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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Talking about whiteness: The Stories of Novice white Female Educators

by

Stephanie Goodman

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2019

Talking about whiteness: The Stories of Novice white Female Educators

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by

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This dissertation written by Stephanie Goodman, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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I believe that no white woman reared anywhere in this racist country can find freedom as a woman until she deals in her own consciousness with the question of race. We grow up little girls—absorbing a hundred stereotypes about ourselves and our role in life, our secondary position, our destiny to be a helpmate to a man or men. But we also grow up white—absorbing the stereotypes of race, the picture of ourselves as somehow privileged because of the color of our skin. The two mythologies become intertwined, and there is no way to free ourselves from one without dealing with the other.

—Anne Braden, “A Letter to Southern White Women,” 1972 (Kentucky Arts Council, n.d.)

DEDICATION

To Henrietta Turner,
my beloved grandmother,
who modeled what strength, resilience, and faith looked like,
every day.

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ABSTRACT

Talking about whiteness: The Stories of Novice white Female Educators

by

Stephanie Goodman

In the United States, the largest group of educators, historically and presently, are white middle-class women, yet there is a rising population of racially diverse students creating a persistent dissonance and disconnect between the culture of the white teacher and their students. In this study, I sought to discover how the racial identity development of novice white female educators evolved, given their common participation in the Teach for America program. Using the conceptual frameworks of critical race theory, critical feminist theory, and the body of scholarship in critical whiteness studies, I conducted a critical narrative inquiry of eight novice white female educators. From the participants' stories, three themes emerged: (a) relationships matter; (b) the privilege to want something different; and (c) intersection of whiteness and power. Further analysis was conducted to address the ideas of race-consciousness building through defining moments and sustained connection, and white dominance through an ascription of power and an analysis of gender. This study represents an effort to address the phenomenon of white teacher dominance by listening to the voices of white educators who experienced race-based development. Ultimately, this study aimed to contribute to the

scholarship that informs how white educators develop their own racial identities so as to not do additional harm and trauma to racialized communities.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It was 2005, and I was in my first-year teaching post at Locke High School in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. It had been a hard first few months in the classroom as I figured out how to be an inclusion teacher. Lesson plan after lesson plan fell flat; general educators did not want me in their classrooms, and students were only opening up to me intermittently. It was December, and the question on the table was: Would I be returning to Locke after the winter break? The fact that students and my administrators were asking this question was confusing to me. As a white woman who had been educated in an affluent school district, I always saw teaching as a year-long commitment. I do not ever remember having a teacher who left mid-year for anything other than maternity leave, yet this was the question that lingered behind every interaction.

I had the good fortune to be placed as a special educator with three other first-year special educators who were also Teach for America (TFA) corps members. While none of us believed it was acceptable for four first-year teachers to comprise the entire inclusion department, our reality illuminated the larger issues of novice educators being placed at the highest needs schools within historically marginalized communities. At that time, one of my inclusion counterparts, Alisa¹, explained that because I am white² and grew up in a white-dominant school system, teacher retention was not the great concern that it was at Locke. She went on to say that it was

¹ Pseudonym

² I am making the choice to use the lowercase “w” for white and whiteness throughout this dissertation. Not all sources used make this same choice, thus for direct quotes I will respect the original text.

my white privilege that allowed me to be ignorant to this fact and that I needed to investigate my privilege because now I was a white educator in front of all Black and Brown³ students. I had the ability to leave as the school was not in my community, while neither she nor our students had that luxury. The assumption was that I was not going to stay or that I was not going to want to stay because there was a “better” white school out there at which I could teach.

Moreover, the message that had been communicated to my students by the white supremacist world in which they lived was that white teachers do not care about Black and Brown folks and, thus, were bound to leave. In this context, I use the term *white supremacist* in reference to the broader system of privilege and dominance that is alive and well in our world. I am naming the system that institutionalizes the belief that white people are superior to other races and puts it into practice. This white-dominant mentality was also reified in my own schooling, an ideology designed to reproduce a racially stratified society. I remember at that moment my world was shaken, and although the “real talk” was tough to assimilate, I was grateful that Elisa, a Latina woman, cared about me enough to name the reality of my ignorance, then help me process the reality of a world that we had experienced so differently in our lifetimes. She felt it was her responsibility to talk to me about my privilege in our school community because she felt I could take it, and moreover, she felt I needed to know. This one conversation put me on a journey to understand what Elisa meant and to interrogate those systems that had allowed me to remain ignorant to this racial divide.

