whites readily embrace an antiracist identity by claiming, for example, that race should not prevent anyone from having access to high quality education; however, a disconnect emerges when those same whites report that they would oppose measures that would equally distribute property taxes (which primarily fund public schools) throughout their county (Doane 2006).

Critics (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Doane 2006) of this ideology assert that colorblindness is actually an increasingly covert form of racism because it encourages whites to ignore the gamut of privileges that they are afforded over people of color. Subscribing to colorblind racism essentially allows whites to support the tenets of racial equality in theory while opposing any race-based initiatives aimed at reducing institutionalized racial inequality. The colorblind paradigm not only permits, but encourages whites to deny and ignore the significance of our socially constructed racial relations, thereby perpetuating racism because something (i.e. racism) that does not exist does not have to be changed or be made to go away (hooks 1995). At once whites are able to appear as antiracist supporters of equality while simultaneously

[5] Feagin (2010:ix) defines the dominant, white racial frame as "...the broad, persisting, and dominant racial frame that has rationalized racial oppression and inequality and thus impacted all U.S. institutions."

[6] Colorblind racism is typically expressed through language and allows whites to minimize, deny, and ignore the realities of contemporary racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003). However, Lamont and Fleming (2005) urge researchers to be cognizant of the class dynamics of language and to not prematurely equate all colorblind language with racism because lower and working class antiracist whites often express their commitments through 'common humanity' language like 'color me human' for example.

upholding and reinforcing a racist ideology that further contributes to the racial divide between whites and blacks.

Silence and complicity among whites also sustains racism (Childs 2005; Trepagnier 2010). Research focused on white women who identify as being against racism shows that "well meaning"[7] whites who, according to the researcher, would be classified as colorblind racists also perpetuate racism by, for example, not intervening when someone tells a racist joke for fear of social isolation (Trepagnier 2010). This may not seem comparable to an act of physical violence incited by racial hatred, but everyday acts of racism (Essed 1991) allow institutionalized racism to remain a prominent feature of our social world (Doane 2006). Refusal to act or intervene in the more common, subtle forms of racism is cited as one of the most profound contributors to the persistence of the white/black racial divide in the United States (hooks 1995; Childs 2005; Tatum 2007; Trepagnier 2010). The increasingly covert nature of racism demands that we approach the issue of racism in an effectively different manner, in a way that works toward bridging our racial divisions.

2.2 The Racial Contact Hypothesis

The racial contact hypothesis is among the most influential theories in sociological studies of race and racism and is central to the research question guiding this project. Upon defining the key features of the racial contact hypothesis and discussing the implications of its implementation, I review several recent empirical studies that test this hypothesis. Finally, I evaluate this review in the context of this thesis project. Initially proposed by Gordon Allport, the racial contact hypothesis (1954) suggests that increasing racial integration among whites and blacks potentially reduces levels of white prejudice and discrimination (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998; Dixon 2006; Tatum 2007; Shook and Fazio 2008; Rude and Herda 2010). The basic premise of this theory is that racial prejudice (individual racism) results from

[7] While discussing who she deems to be "well-meaning whites" Trepagnier (2010:1) argues that, "...the racist thoughts, images, and assumptions in the minds of white people, including those that by most accounts are 'not racist'-is dangerous precisely because it is perceived as harmless. The silent racism in people's thoughts, images, and assumptions-no matter how subtle they are-will produce behavior that reflects racist thoughts, images, and assumptions."

a lack of knowledge about racial groups other than one's own group. The central implication of this hypothesis is that as a result of increased exposure to and interaction with blacks, whites will be dispelled of the racist sentiments that they harbor. Interracial contact theory provided the basis for Brown v. Board of Education (1954). While increased integration in schools and neighborhoods may provide more opportunity for interracial contact and reduced prejudice among whites, Bell (2005) analyzes the pivotal legal decision of Brown v. Board of Education (1954) from a critical perspective and argues that in seeming moments of progress there are always moments of retrenchment. Since Brown v. Board of Education (1954) the overall disparities in life chances between whites and blacks has seen little, if any improvement and simply integrating schools without a deeper commitment to alter the racist structure of our legal, and other social institutions is futile (Bell 2005).

The racial contact hypothesis does acknowledge that laissez-faire approaches to integration may not be as successful in reducing whites' prejudice as interracial contact that occurs under certain appropriate and optimal conditions[8] (Allport 1954). Numerous research studies[9] (Sigelman and Welch 1993; Pettigrew 1998; Dovidio and Glick 2005; Dixon 2006; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008; Shook and Fazio 2008; Rude and Herda 2010) that have tested the contact hypothesis suggest that interracial contact can indeed serve to reduce whites' prejudicial feelings toward people of color. This issue is particularly pertinent now because neighborhoods and schools are increasingly becoming re-segregated (Tatum 2007) which has serious implications for a society that professes to be unwavering in its commitment to the democratic ideals of equality.[10] bell hooks (1995:224) contends that so long as we structure our lives in a segregated manner or, "...in a state of psychic social apartheid, racism will not change." As white America engages in practices that perpetuate segregation, the potential for meaningful interracial

[8] Equal status, common goals, intimacy, and friendship between whites and blacks are among the optimal conditions that Shook and Fazio (2008) describe.

[9] Pettigrew and Tropp (2008:922) report that, "Recent years have witnessed a renewal of interest in intergroup contact theory. A meta-analysis of more than 500 studies established the theory's basic contention that intergroup contact typically reduces prejudices of many types."

[10] Tatum (2007) explains that public school racial resegregation is linked to socioeconomic factors and warns that neighborhood and school resegregation threatens to isolate Black and Latino students from same race teachers and administration and subject them to a substandard education with limited resources for achieving success.

interactions significantly declines (Tatum 2007). In relation to their own lived experiences, interracial relationships could potentially provide space for whites to have to consider how race shapes the lives of their black friends or partners (Korgen 2002).

Empirical studies that test the racial contact hypothesis generally support its main contention, however, particular researchers draw varying conclusions concerning the quality of contact that is needed to reduce whites' prejudicial attitudes and behaviors. During a two year study of interracial roommate relationships on a college campus Shook and Fazio (2008) found evidence supporting the racial contact hypothesis despite the fact that whites reported being least satisfied with their roommate assignment when paired with those outside of their racial group[11]. Although these whites reported a preference for intraracial roommate assignments, their racial attitudes and anxiety about other racial groups improved, whereas whites who shared a dorm with other whites did not experience lessened anxiety about people of color (Shook and Fazio 2008). Sigelman and Welch (1993) drew conflicting conclusions about the viability of the contact hypothesis as they found that increased contact did not always necessarily lead whites to have a more positive outlook on race relations. While less than half of the coefficients used to measure improved attitudes were statistically significant, among the most significant indicators were interracial friendships and interracial contact that occurred in a neighborhood setting (Sigelman and Welch 1993). The previous finding is compelling considering Feagin and O'Brien's (2003:32) discussion concerning the linkage between racial residential segregation and knowledge, "Residential segregation has created, and continues to create to the present day, a situation of lack of contact–which...means a certain ignorance of people of other cultural backgrounds." Perhaps there is great potential for the racial contact hypothesis to come to fruition for those whites residing near or with those outside of their racial group.

[11] Shook and Fazio (2008:720) used the following criteria to measure whites' racial attitudes toward roommate assignments: "Satisfaction with roommate; Joint activity with roommate; Time spent with roommate- In room, Outside room; Involvement between participant's and roommate's social networks; Participant's comfort with roommate's friends; Roommate's comfort with participant's friends."

Evaluating findings from recent research helps to clarify why support for the contact hypothesis seems to be weak or inconsistent at times. Korgen's (2002) research on interracial friendship groups indicates that even when increased integration does not lead whites to commit to antiracism, whites' friendships with blacks positively affect their racial attitudes. One of Korgen's white respondents, Devin, offers the following account of the impact that his interracial friendship has had, "I think [my friendship with Joe has influenced my views on race], actually...I used to think that just because someone had a different color skin, they were, you know, that they were like a criminal or whatever...And then it was like, 'What was I thinking? What was wrong with me?" (Korgen 2002:68). A study conducted by Rude and Herda (2010) utilized two waves of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to assess the stability of interracial friendships compared with same race friendships and found that interracial friendships dissipate more quickly and did not exhibit the same level of closeness that intraracial friendships did. Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 515 intergroup contact studies using indicators categorized as Knowledge, Anxiety, and Empathy to assess the mediation process of reducing whites' prejudicial attitudes. Their findings indicate that, "There may be a causal sequence operating whereby initial anxiety must be reduced with intergroup contact before increased empathy, perspective taking, and knowledge of the outgroup can effectively contribute to prejudice reduction" (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008:929). Taken together, the implications of previous research suggest that future studies should deliberately control for the quality and type of interracial contact that occurs between whites and people of color.

The debates within the racial contact hypothesis literature do not resolve the question of which factors may be most important in leading whites to critically engage in antiracist practices, however racial contact hypothesis studies have consistently found that increased interaction between whites and blacks most often leads members of these respective racial groups to develop more positive feelings about members of other racial groups. Evidence suggests that the quality of interracial contacts and relationships that whites have with blacks may shape whether or not whites' racial attitudes improve as a result of interracial contact (Pettigrew 1998; Rude and Herda 2010). Whites may not necessarily need to

have close relationships with blacks prior to making a commitment to an antiracism, but such relationships may not reach their full potential if whites do not become "...conscious of the ways that unexamined power and privilege could impede the development of such friendships" (Tatum 2007:101). Tatum's (2007) assertion is supported by the findings from Rude and Herda's (2010) research indicating that interracial friendships experience instability because there is a lack of reciprocity and closeness. Dixon (2006) suggests that future studies conducted by those seeking to add nuance to the race relations paradigm should more closely examine the quality and endurance of interracial friendships in order to produce more exhaustive research that test the contact hypothesis. Moreover, it is not clear however if reducing biases through increasing interracial contact is sufficient for dismantling the deeply pervasive forms of institutional racism.

2.3 Whiteness Studies and Antiracism

Within the field of racial studies there is a new body of scholarship that examines white antiracism[12] specifically and asks what motivates white people to recognize and fight against racism. Just as there are varying definitions of racism, scholars and activists collectively conceptualize antiracism in broad terms. Because conceptualizations of antiracism vary, it is important to account for which factors lead whites to embrace the multiple forms of antiracism. In this section, I review recent scholarship on white antiracism by focusing on what we know about the reasons white people cite for becoming antiracist. Aptheker (1993) found that among whites it has typically been women and lower or working class individuals who have committed to antiracism. Supporting the idea that antiracist motivations can be stratified according to gender, Feagin and Vera (1995) posit that white women may be more inclined to sympathize with blacks' subordinate status because of the sexism they face in a patriarchal society. Indeed, Feagin and O'Brien (2003) also find that men are less likely to cite empathetic motivations for becoming antiracist. McAdam's (1988) CRM research highlights the important role that social

[12] O'Brien (2009:501) defines antiracism as "Any theory or practice (personal or political) that seeks to challenge, reduce, or eliminate manifestations of racism in society."

networking played in the movement as the majority of whites' involvement is traceable to other activist organizations and church groups.

Eileen O'Brien (2001; 2009) in particular has documented an array of motivations that have led whites to embrace antiracism. O'Brien's (2001) research on the motivations of white antiracists shows that whites included in her study were inspired to commit to antiracism because of having knowledge of or being witness to an incident in which one of their black friends was the victim of an act of racial discrimination, while others credited an influential college class, book, song, or lecture with raising their awareness of racism as an urgent social problem. O'Brien and Korgen's (2007) research exploring the effect of colorblind racism on the contact hypothesis suggests that there may increasingly be limited potential for interracial friendships to raise one's awareness of racism, which is also supported by O'Brien's (2001) research in which only about one third of the antiracist whites in her sample became antiracist because of a friendship with someone of another race. The racial contact hypothesis suggests that increased integration will reduce whites' prejudice, but because the dominant colorblind ideology insists that we should not "see" or talk about race, there is increasingly less potential for critical dialogue to occur in interracial friendship groups (O'Brien and Korgen 2007).