³ I am making the choice to capitalize all other racial groups throughout this dissertation. This is done intentionally to de-center whiteness and to intentionally place emphasis on historically racialized groups of people. Not all sources used make this same choice, thus for direct quotes I will respect the original text.

Fast forward five years, at which time I *had* left my teaching job for a staff position with Teach for America Los Angeles (TFA LA). I was sitting at a different table, but the question being asked of me was a similar one: Do you have any teachers who are not going to come back after winter break? My manager was asking specifically about the retention of the TFA LA corps members that I was coaching at the time, but I again thought of Elisa and what she had illuminated in me. This question was being asked because teachers (including those in the TFA LA program), who were about 50% white (Jennings, 2017), had the potential privilege to leave mid-year. I began asking questions about the racial identity preparation program that we had started with staff and why it had not yet made it to our corps members. I knew that my understanding of the world had completely shifted by grappling with this question, and I wanted to find a way to bring that conversation to other white educators.

One consistent theme that surfaced from my practice, readings, and conversations with colleagues over the previous five years was that it was not the burden of educators of color to make the white supremacist realities of our world known, but rather, it was the task of white educators themselves to examine their privilege and become self-vigilant in their classrooms. I wanted our Los Angeles region to engage our white corps members in this conversation, including the privilege they had to leave a teaching job mid-commitment. My manager allowed me to pilot what would later become one piece of our regional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusiveness (DEI) programming. I began convening a group of first- and second-year novice white educators who wanted to talk about what it was like to be a white educator in a classroom of children of color. I wanted to assist these young teachers on an awakening path early on, rather than later in their careers, as was my experience. If our TFA LA corps members were

going to be in the classroom, then we were going to be speaking explicitly about race and its impact on our programming. Given my own experience, I came to understand deeply that this must be essential to teacher preparation and, thus, became the central motivation that now informs this study of novice white female educators. Moreover, my connection to the topic of novice white female educators is what drives my interest to listen, document, and honor the stories of other white female educators.

Statement of the Problem

Sixty-three years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision to integrate the nation's public schools, the teaching force in the United States remains overwhelmingly white. According to the 2016 U.S. Department of Education report, *The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce*, over 80 % of all teachers across the country are white, with a large number teaching in schools where the racial/ethnic identities of their students do not mirror the teacher's racial background (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This disparity warrants consideration, especially given the changing demographic landscape of Los Angeles. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the second largest school district in the nation, enrolling over 640,000 students per year (Los Angeles Unified School District [LAUSD], n.d.). In 2015, *The Los Angeles Times* reported that only 9.8 % of students in LAUSD are white, while over 34 % of teachers identify as ethnically white ("Mapping LA neighborhoods", n.d.). The consequence is a persistent dissonance and disconnect between the culture of the teacher and that of the majority of the bicultural students they are teaching (Darder, 2012).

In LAUSD—the second largest school district in the United States—the largest ethnic subgroup of students, for example, is Latinx⁴ or 73.7 % of enrolled students. Yet, the percentage of Latinx teachers is only 33.7. These statistics illuminate the degree of dissonance that exists. Less than 10% of students in the same school district are white, while over one-third of all the educators are white. The number of Latinx students is seven times that of white students, yet there are the same number of Latinx educators as there are white educators (LAUSD, n.d.). There are significant disparities between representation of educators, with the white teacher population being overrepresented. Add to these numbers the fact that white women, who dominate the profession, are staying longer, while teachers of color leave in larger numbers (Broughman, Goldring, Grey, & Bitterman, 2013). Landsman (2018), citing Broughman, Goldring, Grey, and Bitterman (2013), noted that the average white female teacher has 14 years of experience and a higher pay rate due to their longevity in the classroom. There can be many reasons as to why this tenure occurs, yet it indicates a dominance by white teachers in the field and as such a white dominance in educational practice. These numbers are telling and also signal in large part the manner by which people are defining whiteness, how white privilege is used, and how one’s whiteness is critically (un)examined.

The problem, however, is more than simply one of overrepresentation; it is also about the quality of classroom instruction and the capacity of white teachers to engage with the issues of students of color. This is particularly important in that scholars in the field have consistently shown that there is a negative impact on students, both socially and academically, when white

⁴ *Latinx* is a relatively new term that is gender inclusive. Given this, the sources that I reference do not use the term. Whenever relevant, I have used Latinx but have not changed any direct quotations.

teachers employ racializing attitudes and practices on students of color (Darder, 2012; Emdin, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Often, white teachers utilize a “color-blind” lens within the classroom that, wittingly or unwittingly, discounts the unique beauty that students of color bring to the classroom and to society more broadly (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Haviland, 2008).

Defining whiteness

This study focused explicitly on whiteness and the necessity for racial identity development for novice white female teachers. White racial identity scholar Janet Helms (1990) codified this position when she argued that one must “take the journey himself or herself” (p. 219). As such, defining the social construction of whiteness is an essential before entering into an analysis of white racial identity development. The term *Caucasian* originated in the 18th century as part of the developing European science of racial classification (Mukhopadhyay, 2009). German anatomist Johann Blumenbach visited the region of the Caucasus Mountains, between the Caspian and Black Sea, and determined that the people who were living in that region were the most beautiful and ideal humans. He deemed the inhabitants to be created in “God’s image” and declared that this was likely the site where humans originated (Mukhopadhyay, 2009). Blumenbach decided that all light-skinned individuals from this region, along with the Europeans, belonged to the same race, which he labeled Caucasian. He then named four other races that he considered to be morally degenerate forms of “God’s original creation”: (a) Ethiopian or Black, (b) Mongolian or Yellow, (c) Malayan or Brown, and (d) Red. Blumenbach’s system of racial classification was adopted by the United States, where it was then used to justify slavery and other forms of racial discrimination (Mukhopadhyay, 2009, p.46).

Currently, race continues to be used as a method of subjugation. According to Picower (2009), whiteness is socially constructed. She stated that whiteness is an ideology, epistemology, emotionality, and psychology that often produces concrete systemic racism by normalizing dominant ways of being and codifying elements into invisible rules. Said another way, whiteness surreptitiously influences what we believe, how we understand knowledge, what we see, and how we think and feel. There is no realm of being that is not affected by understandings of whiteness and the ongoing reification of white dominant ideology. Darder and Torres (2004) argued that race is not real and has no scientific basis, yet racial categorization guides social structure. They noted, “The majority of the people living in the United States continue to believe that they belong to a specific race, and this has an impact on the way that they conceive their social identity” (Darder & Torres, 2004, p. 152). Tochluk (2010) added that whites often consider whiteness to be “normal.” The concept of normalcy is a manifestation of white people living in a world dominated by whiteness. White people struggle to see that whiteness because it is invisible to the dominant group, which continues to reify a white-dominated society. To this end, this dissertation intentionally uses the lowercased “w” when writing about whiteness in an intentional effort to de-center whiteness. To capitalize the “w” would be to give it additional power in a system that already favors whiteness.

Critical studies of whiteness add to this scholarship as the field seeks to recognize, analyze, and critique the power and privileges associated with whiteness (Haviland, 2008). Critical studies of whiteness are an interdisciplinary approach, which is an attempt to understand the far-reaching societal embedment of whiteness. Cabrera, Watson, and Franklin (2016) used critical whiteness studies in their research in an attempt to “unmask the seemingly invisible

privileges of whites and demonstrate that the privileges are real” (p. 120). In the context of this study, privilege constitutes (a) being white and living in a society that ascribes to asymmetrical power relations that reproduce white domination and (b) being part of a field—education—that is continually reified by its white participants and the racializing design of its institutions.

Gillborn (2005) argued that racism is so systemically ingrained in contemporary society that even race-neutral approaches to education reform serve to recreate white supremacy in that they do nothing to transform the underlying structures and processes of racialization. This dynamic and its relationship to whiteness will serve as a critical point of analysis for this study.

white Privilege

The issue of white privilege is central to understanding the problem that this study seeks to address. White privilege is invisible and needs to be investigated by white individuals. It is important to define white privilege here, given that it is a key component to the DEI programming of Teach for America. Peggy McIntosh (1989) brought the concept of white privilege into the mainstream with her seminal piece, *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. According to McIntosh, whites in Western societies enjoy advantages that non-whites do not experience as “an invisible package of unearned assets” (p. 1). White privilege denotes both obvious and less obvious or passive advantages, which white people generally do not recognize they have, distinguishing it from overt bias or prejudice. This can come in the form of cultural affirmation of one’s worth and can be actualized via presumed greater social status and freedom to buy, work, play, and speak freely (Kendall, 2012). The effects can be seen in professional, educational, and personal contexts. The concept of white privilege also implies the right to assume the universality of one’s own experiences, marking others as different or exceptional

(i.e., racializing) while perceiving oneself as normal (McIntosh, 1989; Tochluk, 2010).