Whiteness scholars have emphasized understanding the linkages between white racial identities, white privilege and antiracism. In response to the white backlash that followed the civil rights gains of the mid-1960s, King warned that "rationalization and the incessant search for scapegoats are the psychological cataracts that blind us to our individual and collective sins" (King 1968: 71). In order to embrace antiracism, whites must recognize their unearned position at the top of America's racial hierarchy, identify that their advantages have been conferred on them by virtue of their whiteness and resist the temptation to passively benefit from their advantaged position by actively working toward racial equality (Katz 2003; Wise 2008). In her handbook for antiracism training Katz (2003) stresses that antiracist whites must not only understand how racism developed and functions in our society, but utilize their racial power to effect justice in our racist social order. Among the required commitments listed for whites to combat racism the overarching obligations are, "Educating family members and close friends;

Raising issues with colleagues at work; Acting as a race role model, questioning the white power structure; Speaking up when seeing behaviors or hearing statements that are racist" (Katz 2003: 186). O'Brien (2003:505) defines whites who engage with issues of power and privilege as "reflexively race cognizant antiracists" who invest a significant amount of time and energy "analyzing their personal relationships and how they can reduce the racism they may unintentionally perpetuate in those relationships, both intraracial and interracial." Tatum (2007:37) explains her definition of white antiracism and also emphasizes the internal personal and interpersonal work that whites must engage in to be more critically antiracist:

> Ideally, we should each be able to embrace all of who we are, and to recognize that in a society where race is still meaningful and where Whiteness is still a source of power and privilege, that it is possible to resist being in the role of dominator, or 'oppressor,' and to become genuinely antiracist in one's White identity, and to actively work against systems of injustice and unearned privilege. It is possible to claim both one's Whiteness as a part of who one is and of one's daily experience, and the identity of what I like to call a 'White ally': namely, a White person who understands that it is possible to use one's privilege to create more equitable systems...

Engaging in critical dialogue is a central component of resistance in antiracist work. Scholars and activists (hooks 1195; Korgen 2002; Childs 2005; Tatum 2007; Walsh 2007; Tochluk 2010; Trepagnier 2010) insist that critical dialogue about racism among whites and between whites and blacks must occur if we are to ever witness a fundamental shift in our racial relations.

In her research of close black/white friendships Korgen (2002) takes note of a ten year old who expressed a desire to expand their social network to include more people of different races because they interpreted interracial problems and division as being attributable to the fact that people of different races rarely interact beyond a superficial level and do not take the time to meaningfully get to know one another. hooks (1995:224) adds, "If White and Black women were collectively working to change society so that we could know one another better and be able to offer acknowledgement and respect, then we would be playing a major role in ending racism." Tatum (2007) poses the following question, "Can Whites and Blacks move beyond the inherited inequality embedded in our shared history to forge...authentic relational connections?" Tatum's contention, along with hooks (1995), Childs (2005), and Trepagnier (2010) is that this is possible so long as we, as a society and in our interpersonal

relationships, are willing to critically discuss and deconstruct both the historical and contemporary realities of race relations in the United States. Tatum (2007:104) argues that the key to creating a successful foundation in interracial friendships is to organize opportunities for critical dialogue, "We, whether White or of color, need to deepen our understanding of the systemic nature of racism, its impact on each of us, and how to interrupt it...such a shared understanding...creates common ground for the cultivation of friendship." According to this philosophy, one does not need to be a member of an organization that combats blatant forms of racism such as police brutality in order to be considered an antiracist activist so long as measures are taken to reduce the amount of racism that one perpetuates.

Personal and interpersonal antiracist work may in fact be considered more radical in nature because white antiracist groups that target police brutality tend to define racism as something external to themselves which results in their neglect of the kind of reflexive work that O'Brien (2001) describes as essential to being critically antiracist. hooks (1995) explains that self-identified race traitor Mab Segrest and one of her closest friends, a black woman, strengthen and maintain their friendship by engaging in dialogue about racism, what it means for their lives and how it affects their friendship. Tatum (2007) describes a similar strategy that she and one of her longtime white friends have engaged in, which requires both women to internally assess and understand their racial identities. According to Trepagnier (2010) it is essential that whites have genuine and deliberate conversations about race in order to fully commit to antiracism. The perspectives of those who advocate critical dialogue practices (hooks 1995; Katz 2003; Tatum 2007; Tochluk 2010; Trepagnier 2010) suggest that it is imperative for whites interrogate the significance of race in both their interracial and intraracial relationships in order to transform our social relations.

Recall the primary research question guiding this project: how does the quantity and quality of whites' social relationships with black people impact their commitment to antiracism? I will use the main ideas from the extent research on the racial contact hypothesis and white antiracism to help analyze this question in a theoretical context grounded in an understanding of American racism. In the next section, I outline the research methodology that I will use to collect data relative to my guiding question.

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach that I employed for this project is based in feminist qualitative methods. Qualitative research methodologies are most appropriate for understanding and representing the lived experiences of individuals or groups as well as for understanding how particular people and groups interact with and interpret the meaning of their own lived experiences (Rapley 2007). Feminist methodologies are distinguished for attempting to unearth "subjugated knowledges and diversity" (Hesse-Biber 2006: 113) in marginalized people's lives as well as for connecting theory to action (praxis) for the pursuit of social justice. Because I was not necessarily concerned with generating generalizable knowledge, but with eliciting a deeper understanding of the ways in which young white adults interpret and react to racism, qualitative methods were well suited to answer my research questions.

3.1 Sampling Frame

Antiracist white students were the target population for this study, therefore I used a purposive sampling frame to identify and recruit study participants. I targeted students at Georgia State University who self-identified as white and as antiracist and utilized several recruitment strategies for this study. I posted fliers in approximately ten buildings around campus, contacted "progressive" student organizations and social clubs, distributed fliers to faculty who were teaching courses in the College of Arts and Sciences, and made attempts to recruit directly from classes across disciplines in the College of Arts and Sciences. I received a disproportionate response rate from the Sociology department, representing eight of my respondents' majors.

3.2 Interview Considerations and Technique

Focus groups are oftentimes the preferred mode of observation when researchers seek to reach participants who may typically comprise a marginalized group in society (Hesse-Biber 2006). While white peoples' location in the racial hierarchy prevent them from representing a disenfranchised racial group, it is likely that they may have previously been or will presently be ambivalent about discussing

racism because the dominant colorblind ideology calls for silence around issues relating to race. Moreover, whites in this society are generally socialized to ignore the significant social and political meaning of our racial relations and to deny any implications that race may have in anyone's life, including their own (Wise 2008). As such, "The kind of group interaction and multivocal narrative that occurs within focus group interviews appeals to feminist researchers interested in unearthing subjugated knowledge" (Leavy, 2006, p.173). White racial awareness or white knowledge and understanding of racism can be characterized as subjugated knowledge–located on the peripheries of the mainstream–because, again, conversations centered on raising awareness about racism and discrimination as social problems are often discouraged or silenced altogether.

Because this study is issue-oriented the in-depth and semi-structured interview approach is especially useful for gaining specific information (Hesse-Biber 2006) from the participants in this research study. Qualitative methods are most appropriate for gaining insight into people's motivations and meanings and this occurs most effectively when the style of the interview is more like a natural conversation (Rubin and Rubin 2005). The semi-structured interview format is most conducive to a natural conversation and was appropriate for this study because there were a few over-arching specific concepts and questions that needed to be addressed during the interviews, but the order was not necessarily important (Hesse-Biber 2006).

Feminist researchers (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006) have legitimized the practice of stratifying focus group interviews by gender when sensitive or controversial subjects are the topic of inquiry, as evidence shows that women and gender non-conforming folks may feel more comfortable and willing to discuss matters with those whom they feel can empathize with their position. This practice of separating groups based on exclusive criteria is known as segmentation and allows for researchers to take advantage of the homogeneity of a particular group setting by, for instance, comparing how white men and women come to self-identify as antiracist. For the purposes of this study it was not necessary for the focus group interviews to be segmented based on gender because previous researchers interrogating the subject of racism (Feagin and Vera 1995; Feagin and O'Brien 2002) have segmented their interviews according to

gender and have found noteworthy differences in the means by which women and men report initially taking notice of racial issues. Additionally, segmentation is a useful strategy when one studies a historically marginalized group and while white antiracists have been discouraged and even harmed physically at times, they have never comprised an oppressed *racial* group and the issues central to this research project do not center on the victimization of whites.

Following approval from the University's Institutional Review Board, I interviewed a total of eleven respondents, seven females and four males. I conducted three focus group interviews, two of which were comprised of three respondents, and the remaining was comprised of two respondents. The focus groups were scheduled according to the response rate of the participants. As such, two of the focus group interviews consisted of two females and one male each, while the remaining focus group consisted of two females. Additionally, I conducted three one-on-one interviews with participants who had scheduling conflicts with the designated focus group interview sessions. Each of the interviews occurred on Georgia State's downtown campus and the duration ranged from one hour to two hours. After consent to participate forms were signed and the potential risks/benefits of participation were explained, interviews were audio-recorded with an Apple i-Phone. Measures have been taken to guarantee the participants' confidentiality by assigning pseudonyms to each person involved in the study.

I facilitate each of the focus groups and individual interviews utilizing a semi-structured interview approach and asked a series of questions aimed to generate responses to the three broad themes that encompass the scope of this thesis project. While I brought an interview guide (see appendix A) to each interview, I did not adhere strictly to the ordering of the questionnaire as the conversation was not necessarily intended to be linear. The interview guide basically ensured that I would remember to address each of the major content areas.

3.3 Coding Procedures and Data Analysis

Several content areas inform my questionnaire (see appendix A for interview guide.) First, I was concerned with assessing the degree of race awareness that each participant has because this is necessary

for analyzing the link between the respondents' level of antiracism and the quantity and quality of interracial relationships that they have had. Whether the relationships were platonic, romantic, or familial it is important to elicit information regarding the duration and stability of previous and or current relationships. Finally, I gained further insight into the details of the participants' identification and engagement with antiracism and the temporal connection with their interracial relationships. In other words, I analyzed the relationships between the respondents' level of race awareness and when and why they began to identify as antiracist. Within the current field of racial studies scholarship there exists a dichotomous debate as to whether white racial awareness is a prerequisite for the success of interracial relationships, or if interracial relationships initiate whites' involvement in antiracist work. This research project explores and offers unique insight into these contentions.

After consulting relevant literature in the field of race studies, I operationalized the central content areas informing this research study. I constructed an interview guide containing nine questions, with a total of seventeen sub-questions. The interview guide consists of a combination of interview questions designed to measure each dimension of the content areas informed by my overarching research question. The first major content area is concerned with the respondents' quality of interracial relationships. Critical scholars such as Beverly Daniel Tatum (2007) suggest that an authentic or genuine interracial relationship exists if the parties involved are able to be open and honest about the state of race relations and racism. In order to assess the extent to which respondents had been engaged in genuine interracial relationships and, or, dialogue, I asked directly about the types of racial contact participants had experienced and about the messages regarding race issues they were exposed to in their family as well as in school. Additionally, I asked if participants had ever engaged in racist behavior, if they had any past or present relationships with people of color, if and how they distinguished between their relationships with white people and people of color, and when they had first begun to question race relations in their life. These questions allowed me to assess the authenticity of participants' interracial relationships, which is identified as a tension in the literature as whites and blacks tend to evaluate the

quality of their interracial relationships differently (Tatum 2007; Rude and Herda 2010). The next content area concerns the quantity or frequency of interracial contact participants have had.