Robin DiAngelo (2011) took this concept one step further with her work on “white fragility,” a term she created to describe white people’s defensive responses to racial stress. She noted that “white privilege can be thought of as unstable racial equilibrium” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 58). When this equilibrium is challenged, the resulting racial stress can become intolerable and trigger a range of defensive responses or behaviors. DiAngelo also wrote that white privilege is very rarely discussed and that even university-level multicultural education courses tend to use vocabulary that further obfuscates racial privilege and defines race as something that only concerns people of color. DiAngelo further suggested that the use of loaded terminology with negative connotations when speaking about people of color adds to and further reifies the cycle of white privilege. Racially coded language such as “urban,” “inner city,” and “disadvantaged” is used pervasively; however, terms such as “white,” “over advantaged,” or “privileged” are seldom used. This racially coded language reproduces racist images and perspectives, while it simultaneously reproduces the comfortable illusion that race and its problems are for people of color not white people (Darder, 2012; DiAngelo, 2011; hooks, 1991).

Moreover, McIntosh’s (1989) work illuminated that white individuals have the privilege of not seeing the impact of race on the human experience. McIntosh argued that the field of education must engage the topic of white privilege due to the abundant forms of white privilege that are invisible. This phenomenon, she contended, has allowed white people to parse out racism as individual acts versus recognizing the large invisible system of racism that confers dominance to the white population. In addition to McIntosh’s individual orientation of consciousness raising, evidence from the literature supports the need for white identity

development that also interrogates the larger structures of white supremacy (Barlas, 1997; Denevi & Pastan, 2006; hooks, 1991; Tatum, 1992).

The social and material conditions of individuals, therefore, cannot be fully understood without addressing their relationship to the whole. In this case, white supremacy has been socially constructed over time, thus one individual cannot understand their individual positionality without also investigating the societal norms and beliefs that uphold the experience of the individual within the context of their practice. With this in mind, Beverly Tatum (1992) pointed to the necessity of white identity development, particularly for those educators working in non-white spaces. She further argued, “A major benefit of this racial identity development process is increased effectiveness in multiracial settings” (p. 22). As such, racial identity development can no longer remain on the periphery of teacher development in that research in the field supports the need for race-based programming (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2006; Tatum 1992), particularly among white teachers who must engage the impact of white privilege in their personal lives and their teaching practice if they are to effectively meet the pedagogical and social needs of students within their classrooms.

Race-Based Programming

There is no question that teaching across cultural and racial lines requires continued self-reflection and development, particularly with respect to questions of race and racism in the classroom. Howard and Milner (2014) called on teachers to attend to their own deeply-rooted values and ideologies, while also gathering an understanding of the urban community context. Tracing this question to where teacher formation occurs, there is a disturbing gap in the inclusion of racial identity development in teacher preparation programs (Milner, 2006; West-Burns,

Murray, & Watt, 2013; Utt & Tochluk, 2016). Milner (2006) asserted that teacher preparation programs have a responsibility to offer knowledge, skills, and tools for learning about cultural and racial diversity. Similarly, Tatum (1992) insisted that white teachers must pay careful attention to their own racial identity alongside the racial identity of their students.

West-Burns, Murray, and Watt (2013) contended that beginning teachers want and need the space to talk about race, but current professional development does not make space for this conversation, neither in the length nor frequency needed for them to become culturally competent about this complex phenomenon. In a context bound by state-mandated Teacher Performance Expectations and local program requirements, choices are made as to how to spend time in teacher professional development. Given the prevalence of white educators in non-white spaces, teacher understanding of racial identity development can no longer be de-prioritized or undermined in service of other more technical teacher skills. Few teachers who practice in marginalized communities fully understand the racialized context and their place within the larger racializing system (Howard & Milner, 2014). Knowing the self in relationship to others can be a significant lever in enhancing relationships and mutual understanding between students from racialized communities and their teachers.

Among different races, however, racial identity development takes different forms. It is also experienced in nuanced ways, given the historical construction of race and the subsequent power hierarchy associated with racism (Tatum, 1992). Tatum (1992) and Helms (1984) have each put forward racial identity development stages for white individuals who are pursuing white racial identity development. Each development framework is consistent of relatively similar stages of development, suggesting some consensus in the field. This body of literature is useful

in understanding how race-based programming can be utilized to help novice white educators unpack their own whiteness and its social and individual construction.

One approach used effectively to explore one's racial identity, for example, is a process known as racial identity caucusing. Caucuses provide spaces for people to work within their own racial/ethnic affinity groups. For white people, a caucus provides time and space to work explicitly and intentionally on understanding white culture and white privilege and to increase one's critical analysis around these concepts. A white caucus also puts the onus of responsibility squarely on white people to teach each other about these ideas rather than constantly relying on people of color to teach them (Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014; Racial Equity Tools, n.d.; Western States Center, 2003). Caucusing is an important strategy for working on the Internalized Racist Superiority that becomes ingrained in one's psyche as a result of existing in a white dominant and white supremacist society (Crossroads Ministry, n.d.). Building heightened consciousness and commitment to undoing these manifestations provides a space for further work and self-liberation. It is important to note that caucusing is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is a tool for deep exploration of one's personal identity so that cross-racial work can be done in the future. Moreover, it represents an effective strategy of raced-based programming within teacher education programs.

In light of all this, an underlying assumption of this study is the necessity for teacher preparation programs, like TFA, to investigate its effect, determine if teacher consciousness is being shaped, and assess if that shift in consciousness is having a positive impact on both teachers and students on a daily level. Ultimately, the intention is for unconsciously held biases of white teachers to surface and be processed so that daily consciousness building can be paired

with interrogation of larger systemic inequities (McIntosh, 1989; Tatum, 1992). Together, this can impact the manner in which white teachers can show up in effective ways to teach students of color.

Teach for America's Response

As discussed earlier, the pervasiveness of both white privilege and white fragility has been well documented, particularly in the past three decades. White privilege must be confronted and, given the pervasiveness of white educators, addressing the roots of white privilege with novice white educators teaching nonwhite students is a starting place. The vision for the white identity development series or race-based programming at TFA has been to pursue a deeper understanding of each person's identity. As noted above, educators cannot teach in a socially just way without deeply reflecting on who they are, where they stand in relation to the societal power structures in our country, and how they are either reproducing or interrupting asymmetrical power relations and structures in classrooms.

Additionally, educators cannot build relationships with students and teach in a culturally responsive way without first acknowledging who they are versus how students may see them within the classroom (Stoneburner, 2016). While always in process, the DEI group aims to be a space that accomplishes goals it has adopted from Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere—Los Angeles (AWARE-LA), a collective group of individuals who have committed themselves to seeking racial justice while at the same time developing themselves. While AWARE LA had other goals, the following goals are a bedrock from where AWARE-LA (2017) operated: (a) People of color shouldn't always have to be the ones to educate white people about racism and oppression; (b) In order to challenge racism and dismantle white power structures, white people

need to unlearn racism and discover the ways we enact white privilege; and (c) It's a space for white people to figure out what it means to be an anti-racist white person and challenge racism in all areas of our lives.

In these ways, TFA LA has sought to respond to the phenomenon of a white-dominated teaching field through implementing race-based programming, with an intentional emphasis on the identity development of white educators. However, after five years of implementation, the staff is still left wondering how the program is experienced by white educators and what impact educators believe the program has had on their own identity development and as a byproduct their classroom experience. Due to the overrepresentation of women in the education field (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), I additionally ask the question, how is the program being experienced by white female educators in particular?

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study sought to understand the experience of TFA LA's DEI programming for novice white female educators. The research leveraged the voices of participants to greater understand: (a) the experience engaging in race-based programming while teaching in a community that does not reflect their own race; (b) how they see their consciousness being shaped over time as a result of DEI programming; and (c) how explorations of whiteness shaped their social justice practice and orientation in the classroom. Paulo Freire (2000) instructed us as educators to use a critical lens and an orientation towards praxis when we engage with others for the purpose of creating a more just world; this orientation was embodied in this study. Furthermore, engaging with white educators was a deliberate choice in this study, understanding that the larger systems of inequity will not change if we do not reach into the core

of white supremacy with the intention to engage and transform the system of education (Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Western States Center, 2003). The DEI programming currently in place is imperfect, and it is still “tinkering around the edges of the problem,” (Denevi & Pastan, 2006, p. 70), as novice white educators are developing consciousness in context to their daily teaching practice with Black and Brown children. This study both acknowledged the tensions upfront and sought to better understand how to live within those tensions, while also engaging in a praxis of ongoing development, where addressing the identity needs of white educators teaching in historically racialized communities is understood as an immediate need.