In order to account for the amount of interracial contact respondents have had throughout their lifetimes, I asked broadly about the types and duration of interracial experiences and relationships they had experienced. Additionally, several of the questions contain both qualitative and quantitative dimensions, meaning that they may be measuring more than just one content area. For example, interview question five asks, "With whom do you discuss issues of racism and inequality with most frequently? Why do you think you talk about racism with this person/these people?" Within this two-part question I measure dimensions of both the participants' quantity *and* quality, (or authenticity), of interracial relationships, which is fundamental for answering my central research question.

Upon organizing my respondents' reported instances of interracial contact into the code category "quantity of contact," I refined this code category into "frequency of contact." Based on their reports of interracial experiences, respondents were then assigned to three sub-code categories specifying the respondents' levels of contact–low, moderate, and high. Higher levels of contact represent the respondents who have been fairly consistently immersed in racially diverse spaces (schools, neighborhoods, work, and friendship groups) throughout their lives and currently have multiple relationships with people of color. Moderate levels of contact represent the respondents who have attended racially integrated schools and/or lived in racially integrated neighborhoods, worked with people of color, and those who have experienced multiple interracial relationships throughout their lives, but may not currently have many interracial contacts. Lower levels of contact represent the respondents who reported attending schools that were not racially integrated and/or lived in predominantly white areas, as well as those who reported the fewest number of interracial relationships. Of course, these measurements are relative to my sample, so what represents low contact for my respondents could represent high contact for others. The final content area is concerned with the level of race awareness a participant has.

In order to assess my participants' association with antiracism, I asked a series of questions designed to evaluate each respondent's personal definition of racism, and subsequently analyzed their

responses in accordance with the type of attitudes and behaviors deemed by critical race scholars to be in service of racism. Specifically, I asked a multi-part question about the respondents' potential reaction to situations involving race and racism, including racist jokes and racial slurs, interracial marriage among family members and friends, the reality of public school re-segregation, and the racial disparities of mass incarceration. I also asked respondents to evaluate the significance of their interracial relationships in determining their commitment to antiracist activism. Finally, I asked each respondent about how they view their role in dismantling racism broadly. The combined effect of asking these particular questions and juxtaposing the responses with academically sanctioned knowledge allowed me to gain a nuanced understanding of how the young whites in this study interpret and subsequently enact their antiracist activism.

The primary analysis technique that I utilized is based on the content analysis of the transcription of the recorded focus group and individual interviews. Upon transcribing each of the interviews according to the temporal order in which they initially occurred, I began a structured coding process of the ninety pages of raw data produced from the interviews. Analyzing text in this manner is theory driven and allowed for several sub-themes to emerge that were relevant to my overarching research question. I did not construct analytic codes prior to the analysis; rather my analysis was guided by three broad themes that encompass the scope of this thesis project.

The three general themes that are central to this project are: The quantity and quality of interracial relationships; identification and definitions of antiracism; and engagement with antiracist activism. After reading through the entire document of transcribed interviews, I constructed analytic codes according to the three broad themes guiding this project. I continued rigorously analyzing the data until all relevant and significant results had been identified. This process allowed for several sub-themes to emerge from the data, which were refined and constructed into sub-code categories. I did not complete the coding process until I exhausted the data of all major themes and sub-themes which were later constructed into code categories that ultimately allowed me to make sense of the data and answer my research question.

Furthermore, I analyzed respondents' statements, and more specifically the responses related to the questions informed by the primary content areas that constitute the interview guide, in accordance with what previous researchers have established in the relevant literature. For instance, in determining the level of race awareness that a respondent reports, regardless of how they self-identified, I consulted the scholarship that has identified and explicated upon the continuum of race awareness to determine exactly where their position aligns. This methodological technique helped to enhance the theoretical validity[13] of my research.

Feminist qualitative researchers also embrace methodological techniques that privilege reflexivity throughout the research process. According to Hesse-Biber (2006), reflexivity is defined as, "Taking a critical look inward and reflecting on one's own lived reality and experiences" (Hesse-Biber 2006:129). Reflexivity is particularly important for understanding the ways in which I, the researcher, may impose assumptions from my lived experience onto the narratives of the participants. The goal of practicing reflexivity is for the researcher to be cognizant of the contextually specific manner in which knowledge is being co-constituted throughout the research process. Practicing reflexivity throughout the entire research process strengthened the interpretive validity of this project by ensuring that I did not impose my perspective onto my participants' understanding of their own lived experience.

Memoing, a strategy of reflexivity that I engaged with throughout each stage of the research process, involves journaling about various issues related to the research project. Understanding one's standpoint is a revelation that can be more effectively understood by way of memoing, or writing down the ways one's social position influences how the self and others are perceived. Each specialized technique is a strategy for remaining reflexive and aware of one's position regarding matters that are discussed during interviews, as well as for when the transcription and analyses of the interviews occur (Hesse-Biber 2006). I found this method to be particularly useful for "making sense" of the data. The

[13] Thomson (2011:79) explains that theoretical validity aims to examine the "...validity of the researcher's concepts and the theorized relationships among the concepts in context with the phenomena. The question that is asked here is has the researcher provided an accurate explanation of the phenomena?"

memos allowed me to organize segments of the data into broad themes that were eventually reconfigured into the final code categories.

4 FINDINGS

Recall that the primary research question guiding this study is what is the relationship between the degree of racial integration and anti-racism among young white adults? The interview data were analyzed according to three major content areas that were operationalized from each element of the research question. Respondents were asked questions that measured their quantity and quality of relationships with people of color. Respondents were also asked questions that captured their views on definitions of and identifications with antiracism. Finally, respondents were asked questions that examined their level of engagement with antiracist activism. In accordance with the previous literature, this sample of self-identified white antiracists reported having different kinds of relationships and varying levels of contact with people of color, and these relationships were related to their definitions of and engagements with antiracism. Several other factors also emerged as important pathways for this group of young white adults' commitments to antiracism. The figure below illustrates the ways in which interracial contact influenced this sample of young whites' affiliations with antiracist activism.

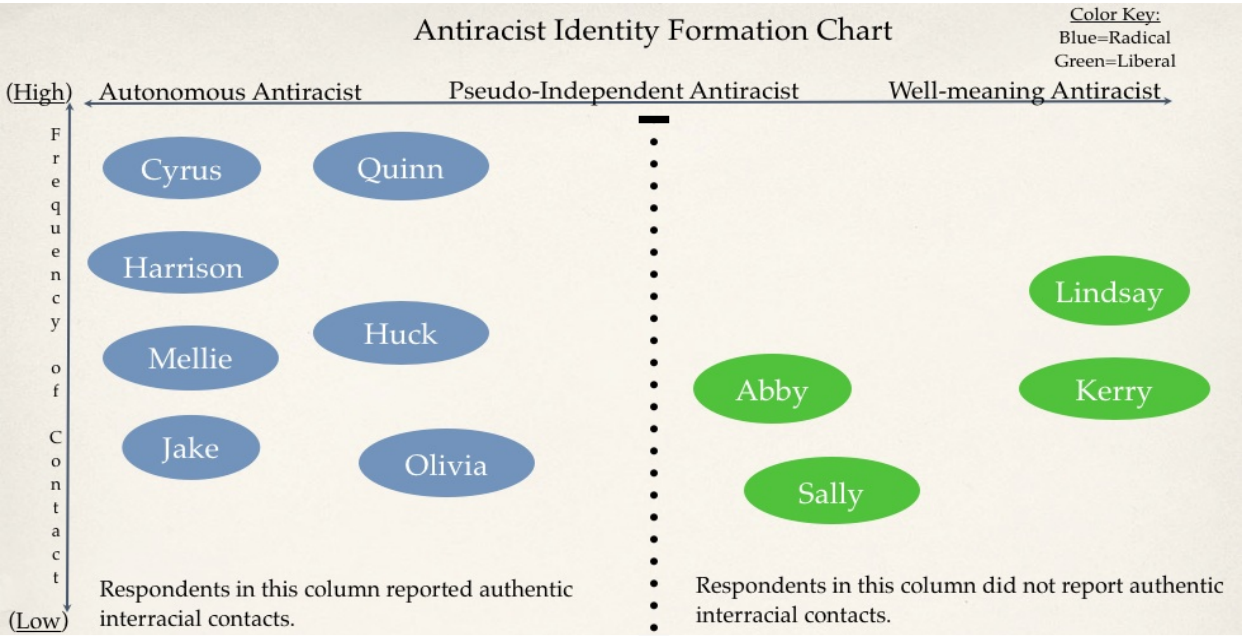

Figure 1.1 Antiracist Identity Formation Chart

Drawing from Eileen O'Brien's (2003) and Barbara Trepagnier's (2010) analyses of White antiracist praxis, I have categorized the white students in my sample along a continuum of antiracist awareness. Autonomous antiracist whites, located on one end of the continuum, are considered to be the most racially aware, or reflexively race cognizant. Pseudo-independent antiracist whites are located in the center of the continuum and are defined as moderately racially aware. On the opposite end of the autonomous antiracist category are the well-meaning antiracist whites who may profess antiracist values while simultaneously perpetuating racism in unintentional ways.

According to Eileen O'Brien's (2003) research, autonomous antiracist whites are able to empathize with people of color in genuine ways, and are also able to extend a level of compassion to other whites who may not be engaged in antiracist work. Harrison, Cyrus, Jake, and Mellie fall into the autonomous antiracist category because they each demonstrated an ability and desire to connect within and across racial lines in their commitment to dismantle white supremacy. Harrison grew up in a racially and ethnically diverse area of Miami, did not identify racially as white until he moved to Georgia at age fourteen, and currently engages in organized antiracist activism across the racial divide. He also emphasized the patience he attempts to maintain when dialoguing with white people, including his sister.

Cyrus received explicitly antiracist messages from his father, attended mostly black primary schools, and engages in various methods of antiracist activism, including organized work and calling out everyday racism among friends and family, specifically. Jake experienced relatively less interracial contact than did Harrison and Cyrus, but his early interracial childhood friendships seem to have laid the foundation for his future commitment to antiracism as he recalled that moving and transitioning out of his conservative "bubble" allowed him to think critically for one of the first times in his life. Although Mellie described the ways in which she felt that the politics of Southern respectability sometimes silenced her, she also reported numerous instances of engaging with and calling out white racism, rather than avoiding it out of fear. She currently has a black female friend with whom she shares accountability for racism with. "In these ways, then, their movement towards empathy with people of color and autonomy with other whites is a direct struggle against white supremacy. It is a struggle to translate a political

commitment (to antiracism) into one's personal relationships–that everyday realm where white supremacy is reproduced," (O'Brien 2001: 256). Each of the four antiracist whites in this category identified politically as radical and experienced at least moderate to high levels of interracial contact.

Five out of eleven respondents (Quinn, Huck, Olivia, Sally, and Abby) fall into the pseudo-independent antiracist white category for various reasons, although Quinn, Huck, and Olivia are located closer to the autonomous antiracist white category, whereas Sally and Abby are proximate to the well-meaning antiracist white category. Quinn has had high levels of interracial contact throughout her lifetime and expressed high levels of racial awareness throughout the interview, yet she also acknowledged the ways in which she continues to struggle with maintaining intra-racial relationships. Olivia also expressed hesitancy in calling out instances of racism, but is seemingly committed to creating safe spaces that foster critical antiracist dialogue. Furthermore, although Olivia has maintained relatively low to moderate levels of interracial contact and even went to integrated schools, she cited a conversation with her black therapist as part of the motivation behind her commitment to the antiracist struggle. On the other hand, Huck has maintained moderate levels of interracial contact and was raised with explicitly anti-racist messages from his family. Interestingly, he discussed in detail the empathy that he has been able to cultivate for other white people, particularly racist white folks, and actually expressed the most difficulty with engaging in interracial dialogue centered on racial issues. These three respondents, like the autonomous antiracist whites, identified politically as radical.

Sally and Abby each maintained low to moderate levels of interracial contact throughout their lives and identified politically as liberal. Abby recalled that being in a relationship with a black classmate during high school caused her to reflect on the state of race relations broadly, but also within the context of her family because her mother and step-father openly and coercively discouraged her from interracial dating. Today Abby is committed to calling out certain instances of racism, but also recalled that she isn't able to have those difficult antiracist conversations with her white family members or white best friend because of the negative emotional reactions associated with such topics. Furthermore, Abby's *close* interracial conversations have largely avoided the topic of racism, which likely undermines the potential

for developing a genuine interracial relationship. She did not discuss racism directly with her black boyfriend or with her black roommates early on in college, which could help to explain her position in the antiracist identity continuum. Sally has experienced heightened levels of race awareness since coming to Georgia State for college and learning about racism through Sociology with black professors and classmates. Despite not being actively engaged in antiracist activism, she emphasized the importance of cultivating critical antiracist awareness within her children through intentional dialogue.

Finally, Lindsay and Kerry fall into the well-meaning antiracist category because they acknowledge the existence of racism, have had relatively close interracial friendships at various points in their lives, and even interrupt instances of everyday racism at times. However, they both expressed sentiment that critical race scholar Richard Delgado (1996) associates with *false empathy* for people of color. False empathy is associated with paternalistic tendencies and often occurs in situations where well-meaning white people unintentionally reinforce racist notions. For instance, when asked about what general steps society needs to take to dismantle racism, Lindsay replied that she was in class with a group of black film majors and she made it a point to tell them not to produce films that portray black people in stereotypical ways. She also lamented the negative attention that sagging one's pants brings to one's community. While these remarks may seem harmless enough, it does suggest that Lindsay is perhaps not as reflexively race cognizant as some of the other respondents who were categorized as autonomously antiracist. Similarly, during her interview, Kerry perpetuated racialized stereotypes about tipping for service while simultaneously acknowledging the rampant racism that is commonplace in the restaurant industry. She rationalized the racism among servers by claiming that overall, certain people, including black people, tip less than the average, presumably white, patron. Rather than identifying racism primarily as a system based on unequal power relations, Lindsay and Kerry also seemed to reduce inequality to the individual level, suggesting that reparations could, in part, be met through behavior modifications.

4.1 Quantity and Quality of Interracial Relationships

Seminal work in the race relations literature within sociology considers certain types of interracial relationships and interactions to be essential for a reduction in whites' racism toward people of color. Frequency and type of interracial contact are not measurements that can be neatly captured, as our experiences throughout the life course, and even in our daily exchanges, are dynamic and fluid. For most respondents, the number and type of interracial relationships they have had has fluctuated throughout their lives. While all of my respondents had relationships with people of color to varying extents, three respondents specifically cite a significant interracial relationship or encounter as the catalyst of their racial awareness.

Four out of eleven of the respondents (Olivia, Abby, Kerry, and Sally) have experienced low to moderate contact, though at times they may have had fairly high levels of contact. Olivia's description of the level of interracial contact she was exposed to throughout her early years in the public school system reflect the degree to which frequency of interracial contact is situational:

> When I first started to go to school, like Kindergarten through second grade it was pretty, mostly white, but there were definitely some black kids and some Latino kids and some Asian kids. And so then when I was in third grade I went to this school and it was mostly white, very few black, very few people of any other race, and so when I left that school in third grade my mom hated that school and I hated that school because all the kids there were spoiled and rich and they kind of looked down on the kids that lived in the neighborhood that I lived in because it wasn't the rich neighborhood and we were getting bussed across town to this other school. So then I went to this other school in fourth grade that was like umm, it wasn't predominantly white so it was probably like half white and the other half was mostly Hispanic, like Puerto Rican, and there was some Asian kids, some black kids, and I don't know, my mom always said that she wanted me to go that school because it was diverse, even though they were overtly racist.

In Olivia's example, we can see that she experienced relatively low interracial contact at school until Fourth grade when she transferred to a school that was much more diverse. In this conversation, Olivia

also attempts to reconcile her mother's desire for her to attend a diverse school with her understanding that both of her parents were overtly racist. Perhaps her mother was more concerned about the apparent lack of socio-economic diversity than the lack of racial diversity at the schools.

Five of the respondents (Lindsay, Huck, Mellie, Harrison, and Jake) experienced relatively stable moderate contact throughout their lives, though they may have had peaks of high contact and episodes of infrequent contact. Jake's description of his childhood friendships resemble Olivia's account in that youth's relationship to their local school system greatly affects the level of interracial contact they may be exposed to:

> Yeah, when I was little there was still some African American families in the neighborhood and they moved out by the time I was like eight, but when I was like Kindergarten age, African American kids, several little girls, I was friends with them and they would come over. But by the time I was in middle school I didn't know any black people...There weren't any in the neighborhood and then I started homeschooling after I went to elementary school. There were very few, there was like one black kid and he was only there for like a year.

Unlike Olivia, Jake experienced close interracial contact much earlier in his life, though it dissipated for a period during his adolescence.

The final two respondents (Cyrus and Quinn) maintained high levels of interracial contact throughout their lives. Quinn provides insight into how she achieved this level of interracial integration in her life, "I mean...my whole life was surrounded by a lot of diversity so I always sought that out after I left home." Cyrus, like several of the other respondents, experienced the majority of his early interracial contact through educational institutions. Cyrus lived in a predominantly black neighborhood as a child and attended the local school system. Like Quinn, Cyrus also maintained high levels of interracial contact throughout his life, and he currently works closely with Pan-Africanist Revolutionaries. Direct causation between Quinn's and Cyrus' early life interracial exposure and their antiracist politics may not be determinable from these descriptions alone, however, it is certainly notable that among all of the

respondents, they reported the highest levels of childhood interracial contact. Quinn and Cyrus also identify in antiracist political terms as radical and anarchist, respectively.

I categorized the quality of interracial relationships that respondents reported as either authentic/genuine or in-authentic. Recall that genuine interracial relationships are defined as those in which both/all parties are able to honestly and critically discuss the state of race relations and racism in our society. Furthermore, Tatum (2007) suggests that the ultimate level of authenticity in interracial relationships may be met when those involved are able to critically reflect on how white supremacy impacts the dynamics of their personal relationship. In this section I further analyze how both the quality and quantity of respondents' interracial relationships matter for their antiracism. Among the respondents' genuine relationships were those with friends, intimate partners, teachers, professors, mentors, therapists, co-workers/colleagues, and students. Jake, Olivia, Quinn, and Mellie each reported having a current mentor or teacher of color who had a considerable amount of influence on their antiracist orientation. In this example, Olivia explains how the relationship with her black therapist has compelled her to remain committed to antiracism:

> Oh yeah, well I do talk about race issues with my therapist because she's a black woman. I mean obviously I talk to her about my life issues, but I've been trying to figure out how I am going to deal with the world and so she has been trying to help me with that. And I've been trying to find my "voice" and she has said that she thinks that's important because I do believe in antiracism and she is saying that because I am white and I do have privilege as a white person that I need to be antiracist because I'm in a position where people might listen to me.... it makes me realize my position more and that I should, it makes it more difficult to ignore my privilege because I have had the opportunity to go to school for so long and learn all of these things so I might as well do something good with them.

Inauthentic interracial relationships were formed mostly by way of institutional settings such as academic conferences (Mellie), public school (Sally and Abby), volunteer organizations (Mellie and Kerry), and places of employment (Quinn, Abby, Lindsay, Kerry, and Cyrus). Although Abby dated a

black classmate in high-school, this relationship was categorized as inauthentic because they never shared dialogue centered on the personal or political effects of white supremacy. Sometimes respondents' in-authentic interracial relationships developed into more genuine relationships, which will be expounded upon further in section (4.2). Quinn, in particular, worked directly with mostly black youth when she was employed by the Department of Juvenile Justice and later developed genuine, close relationships with several of the young men she came into contact with.

Respondents with disproportionately fewer genuine than in-authentic interracial contacts were most likely to have low to moderate levels of interracial contact (Olivia, Abby, Kerry, Sally). Respondents who reported nearly equal numbers of genuine and in-authentic relationships, as well as those with disproportionately more genuine contacts, were most likely to have sustained moderate to higher levels of interracial contact (Harrison, Jake, Cyrus, Quinn, Mellie, Lindsay). These associations make sense considering that more significant time is likely to be spent with those whom we are connected to beyond the superficial realm.

Consistent with previous research, it seems that the friendships, intimate partnerships, and academic influences reflect the most common types of interracial contacts that compelled this group of young whites to commit to antiracism. Three out of the eleven respondents (Quinn, Abby, and Lindsay) refer specifically to incidents with people of color while recalling the time they first realized racism was a significant social problem. Inauthentic interracial relationships did not necessarily limit whites' *awareness* of racism as long as other forces caused them to reflect on the state of race relations, which has previously been explained in Abby's case. The level of authenticity these antiracist whites experienced in their interracial relationships seems to have greater implications for the type of antiracist *action* they were willing or able to engage in, which will be expounded upon in section (4.3).

Overall, the racial contact hypothesis was affirmed in my focus groups and interviews with self-identified antiracist whites. Each of the self-identified antiracist white people that I interviewed clearly recalled numerous instances and varying degrees of meaningful interracial contact at different points throughout their lives. I did not interview any respondents who reported being racially isolated for their

entire lives. As I continue to emphasize the importance of genuine relationships and dialogue, it is also important to acknowledge the possibility for inauthentic relationships to impact white people's antiracist imagination, as is evidenced by Abby's relationship with her high school boyfriend. In the sections that follow, I demonstrate that it is not simply interracial contact that leads to antiracism, rather this process of identification is contingent upon several mitigating factors. For instance, the type of early life racial messages one receives seems to have a particularly significant impact on the extent to which one engages in antiracist activism. Factors such as the education system and witnessing acts of racism have been alluded to and will be expounded upon as well in the following sections.

4.2 Identifications and Definitions of Antiracism

White antiracist identity formation is a process that has been well documented by critical scholar Eileen O'Brien. In this section I continue to contextualize the results by reporting on how the respondents' process of coming to racial awareness was shaped by a range of influential social forces. Among the most important mediating factors in this sample of young white adults' identifications with antiracism are early life messages from parents and other immediate family members, religious affiliations, memorable encounters with friends, peers, and colleagues, intellectual and academic influences, work dynamics, being witness to a racist event, and finally, transitioning or moving (in geographical terms). As supported by previous literature, the responses from this sample indicate that there is not just one definition of what it means to be antiracist. However, for most respondents, there does seem to be an important relationship between one's particular identification with antiracism and the types of early life racial messages they received.

4.2.1 Early life messages

Each of the respondents in the sample reported being exposed to ideas about race from an early age by their parents and other family members. These early life messages were coded into four broad categories that include overtly racist messages, colorblind racist messages, mixed racial messages, and intentionally antiracist messages. About half of the sample reported messages that fell into two different

categories, while the other half reported one predominant type of racial ideological reinforcement. Only two respondents reported early explicitly anti-racist messages, while the other three categories had relatively similar distributions, with colorblind racist ideologies representing the most common type of early life messages about race.

Abby, Lindsay, Sally, and Olivia all reported being exposed to overtly racist comments when they were younger. For the purposes of this study, racial slurs, offensive comments about racial minorities, and general disdain for non-white people are categorized as overtly racist. Abby revealed that her grandparents were "extremely derogatory toward black people" and overheard political conversations in which her family would associate the black community broadly with welfare abuse. Her mother and step-father also openly discouraged her from dating outside of the white race to such a strong degree that her step-father threatened her with physical removal from their home if she ever brought a black boyfriend over. Lindsay, too, revealed that her parents and grandparents have been openly racist throughout her life, which included use of the n-word when their black domestic workers were not within earshot. Congruent with Feagin and Houts-Picca's (2008) research in *Two-Faced Racism: Whites in the Backstage and Frontstage,* Lindsay's family espoused vehemently conservative values in public settings, but reserved their most volatile racist expressions for seemingly safe all white spaces. Additionally, Lindsay reports that her father hires Latino people to help with his home business and that he generalizes them all as Mexican and doesn't care to find out where people might really be from. Sally did not remember much about her parent's feelings regarding race, but an event that stood out to her was that when her father saw someone who appeared to be Latino, he would sing an offensive song about Mexican people dropping out of school. From an early age, Sally also distinctly remembers having the impression that urban black youth were "bad" and to be feared. Though she could not pinpoint the direct source of this socialization, she associates it with her father's apparent disavowal of Mexicans. Much like Sally, Olivia recalled that there was a relatively high proportion of Puerto Ricans in a particular area of her hometown and that her mother would refer to them as "porch monkeys" as they drove by. Her father also owned a business which would occasionally hire some Puerto Rican people to perform janitorial tasks,

but her father's white employees were openly racist from as far back as she could remember. Olivia indicated that this is significant because she practically grew up in her father's business, spending much of her time after school and during the summers being influenced by a shared disdain for immigrants and racial minorities.

Colorblind racist messages represent the most common type of early life racial messages reported by respondents. Some utilized this exact terminology to describe their parent's views on race, while others simply described actions and behaviors that adhere to the previously established definition of colorblind racism in the literature. Generally speaking, colorblind racism is characterized by a general acknowledgment of racial disparities that are explained away by *nonracial* dynamics such as innate ability and/or cultural differences (Bonilla-Silva 2003). While coded language is a prominent feature of colorblind ideology that sanitizes its deeply racist roots, making racial jokes and expressing disapproval of interracial relationships while claiming to be non-racist are also key features of colorblindness. Six respondents (Mellie, Quinn, Harrison, Kerry, Cyrus, and Abby) reported exposure to colorblind racist early life messages.

Mellie explicitly referred to both of her parents as colorblind racists, but notes differences between how her mother and father expressed such sentiment. Her mother openly rejects affirmative action policies, while she feels that her father sincerely believes blacks and whites *should* be equal to one another, though he sometimes fails to grasp the implications of institutionalized racism. Quinn also explicitly referred to her parents as colorblind racists, but primarily because they fail to understand how structural forces impact an individual's life chances. Like Mellie and Quinn, Harrison also named his parents as colorblind racists for their tendency to deny the effects of structural racism. He reported that his parents' diverse group of close friends, including his dad's best friend from Nicaragua, are used as defense mechanisms when he attempts to address their lack of awareness to larger, structural forces of racial oppression. Kerry did not utilize sociological jargon to characterize her parent's racial ideology, however, she did report interactions with her father that could be characterized as colorblind racism. Kerry told a story of how when rap music comes on the radio her father will often imitate monkey noises,

but that he denies any racist intentions. Because he did not use an overt racial slur, he was able to deny and minimize the effects of making such offensive remarks. Similarly, Cyrus reported being frustrated with his mother and aunt for claiming a liberal, Left-wing political affiliation while privately telling racist jokes and making racist generalizations about teenage pregnancy and intellectual ability. Finally, Abby seems to have been exposed to colorblind messages in addition to what she characterized as overt racism. Her mother expressed approval of interracial relationships, but with the caveat that her family members should not engage in such behavior.

Of course, social life and language are complicated and it is not necessarily atypical to have received mixed, sometimes contradictory messages from our agents of socialization. Accordingly, four respondents (Jake, Olivia, Kerry, and Mellie) indicated that they have received conflicting information about race from their parents. Two respondents, Jake and Olivia, reported mixed messages from one of their parents. For example, Jake understood his father as having great respect and admiration for Civil Rights Movement leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., while simultaneously having an affinity for Ronald Reagan and utilizing "welfare queen" terminology. The other two respondents who received mixed messages, Kerry and Mellie, reported varying messages from two or more of their parents/family members. For example, Mellie previously distinguished between the colorblind messages she received from her mother and father. She characterized her mother as having a chip on her shoulder and being ignorant. Recall from the previous subsection on colorblind racist messages that Mellie also stated that her mother was against affirmative action policies; whereas she described her father as *occasionally* being blind to the racial privileges he receives. In fact, Mellie traces her initial awareness of racism as a problem back to one important conversation she had with her father. Consider her recollection:

> I remember when I became aware that racism was a thing. I can trace it to one conversation with my dad when I was about five or six and we were learning about Martin Luther King Jr. in school and I asked my dad what he did and so he explained about the Black Civil Rights Movement little and I was like, "but I don't understand, why did that have to happen?" And he was like, "Well you know because black people weren't allowed to do things and they were treated very

> unequally and it was bad and things took a long time to change and it went from really bad to still bad to a little bit less bad over time."

This conversation left a lasting impression on Mellie and illustrates the crucial importance of early life messages. Although Mellie's father was not necessarily explicitly *antiracist* in his rendition of the Civil Rights Movement, he does frame it in liberal, non-racist terms that acknowledge the historical injustices blacks have suffered in US society.

Finally, two of the respondents in the sample reported receiving explicitly antiracist messages early in life. Huck was raised in a Quaker religious community and reported that antiracism was so normalized growing up that being antiracist is not an identity he has to be very conscious of, "that's just something I am in addition to other things." Although Cyrus did report that his mother and aunt made racist jokes at times, his father is a Dutch immigrant to the United States and apparently despises racism. Cyrus explains, in part, why being racist was not an option for him as a child:

> I mean, he was living in Holland when Nazi's were occupying, and so he hates racial ideology. He hates anything that just sounds remotely like something that would remind him of that time in his life. So he was quite young, but it sticks with him a lot. And, you know, his dad was in a prison camp for helping to hide Jews and stuff and also being Catholic, so yeah he just hates racists. And recently with the Trayvon Martin thing, it was almost impossible to talk to him without him bringing it up, which is cool 'cause I love to talk to him about [it].

For Cyrus and Huck, being conditioned to think about and recognize racism from an early age served as the catalyst for an enduring commitment to antiracist principles.

One of the most commonly reported ways in which early antiracist ideology was transmitted was through religious or spiritual discourse. As just stated, Huck received antiracist messages through the Quaker faith and broader Quaker community. Mellie also indicated that Christianity and her father's pattern of framing racial equality issues in religious terms were influential in her developing antiracist awareness. She succinctly explains this relationship:

> Well, Christianity brought me to where I am, in my understanding of race, and like, it was the beginning for me, even though I've moved past it now. Christianity was originally the fundamental reason that I refused to or rejected the possibility that there could be natural differences between people of different races, because I was just like, well of course not, if we're all made in God's image then we were all made perfect, so we're all exactly right, and nobody could possibly be more perfect than anyone else, like we're all just right. Everyone is just right the way they are and any differences must be inconsequential. Even though I no longer accept the supernatural underpinnings of that, that's still the *feeling* that I have.

Jake and Quinn also reported significant ties to the Judeo-Christian faith, though such spiritual connections did not necessarily *inspire* their antiracist identity.

4.2.2 Academic and intellectual influences

All of the respondents in this sample indicated that their identifications with antiracism were greatly influenced by their relationships with academic and intellectual socializing forces, while three of the eleven respondents in the sample indicated that their racial awareness was *rooted* in a particular academic event or setting. The potential for education and knowledge to be subversive cannot be denied as each respondents' antiracist imagination was significantly shaped by a teacher, mentor, and/or intellectual activist. The various types of academic and intellectual influences were categorized according to four major areas, including respondents' college experiences, antiracist role models, respondents' transitions from predominantly white schools to more racially and ethnically diverse public schools, and lastly, self-education and the public school curriculum.

Eight respondents (Olivia, Huck, Quinn, Mellie, Sally, Lindsay, Abby, Jake) indicated that their undergraduate and graduate school courses have increased their level of race awareness in significant ways. Olivia, Quinn, Mellie, Abby, Jake, and Sally each reported that college was really the first time that they were introduced to and/or understood the concept of structural, or institutionalized racism. Mellie, Quinn, and Jake referred specifically to black mentors who helped them come to this realization.

Mellie explains why she believes her early college experiences were so important for developing her antiracist identity, and more specifically an understanding of white privilege:

> There were actually two undergraduate professors at my previous institution who gently guided me to that understanding, and to a point where, because I think if they had pushed me on it, I would have just pushed back so hard that I couldn't have accepted it because I had been so blinded to it. But, I think being gently led there by two black professors in the sociology department really helped me understand what was going on and to see structural inequality around me and see that it was an issue right now, not just something in the 60's that Martin Luther King Jr. and all of them solved for us, but like a persistent problem that we still need to work to address. And that's when I really became aware of white privilege and structural inequalities on a larger scale. And as soon as I realized that, I was like oh crap, I've got all this privilege, how do I give it back? Where can I return this? This isn't what I ordered?

In this sense, the authentic interracial contact that Mellie and other respondents experienced with their sociology professors, in particular, encouraged a deeper understanding of the ways in which white supremacy functions contemporarily in covert ways. Overall, educators and mentors seem to play an invaluable role in cultivating and raising this samples' antiracist awareness, as well as encouraging a commitment to direct action antiracist activism.

Olivia, Huck, Lindsay, Abby, and Sally indicated that the type of dynamic fostered and conversations taking place in their classes were instrumental in the development of their antiracist identities. Sally exemplifies this statement as she credited her transition from high school to a small state college as a highly pivotal moment in her antiracist identity formation process. More specifically, Sally referred to her first sociology course as the switch that increased her race consciousness, allowing her to think and talk about race in ways she had never been encouraged to before that point. The following account is Sally's response to me following up about the content of her first sociology course:

> It was really good though, I just remember being like, I don't remember a specific topic, but just a general feeling of being like, how did I not think of this before? Why didn't I think about that? So

> I don't think I really had, well that's not really fair, I had, well I was going to say that I don't think I had a whole lot of racist beliefs before, but like there was little stuff, like you know, locking your car when you go into the more "black" part of town, even though you don't realize that's what you're doing. So, and like I think taking a sociology course made me realize, made me think about little stuff like that and made me realize that I was doing it when I was around black people and stuff that's just subconscious and stuff like that, without really thinking about it.

In this example, Sally exemplifies the ways in which academic settings and some professors can potentially cultivate unique spaces for critical dialogue that raise awareness about social justice issues such as racism.

Seven (Olivia, Mellie, Kerry, Harrison, Jake, Quinn, and Cyrus) out of the eleven respondents in the sample referred directly to a range of intellectual activists including critical scholars and revolutionary leaders who have influenced their understanding of what it means to be a white antiracist. The vast majority of the intellectuals cited are people of color. Harrison's account of his influences is among the most extensive and diverse, which includes Keyonda Taylor, José Martí, Michelle Alexander, and Anne Braden. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Tim Wise were the only leaders mentioned by more than one respondent. Importantly, several of the respondents (Olivia, Mellie, Kerry, Jake, and Quinn) reported being introduced to these intellectual activists by their college professors.

Two respondents, Abby and Lindsay, transitioned from predominantly white schools to public high schools where their level of interracial contact increased significantly. Both respondents considered their experiences to have greatly informed their antiracist understandings. For instance, Abby's suburban high school participated in a program that bussed mostly to all non-white students from Atlanta to her school. She indicated that this was the first time she had really been caused to contemplate the significance of segregation:

> I guess I definitely noticed the cliquey aspect in high school, that's kind of obvious, but something interesting I did notice, I don't know if I ever really spoke out about it because it was

> like, you know, a lot of kids from downtown Atlanta would take the bus every morning like 45 minutes north to my high school because it was like a good school, but it was like, they were all predominantly black and Hispanic and they would all sit in the cafeteria in the morning before classes start, you'd all just sit in the cafeteria until the bell rings to go to class and they would all sit together at like two tables. So it would be like two tables that were like all the kids from downtown and then everybody else. And it was just something I noticed and I was like, that's weird that like, you know it's like black kids at these two tables and then everyone else is over here and that's you know. And I guess it was also because there were so many more white people, but then it was, I definitely noticed it, I never really had a conversation about it, but I was just like, you know, it was interesting I guess that nobody was dispersing more, and kept separated.

Interestingly, Abby indicated that she had previously attended mostly white public schools and that being confronted with this type of seeming self-segregation at her moderately diverse high school provided the foundations for her critical thoughts about racial relations. While this transition did not encourage Abby to engage directly in antiracist dialogue, it did seem to further spark her antiracist imagination.

Finally, three (Harrison, Kerry, and Cyrus) respondents contextualized aspects of their race awareness within their responses to their public school curriculum. Harrison and Kerry both referred to their individual and guided educational pursuits as the catalyst for their antiracist identity formation process. Kerry attended a relatively well-funded public high school and was able to take a "Race, Class, and Gender" sociology course well before the other respondents reported such opportunities. During the interview she was sure to emphasize the important role that her high school sociology teacher played in her antiracist identity development.

Unlike Kerry, Cyrus reflected negatively on the type of racialized education he received in school. As a child, Cyrus lived in mostly black neighborhoods and attended mostly black public schools with mostly black teachers. In the following extended account he recalls some of the lessons he was exposed to:

> When I went to school there, I mean you got, we learned, you learned the usual, I mean it's normal to me so I forget that some people haven't had that thing. I was like god I'm getting, I feel like, you know ragtime was pounded into my head, I'm like learning about the Harlem Renaissance and stuff since I was in Kindergarten, and like...very cultural references to Africa and African songs and stuff like that...Folks would speak uncritically about folks like Booker T Washington, who hated black people, the guy was awful. And just promote these ideas of like, you know, famous black millionaires and all of this lifting as we climb mentality, um, kind of things, and so...you just can't, since the 70s, you just can't get away with teaching capitalism and the state to people on you know, purely white terms, nobody would listen to it anymore, so you shift it and you teach capitalism and the state as something that's inclusive for black people and that's how you maintain the institution. And so, so yeah, growing up, I can't imagine it's that different from what anyone else, what many other people have experienced, maybe a little more Africa in there.

While Cyrus is obviously critical of the type of state education that he received, he also normalizes the quality of exposure to arguably positive images of black life and pivotal black leaders that he was privy to. It does not appear that other respondents in the sample received public school educations oriented so extensively in emphasizing some of the important contributions of black culture to US society. This early interracial exposure, albeit sponsored by the state, could likely be credited with strengthening Cyrus' ability to empathize with people of color.

4.2.3 Bearing witness

All of the respondents mentioned a range of significant interactions, mostly with with people of color, when detailing the process of their antiracist identification. The types of interactions the respondents reported have been categorized according to four broad categories including witnessing acts of racism, being teased or "tested", childhood friendships, and being called out on accountability. For

three respondents in particular, Quinn, Abby, and Lindsay, these life experiences served as the driving force behind their current awareness of racism as a social problem.

First-hand experiences of witnessing white supremacist behavior or ideology can leave lasting impressions on the antiracist imagination. Abby refers to the relationship with her black boyfriend in high school as the moment that caused her to really reflect on our racial relations. She was not able to ignore the taboo surrounding interracial dating because she was never able to introduce her mother to her boyfriend for fear of rejection. She explains, "I think my mom would be a little like, freaked out, and I think that's, that's probably why I never told her. Not that I would just call her up and be like, 'Hey, I have a black boyfriend,' but you know, it was never brought up, you know, like I never mentioned it to her. Which is why dating him kind of even made me think about different races and that being an issue for some people." Similarly, Quinn described a situation that occurred when she was about eight or nine years old. One of the young men on her father's football team had been refused service at a local Denny's because the staff was racist. Quinn's detailed description of the situation also provides insight into how inauthentic interracial relationships can transition into more genuine relationships based on understanding and empathy:

> But I remember the first time I realized that race was an issue, but I was a little older, I was in like 4th grade maybe. There was a guy that played football for my dad, his name is TK, he's black and had a blue car....TK was my favorite because he kind of helped raise me and my brother and TK was a huge part of our life and he, one day they got out of practice really late and the cafeteria was really small and closed really early, at like 6, so a bunch of them went to the Denny's in our town. Of course, it had to be Denny's, and so the football players went all together and it just so happened that the group of white football players got their first and got a table. And then the next group that came was the group of black football players and they told them "I'm sorry we don't serve college students." And they're like, "well you do, because those are our teammates right in there" and I don't know all the details, but they got into some type of verbal altercation and someone called them the n-word. And all I remember is that I used to always answer the phone in

> our house so the phone rang and it was TK and he sounded really sad and asked to speak to my dad. So I'm sitting next to my dad and trying to figure out what's wrong because TK's sad and I love TK. And my dad was like, "well come out to the house" and he had my mom cook food for them and they all came out and they were talking about it and it was the first time I had ever heard the n-word and I was like I don't know what that word means, all I know is that it made TK be like super sad and I don't want TK to be super sad so I hate that word. So that was my first like, something's not right.

Quinn later described that through her employment with a juvenile justice facility she mostly worked with young men of color which expanded her antiracist imagination even further. Quinn explained that her connections with these young men allowed her to finally be able to apply the concepts of systematic, institutionalized forms of racism to her everyday experiences. Perhaps this early genuine interracial bonding with a young black football player gave Quinn the empathy necessary to develop such a strong antiracist consciousness.

Coincidentally and more recently, one of Lindsay's stories of witnessing racism also occurred in a restaurant setting. While doing work in Vietnam she and a black friend went out to eat and were denied service. "And that's when it solidified for me. That's when I knew that that was an issue, I mean really all over the world. But to actually see it and *witness*, even being treated poorly, just so poorly, even hostilely, hostile-like, when I brought my black friend in. I mean we were turned away at the door, at a restaurant." While Lindsay may have already had an idea of how racism functioned in the United States, she connected this international situation to her awareness of *globalized* racism. Later in the interview she likened her experience to the Jim Crow laws in the Southern United States.

Four other respondents (Huck, Sally, Jake, and Kerry) also referred specifically to influential interracial childhood friendships when describing the foundations of their antiracist awareness. Each respondent mentioned having at least one close black or Latino best friend as a child. Jake explains the impact that these early relationships have had on his antiracist identity:

> Well, my friends were mostly Latino and undocumented and everyone was very poor and so I already had this experiential, I was ready to hear this stuff is unfair racially and that people shouldn't be screwed over like this you know, 'cause I already had a class warfare, even a racial warfare kind of mentality. I remember being a white teenager who didn't know any, by the time I was in my older teens I hardly had any non-white friends, but me and my white friends called the popular kids the 'stupid rich white kids' ....

Though as a child Jake may have lacked the conceptual framework to think in terms such as "class warfare" or "racial warfare", the experiences he had as a young child greatly impacted his future interactions and identifications with antiracism.

Two respondents, Lindsay and Cyrus, both described being teased by fellow black classmates during grade school. While each respondent described these interactions in differing terms, both were at least minimally aware that these situations occurred within a larger white supremacist society and therefore resisted the urge to go on the defense. Lindsay described a situation that occurred in the girl's bathroom shortly after transitioning from a white private school to an inner-city public school:

> Then, I was also picked on a great deal in the bathroom (laughing) by some black girls and I didn't really know how to respond to that and so I just sort of laughed it off and then they sort of had this new found respect for me or something because I didn't fight them back like the other white girls did, um so I thought that was kind of an interesting, it was almost like they were feeling me out on how I felt about, perhaps racism, I'm not sure.

Although Lindsay said that she did not really know how to act in this situation, she does highlight an important discrepancy between the way she responded and the way "other" white girls reportedly responded. She described the interaction as a test of sorts, so that the black girls in her school could effectively determine her position on racial issues. This was important to her antiracist identity formation because it allowed her to distinguish herself and her interracial interactions in opposition to what she perceived to be racially-hostile treatment from most of the other white people at her school. Cyrus, on the

other hand, attended predominantly black schools beginning in Kindergarten and described racialized teasing as prominent feature of his childhood:

> Racism is definitely something that was never an option. Like, what am I gonna, you already catch enough shit in school just for being white, what, you're just gonna start developing ideologies where you hate everyone else on virtue of their skin color? How are you gonna make friends doing that? You know, when you're a kid you just wanna make friends, you don't wanna just get angry at everybody and hate the world. I mean, sometimes you do, I mean you do when you get older, but I think that, I don't know. It's interesting, I guess everybody could be different. But, for me, it would never make sense.

Interestingly, Cyrus resisted internalizing the taunting he was subjected to and described his reaction in purely rational terms. While at first he generalized his understanding of these events to wider society, he then clarified that for him, in his position, it would not "make sense" to be racist. Perhaps Cyrus' early antiracist indoctrination from his father helped to contextualize, and perhaps rationalize, the teasing that he experienced.

Finally, four respondents (Huck, Quinn, Mellie, and Olivia) each described being called out on racism as something important to their antiracist identity. Huck actually talked at great lengths about his unease with discussing racism in interracial settings because he worries about being offensive. He does intentionally discuss race issues with one of his black female friends who, according to Huck, is patient with him and will let him know when he is off base about a particular issue. Quinn described several instances in which her motivations have been questioned by people of color and has even been accused of being paternalistic, or, a "white savior." Quinn reported utilizing those experiences to inform how she approaches discussing racism in interracial settings so that she appears to present herself as genuinely as she feels about antiracism. Mellie talked about the types of intentionally antiracist conversations she has when asked to distinguish between her relationships with people of color and white people. In this situation, Mellie did not describe being "called out" as much as she illustrated the importance of being accountable to a person of color in a mutually safe space.

Unlike all of the other respondents described in this section, Olivia traced much of her antiracist awareness to being called out by a white female who she was dating at the time. Olivia described her partner as an "in your face" antiracist. When asked to clarify what she meant by that, Olivia explained, "Well, just very adamant and open about it. Like, she would call me out for some stuff, like some of the subconscious things that [Sally] was just talking about and, I don't know, it just changed the way I looked at things." Olivia plainly states that being called out by another White person helped her to transform her own racial consciousness. However, the context of the relationship and the conversations she described may have greatly impacted how much Olivia was willing to acknowledge and work to change her own unintended acts of racism.

4.2.4 Geographical and Life Transitions

Four of the respondents (Harrison, Kerry, Olivia, and Jake) referred directly to geographical moves when describing their process of antiracist identification. Of course, none of our social interactions occur in a spatial vacuum, so it was not the move per se that suddenly transformed the societal veil covering racism, but the particular social conditions and life transitions associated with their moves. Olivia and Jake, in particular, said that moving away from their conservative upbringings for college was pivotal for their identity formation process and credited their moves with laying the foundation for their understanding of racism. Jake explains how this transition was important for him, "I guess in undergrad I moved out from my parent's [house] and I was like in this bubble where I didn't think about politics or race or anything really for that matter." Kerry described her move from the Northeast to Georgia as a wake-up call to the extent that overt racism was still alive and well in the Southern United States.

Harrison's description differed slightly from the experiences of Kerry, Olivia, and Jake. Harrison actually pinpoints his move from Miami to Fayetteville when he was fourteen years old as the moment when he began to identify racially as *white*. In addition to describing the move as "awful," he gave the following analysis of this formative life event:

> Well my dad's white, he grew up in Wisconsin and my mom's family is white Cuban so I grew up in an area with people from all different backgrounds, and it being Miami, mostly a Hispanic community, people all different shades of colors, so when I moved to Georgia, my experience has been people asking me like, are you white or are you black?' And it's like really limiting what you could possibly identify as...so that's when I started identifying as white, because that's what most people are going to think I am and call me so I'm like alright, whatever, I'm white and that's how it is.

Harrison described his identification with whiteness in fairly coercive terms and ultimately assumed the identity because of how others perceived him phenotypically. Perhaps this moment of accepting an imposed racial identity provided insight into the types of overt racialized policing that most white people are not subjected to.

4.2.5 Political Conceptions of Antiracism

By agreeing to participate in this study, each of the respondents in this sample indicated that they identify as an antiracist white person. The previously reviewed literature demonstrates that there are many paradigms of antiracism. In her work on how "well-meaning" white women perpetuate racism, social researcher Barbara Trepagnier (2010) sought to replace the "racist"/ "not racist" binary with a continuum ranging from "more racist" to "less racist," in accordance with the idea that all white people participate in and benefit from white supremacy to a certain degree. In this subsection, I conclude the discussion surrounding the white antiracist identity formation process by detailing the respondents' current philosophical and political understandings of what it means to be antiracist and what it will take to finally dismantle our societal investment in white supremacy.

The respondents in this study identified two broad definitions of antiracism which have been categorized as the liberal/accommodationist frame and the radical multicultural frame. The central feature of the liberal/accommodationist frame is an overarching reliance on the state to mend our racial relations. The central feature of the radical multicultural frame is an acknowledgment that nothing short

of a racially diverse revolution geared toward ending capitalism would eradicate white supremacy from US society, and the rest of the globe.

Abby, Lindsay, Kerry, and Sally expressed antiracist ideas that seek to resolve the problem of racism by working within our current political and economic systems. The state/institutional level interventions suggested include the racial integration of schools, changes to the mass produced curriculums in public schools, reparations, affirmative action, and including more positive representations of people of color in the media. While summarizing her thoughts on the overarching solution to racism, Kerry mentions several of the most common liberal responses:

> I feel like I was talking about three things that need to change. There was, um, education, media, and there was something else, affirmative action, political–I guess that could be considered. I do think there needs to be more scholarships or financial assistance, not just for black people with low socio-economic status, but also anyone with low socio-economic status, I think there needs to be a lot more financial aid for schools. Especially with single mothers because that's a huge, um, I don't want to say problem, but pattern in the black industry, the black single mother who can't break beyond, who's just living paycheck to paycheck, and can't afford an education and child care and in that sense, yeah more government assistance, obviously I'm very liberal.

Kerry suggested that increased access to financial aid or monetary resources is key to changing our current state of race relations, as well as our unequal class relations. Rather than suggesting a transformation of the most prominent *and* racist social, economic, and political institutions in our society, the four respondents in this subsection believe in making accommodations with the state through reform efforts. Racial integration in terms of changes to the state school system and its curriculum is proposed and explained by Abby:

> Because all of my elementary and middle school, it was like only surrounded by white people. So like teaching about other's cultures would be a big thing because you know, that's or I think, a lot of racism exists because it's 'different' and different would, I think we need to know that different isn't bad, because I think that's where a lot of things stem from, is that like oh, I'm

> taught that you're different and I've never been exposed to anything else than white, I've never been exposed to anything else, and then when you do it's so much different than your own culture that you're like, woah!

Abby's observations lend support for Gordon Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis regarding the possibility for interracial contact to lessen the effects of white people's prejudicial socialization. In this way, the structure or institution itself is not seen as the problem, rather it is isolation and ignorance that needs to be resolved through state mandated integration efforts.

On the other hand, seven (Harrison, Mellie, Jake, Cyrus, Olivia, Huck, and Quinn) respondents in the sample identified themselves, mostly in explicit terms, as revolutionaries, socialists, and radicals. Notably, each of these respondents is in graduate school, with the exception of Cyrus. Additionally, Harrison, Huck, and Cyrus worked with the Occupy Atlanta group while it was active. For these respondents, a revolutionary movement including people of all races aimed at dramatically reshaping the foundations of society was explained to be the clear path toward racial reconciliation. Harrison, in particular, is very critical of the state's role in perpetuating racism and recently became rather disenchanted with the United States' concept of democracy and the two party political system. After spending some time working for the Democratic Party his friend and candidate for office lost the election after a contentious campaign. He explains his reaction, "And I remember texting her and just being like 'I'm done, it's over, I'm not doing this anymore, I'm quitting my job and joining the revolution. Fuck this.'" Harrison described this situation as the point in his antiracist identity in which he transitioned from a more liberal mindset to one committed to revolution. He further elaborates on the ideological underpinnings of his socialist antiracist identity:

> But I mean as far as what it's gonna take to end racism...It goes back to that metaphor I was talking about earlier, you can't just take the sugar out of the cake, it's part and parcel of the system that exists and you can't just micro manage the little bits and pieces or the little manifestations of it, but you have to pull the weeds out by the root, otherwise they keep cropping up, so that's how I think of it.

Cyrus expressed very similar sentiments when he self-identified as an anarchist. He believes that in order for racism to be resolved, the state and all centralized power must be dismantled. He is also very critical of liberal and black elite state power because of the covert way in which is functions to uphold capitalism. He condemns of any type of hierarchical organization because he sees hierarchies as inherently unequal and unnatural. Consider his explanation of the problematics surrounding antiracist narratives centered on "achieving equality" rather than emphasizing liberation from state entities:

> I guess I'm saying that it doesn't matter if you change the color of the peoples' face in the hierarchy in the long run because you still have a hierarchy. So if you recognize that black people are disproportionately represented among the poor and working class, right, if we're talking about percentage of population or what have you. And so if you recognize systems like the state, systems like capitalism, that those systems maintain that hierarchy and are in fact manifestations of that hierarchy then putting a black person in charge of the system is not going to free anybody. Now yes, in terms of the middle class you may see greater access to certain jobs, again the middle class, small group of people comparatively. But on the whole, exploitation of black workers is not going to change.

While each of the radically antiracist respondents professed a desire for the antiracist revolution to be intentionally multiracial and even led by people of color, Harrison's description of José Martí's concept of *mestízaje* very clearly illustrates many of the ideas that other respondents echoed in their interviews:

> And he wrote a lot about how, he wrote this piece that a lot of people know called Nuestra América,'...in attempting to construct a nationality that is inclusive and not like racist like American, US American national identity...and he came up with this term *mestízaje*...in trying to develop an idea of how you can build a nation in opposition to imperialism, that isn't just in the interests of one racial group. And constructing a community as *mestízaje* means mixed, like so that is, it takes all of the cultures that exist within these geographical boundaries and constructs a new identity from all of these different heritages, without like privileging one over the other...I

> think that idea of *mestízaje* is a really good way of thinking about how you can create a new culture that everyone can be part of and that values all different people and aspects of where people, where a white person can adopt aspects of black culture and not do it in a way that's sort of appropriating it or whatever, and I see that in the culture of Latin America. Like you talk about all the different music and things like that, and all of it is just this massive mix of all of these different cultural heritages and everyone in that community has ownership of that.

Harrison succinctly addresses issues of power and diversity while describing his vision and desire for the various cultural and racial groups living in the United States. Key to his understanding of liberation is localized control of and responsibility for cultural traditions and customs.

In addition to supporting the deconcentration of hegemonic political and economic power, Jake and Olivia talked specifically of subverting the system from within. Both aspire to teach in the academic setting, but with the explicit intention of raising critical consciousness and inspiring dissent with the status quo, much like their mentors have done for them. While their proposed method of counteracting racist state structures may seem slightly accommodationist in nature, it is nearly impossible to completely escape participation within the capitalist economic system. Their plans of action provide insight into how antiracists can deal with these seeming contradictions. In the next section I expand on this discussion by reporting the various types of antiracist activism the respondents from this sample have engaged in.

4.3 Engagement with Antiracist Activism

All of the respondents in this sample reported instances in which they made attempts to interrupt racism, whether on an interpersonal level or in organized marches and protests. Just as definitions of and associations with antiracist ideology can be defined along a continuum, there is no uniform standard of what constitutes antiracist activism. In the previously reviewed literature I recounted the debates within critical whiteness studies that contemplate the effectiveness and implications of various modes of antiracist intervention. I categorized the types of antiracist action described by the respondents into direct action organized activism, intentional dialogue, and everyday antiracism/ "calling it out."

4.3.1 Organized direct action

Three of the respondents (Harrison, Huck, and Cyrus), and interestingly those who mentioned affiliation with the Occupy Wall Street Movement in Atlanta were also those who reported engaging in direct action activism. Huck referred to his work with Occupy Atlanta and also participated in marches and protests surrounding George Zimmerman's not guilty verdict in the murder of Trayvon Martin. Cyrus is also involved in few different community anarchist groups. Harrison seems to be the most active in organized resistance of white supremacy and focuses much of his efforts on work on campus. He detailed several events ranging from protests around the Troy Davis case, to working on coalitions with black separatists, and organizing against Islamaphobia on campus. In the following excerpt, he describes a type of antiracist movement he participated in on campus:

> On campus because there's this awful way in which like Zionist Israeli racism exchange with the sort of typical racism of the police force in the United States through GSU on campus through this group called the Georgia International Law Exchange, where cops from GA exchange with cops in Israel and yeah, so cops come over here and learn the racist ways in which they do drug trafficking policing and things like that, and then our cops go over to Israel and learn how to do counter-terrorism and things like that.

Each of the three male respondents who discussed their participation in organized antiracist activism identify politically with the radical multicultural frame. Two of them, Huck and Cyrus, were also exposed to explicitly antiracist messages early on in their lives.

4.3.2 Intentional dialogue

Six of the respondents (Quinn, Mellie, Lindsay, Abby, Sally, and Olivia) referred to at least one instance of proactively discussing racism with another person. Quinn articulates the importance of white people working with other white people to end racism, but she has a hard time managing her emotions during such exchanges. Racism triggers intense anger and frustration for Quinn, and she has a general moral rule that she doesn't like to say things to people unless they come from a place of love and

understanding, so, for now most of her interpersonal work around racism has been with people of color. She says it is even difficult for her to maintain relationships with white people who express racist sentiment. Mellie described similar feelings throughout the interview and offered this account of the type of intentional antiracist dialogue she has with one of her friends:

> I have one friend who's very interested in anti-racism work too, it is my friend Keisha, who is not my one black friend, but she is like, um, you know she always jokes about how she feels like she has to be Professor Black Person with her white friends and so she jokes about how she feels like it's her job to educate everyone and how exhausting that is, so every now and then I'll just be like, Professor Black Person, I need to talk to you, but she calls me Professor Atheist and asks me about religion all the time, so we like every now and then have conversations about it, but we can just like be open and admit where we're each ignorant and share with each other in a very open and it's okay to be vulnerable, and you don't have to feel like fear of feeling stupid in some way, which is beautiful and I value that relationship a lot.

Although Huck said that he has never participated in all white antiracist dialogue groups, he persistently suggested that a type of organized workshop group could potentially be effective for allowing whites a safe space to work out their racial baggage and subsequently transform their consciousness. Clearly, Mellie's story illustrates the importance of processing ideas and feelings in spaces rooted in understanding and compassion.

Lindsay and Abby each described situations in which they attempted a conversation centered on racism, and President Obama to be more specific, with their white best friends. Both described these events as highly emotionally charged situations and Abby ended up having to walk away as she and her friend vowed to never discuss racism again. Abby summarizes the exchange she had with her friends:

> I definitely, in that conversation I got very angry. And then 'cause she was like, saying things along the lines of, "A black president is only looking out for black people." And I was just like, that is the most absurd thing I have ever heard in my entire life. But that was, I got to the point

> where, yeah I walked away, because it was just so like, I can't believe this is happening. And I tried and it failed and I was just like okay, I'm done, because it upset me.

Olivia and Sally described similar approaches of how each of them facilitates dialogue with those whose minds they have been charged with shaping the most. Olivia intentionally fosters a space for critical interracial dialogue in the classroom and Sally described the influence she hopes to leave on her children, "I'm going to raise my kids in a race privilege conscious way, they're going to be really aware in a way that I wasn't as a kid. And I think that's a big one, knowing that you're influencing your kids in a way that you weren't, or at least a lot earlier than you were." While direct action organizing may seem like a more obvious form of activism than intentional antiracist dialogue, the potential effects of socializing one's children with explicitly antiracist messages are immeasurable.

4.3.1 "Calling it out"–Everyday antiracism

Each of the eleven respondents recalled instances of calling out perpetrators of racism for their behavior and defined this type of interpersonal action as essential for maintaining an antiracist identity. The respondents' personal stories of interrupting acts of everyday racism include instances of calling out friends, co-workers, family members, and sometimes strangers. Lindsay, Quinn, Cyrus, and Olivia specifically talked about some of their family's resistance toward their antiracist philosophies. Abby works in the restaurant industry and she reported several instances of actively trying to convince her fellow servers to break with the strong anti-black racism that is such a prominent feature of restaurant culture. Mellie's description of how she attempted to interrupt a racist joke involved calling out strangers and one of her friends from high school:

> I stormed out of a party this past Christmas because a bunch of white dudes were sitting around and they started telling racist jokes and making racist comments and they were on Asian folks, and I was like, "pardon me, I'd really appreciate it if we could change the subject. This is not okay with me." Because you know, you can tell how socially adept I am anyway, but I was like, "pardon me, this isn't cool, can we stop talking about this?" So they took that to mean let's move

> on to black and Latino people and so I didn't know what to say at that point because the host was standing there saying nothing. The host who is my friend from high school and I'm just like are you fucking serious right now? How is this happening at your party? So I went to where my husband was standing across the room and I told him, "Get your coat. We're going."

While she and her husband were figuring out who was going to drive home, the host of the party came outside to resolve what happened and ultimately brought Mellie and her husband back in to announce to everyone that racist jokes would not be tolerated in their house and they were embarrassed that they had allowed it to happen. How this exchange affected the racist offenders is unknown, however, had Mellie not stepped up and had just been complicit with the racism she witnessed, these issues would have likely been ignored.

Harrison connected his interpersonal antiracist actions with his commitment to revolutionary political action:

> But I think of it like, there's a revolutionary who said that people who fought for social justice need to be a tribune of the oppressed and they need to fight every oppression and that they need to patiently explain with people what exists that is oppressing people, and stuff like that. Um, and so that's sort of like how I envision what I am trying to do. To be that person who will take the time to patiently explain with someone and answer their questions and you know, give them reasons in contrast to what they've been trained to think and what they already think.

While Harrison did discuss the importance of calling out overtly racist actions, he also described the way in which he "patiently" attempts to communicate about social justice issues with his sister because she is a devout Catholic. Harrison's tactic has been to buy her liberation theology books as gifts so that it doesn't feel as if she is being scolded, but is presented with a different way to think about racism that still conforms to her religious commitments.

Whether the respondents in this sample reported taking to the streets with signs and banners, organizing the time and space for constructive dialogue groups, or calling out instances of everyday racism, each of these young white antiracists take measures to eliminate racism in the way that makes the

most sense to them. In the concluding section I provide a synthesized analysis of the three overarching content areas that contain the answer to my initial research question.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Recall that the overarching research question guiding this project asks to what extent interracial contact matters in determining whites' commitment to antiracism. The simplified answer is that although not always cited as a precursor to or a catalyst for forming an antiracist identity, interracial contact seems to be significant to whites' politics of antiracism, but is also conditional upon overlapping factors that the interviews elicited. Early family messages, school and peer socialization, religious indoctrination, as well as teachers, mentors, and intellectual activists, were reported as highly influential agents in respondents' identifications with antiracism. Respondents reported varying levels of engagement with antiracist activism, transcending the micro/macro divide, that ranged from direct action organization, to intentional dialogue centered on accountability, to actions of everyday antiracism oriented in calling out and interrupting acts of individual racism. In congruence with the previous literature, there seem to be associations among the type of antiracist action these young white adults have engaged in, their conceptualizations of both racism and antiracism, and the degree of interracial integration they have experienced.

Considering the range of life circumstances that have shaped these respondents' relationships with their antiracist identity and activism, it seems that *close* interracial contact early on in one's life may be particularly influential in leading one to adopt an antiracist lifestyle. Relatedly, the ability to form genuine interracial relationships matters greatly for determining one's antiracist affiliation. Those who had not yet forged genuine interracial contacts were most likely to locate the solution to ending racism within the state or government, rather than identifying racism as systemic to the state. Those who had a more authentic understanding of race relations were more likely to call for a radical restructuring of society. From a critical race perspective, the eradication of racism from society would necessarily involve the simultaneous destruction of capitalism and all other socially constructed hierarchies.

The type of early life messages one receives from family members and other influential agents also seems to matter for shaping young whites' antiracist awareness. Respondents who received

explicitly racist messages that were rarely mitigated with antiracist or colorblind race messages were the most likely to be labeled a well-meaning antiracist and the least likely to have maintained genuine interracial relationships. Respondents who received explicitly antiracist messages were most likely to be labeled an autonomous antiracist and to have cultivated genuine interracial relationships. Of course, our lives are organic and our experiences are fluid, so at any moment it is possible that these respondents could transcend the antiracist category they have been assigned to. Olivia's story provides a window into what such a seemingly instantaneous transition could look like. Despite attending integrated schools and having relatively low to moderate levels of interracial contact throughout her life, it was not until she moved to another state for school, began dating an antiracist activist, and developed a genuine relationship with her black therapist that Olivia internalized her antiracist identity. At this point she is located on the border between the pseudo-independent and autonomous antiracist categories, however, her story indicates that just two years ago she would have most certainly been labeled a well-meaning antiracist. Regardless of which antiracist category respondents were assigned to, their interactions with the education system mattered deeply for raising their race awareness.

Sociology as a discipline, in particular, was reported as an influential agent in shaping these young whites' perceptions of race relations. For the respondents who were predisposed to antiracism, taking sociology courses forced them to confront the realities of institutionalized racism, which is fundamental for developing a truly autonomous antiracist identity. For respondents like Sally, who were not as racially aware upon entering college, the experiences cultivated in their sociology classes exposed them to a type of critical ideology that left lasting impressions and a desire to live in accordance with antiracist principles, even if this did not translate into consistent direct action activism. Their professors provided the necessary space within their classrooms for genuine interracial dialogue to occur, took time to personally mentor students in the area of critical race studies, and introduced several respondents to a range of critical race scholars such as Derrick Bell and Michelle Alexander. College professors and mentors, most of whom were people of color, played an essential role in facilitating a deeper racial understanding for the respondents in my sample.

Overall, the findings from this study of young white antiracist college students suggest that a laissez-faire approach to integration is futile for actualizing racial liberation. It seems that close early interracial contact coupled with intentionally antiracist dialogue throughout the life course provides an optimal foundation for the development of an autonomous antiracist identity. While genuine interracial contact does not seem to be a prerequisite for identifying as antiracist, the type of antiracist action one engages in does seem to be heavily correlated with one's ability to engage in genuine dialogue centered on race issues. Respondents who reported a history of both genuine intra and inter racial dialogue were categorized as either autonomous antiracist or pseudo-independent antiracist whites and actively resist racism through a variety of methods. Respondents whose genuine interracial and/or genuine intraracial contacts were limited or nonexistent were aligned more closely with the well-meaning antiracist category, were least likely to engage in direct action activism, and reported fewer instances of interrupting everyday acts of racism. These findings suggest that measures aimed at dismantling racism should consider the myriad implications of fostering genuine antiracist dialogue for white children at a young age, which contradicts the logic espoused by colorblind ideological frameworks.

The implications of this study also suggest that patriarchy and sexist oppression may matter for whites' commitment to antiracism in ways that have been under explored previously. Gender is certainly related to our personal identity formation processes in many ways, but the ways in which my sample of white antiracists "do" antiracism seems to be uniquely impacted by patriarchy. It has been suggested that white working class women may be the most likely group to join antiracist struggles because of a recognized shared oppression with other minority groups. In fact, supporting Feagin and Vera's (1995) findings, none of the males in this study directly cited empathetic reasons for committing to antiracism, although, Jake came the closest in identifying his working class background as the foundation for his receptivity to hearing about unjust racial issues. While it has been noted that sexism may encourage women to become antiracist, little attention has been paid to how patriarchy and sexism may also *inhibit* white women's racial awareness, engagement with antiracist activism, and potential solidarity with other minority groups. Exploring these issues may help to explain why the males in this study were

disproportionately labeled autonomous antiracists, while several of the females seem to have been labeled pseudo-independent antiracists precisely because of the emotional labor they associated with having those difficult, yet genuine conversations. In other words, the women in my sample disproportionately reported being fearful of confrontational situations that would have required them to interrupt racism in some way, and that they were somehow responsible for keeping conversations and situations positive.

During the first focus group interview, Harrison actually stated that he probably felt more inclined to speak out against racism because of his male privilege, while Mellie agreed and said that her early socialization to be a "nice Southern lady" had previously kept her from speaking out for fear that she would be in violation of respectability norms. If the autonomous antiracist white category is associated with the highest levels of security in one's antiracist identity, what does it mean to suggest that the females in this sample are less secure in their identities than the males? It may be difficult to meaningfully engage with this conundrum without an intersectional theoretical framework that intentionally analyzes the connections between white supremacy and patriarchy. Future studies may want to further explore the ways in which patriarchy helps to suppress antiracism among white women, in particular.

While this study offers some insight into how the contact hypothesis could be refined to support the needs of radical antiracism, there are also limitations inherent with the design of the project. The relatively small sample size constrains the generalizability of the findings beyond this particular population. The overrepresentation of Sociology majors likely impacted the results of this study as well, considering that even in the era of colorblindness, all of my respondents claimed to be antiracist *and* had a basic understanding of structural racism. From this analysis alone I cannot assume that I've gained a comprehensive understanding of antiracist identity formation. However, qualitative research methods are well-suited to offer in-depth accounts of case examples that resemble the collective group of young white antiracists that I interviewed for this study.

Another limitation of this research project is rooted in the interpretive analysis technique that I utilized for answering some of the interview questions. For instance, I relied solely on respondents' self-

reports of interracial contact, which could have been underestimated or biased in some way considering that it would have been nearly impossible for my respondents to recall each and every interracial encounter they had ever experienced. Because I asked respondents to tell me about the life experiences they thought mattered most in shaping their antiracist identity formation, I could have missed a range of important influences that were either forgotten about or more subconscious in nature. On the other hand, privileging the interpretive technique allowed me to explore the importance of some interracial encounters and relationships in directly shaping my sample's antiracist awareness.

While these limitations are important to acknowledge, sharing one's story and participating in critical antiracist dialogue can have potentially subversive effects on the power structure of white supremacy. It is my hope that the young whites who participated in this study felt validated in their antiracist identities and encouraged to continue the struggle in each facet of their lives. The results from this project could potentially inform the direction of future studies concerned with raising white antiracist consciousness. Specifically, an intersectional approach to refining the contact hypothesis may be fruitful for producing knowledge concerned with eradicating white supremacy from our social relations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A (Interview Guide)

1. What messages did you hear in your family concerning race issues?
    a. What about in school?

2. Do you remember when you first began to question race relations in this society?
    a. Tell me about that time in your life.
    b. What understanding, event, or relationship made you begin to question race relations?

3. Can you think of a time when you did something that you would now consider racist?

4. What would your reaction be?
    a. If someone around you tells a racist joke?
    b. If your best friend or someone in your family wanted to marry outside of their race?
    c. If you saw someone being called a racial slur in public?
    d. To the fact that schools are now more segregated than they were just after Brown *v* Board of Education?
    e. To the fact that people of color disproportionately make up the US prison population?

5. With whom do you discuss issues of racism and inequality most frequently?

    a. Why do you think you talk about racism with this person/these people?

6. What experiences or relationships have you had with black people in the past?

    a. How about now?
    b. What relationships would you like to cultivate in the future?

7. Have you ever had a best friend or intimate partner who was black?

    a. Tell me about that relationship.
    b. How do you think that relationship impacted your understanding of race relations?

8. How are your relationships with blacks and whites different, if at all?
    a. Are they similar or different in any ways that are meaningful to you?
    b. For how long have your most important friendships/relationships lasted?

9. What do you think needs to happen concerning racism now?
    a. What would your role be?
    b. How do you think white people in general should be a part of antiracism?