Connection to Social Justice

The disparity between the racial identities of teachers and students in historically marginalized communities is a significant issue (Utt & Tochluk, 2016). The national teaching force remains over 80% white (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), and thus it is the responsibility of teacher preparation programs to help ground teachers as racialized beings (Milner, 2006). As one such teacher preparation program, TFA LA seeks to embrace the call for racial identity development for all teachers, but in particular for white teachers. It is TFA LA’s responsibility to ensure that white educators are having a positive impact on students. As such, it is critical that TFA LA executes programming that focuses on white identity development so that teachers can engage in critical discovery about themselves as white racial beings alongside the positionality that they hold in the larger system of white supremacy. Unexamined, the potential of white classroom teachers causing students of color harm and trauma is not just possible but probable given the power and pervasiveness of racism within the educational context (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As educators, we are all in process; however, active engagement with

issues of racial identity development is one important avenue of teaching praxis toward a more socially just and conscientious TFA LA white teaching force.

Research Questions

There are one overarching research question and three secondary questions that this qualitative critical narrative study sought to answer. The ability to answer these questions was directly linked to the participation of first- and second-year K-12 white female educators within TFA LA race-based programming.

The main research question that drives this study was as follows: How does the racial identity of novice white female educators evolve during their first three years teaching?

The three secondary questions that guided, in particular, the prompts that were used during the narrative sessions included:

- 1) How do novice white female educators define whiteness? How do they believe their definition of whiteness has evolved as a result of their experience in race-based programming?
- 2) How do novice white female educators describe the impact that whiteness has on their teaching?
- 3) How has the preparation they received through race-based programming influenced their classroom practice and relationships with students from racialized communities?

Conceptual Framework

The findings of this study were analyzed through a conceptual framework that utilized three different lenses, given its focus on the question of race and the identity development of novice white female educators. The study sought to understand the experience of white women

who are currently or who have recently been involved in race-based programming. This called for one level of analysis through an identity development lens, more specifically through a whiteness identity lens. However, the analysis was informed by a framework that juxtaposed principles from critical race theory (CRT), critical whiteness studies (CWS), and critical feminist theory.

Critical Race Theory

This dissertation sought to understand the experience of female educators, given that females dominate the teaching field at 76% of the total teaching force (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In fact, the U.S. Department of Education report (2016) detailed an overrepresentation of female teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The choice then to focus on the intersection of race and gender was deliberate. My personal experience and underlying assumption was that the experience of a white woman teaching nonwhite students is different from the experience of other educators.

Within the context of critical race theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality has particular relevance to this study. Crenshaw (1989) asserted that an "intersectional experience" is "greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (p. 141). While Crenshaw's work traditionally centered on Black women, there was relevance as the white women who participated in this study were in schools teaching nonwhite students every day. As such, both race and gender have to be considered as salient factors within this study.

In speaking about pervasive racism, Carole Barlas (1997) noted, "Racism has become institutionalized at every level of society, and the consequences are destructive to both white people and people of color" (p. 1) A lack of consciousness of white privilege is a key factor in

perpetuating this phenomenon, as critical race theory also illuminates broadly. Thus, Barlas's (1997) work supported the notion that there is a need for developing the kinds of learning processes that effectively arouse and expand consciousness among white teachers.

With this in mind, CRT provides a useful rationale for why carefully examining the construction of whiteness is essential for white teachers. It recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of American society and that institutional racism is therefore pervasive and has infiltrated all facets of society. Critical race theory identifies societal power structures as based on white privilege and white supremacy and claims that racial power is maintained over time at the expense of individuals of color (Barlas, 1997; Lazos Vargas, 2003). Since DEI programming seeks to name that white privilege and white supremacy exist, CRT was a helpful framework to understand the societally ingrained nature of white privilege and power.

Critical whiteness Studies

Critical whiteness studies, including white consciousness development, support a learning process to arouse greater consciousness among white teachers. This body of scholarship intersects with Janet Helms's (1984) theory, as the learning process can help people understand their transition from one status to another. To engage in a conversation about white identity development as connected to the perpetuation of white supremacy, Helms provided essential language. Within this framework, the development of white identity undergoes a process that can encompass six distinct statuses:

- 1) Contact: Obliviousness to own racial identity
- 2) Disintegration: First acknowledgement of white identity
- 3) Reintegration: Idealizing white/disintegrates (People of Color)

- 4) Pseudo-independent: Intellectualized acceptance of own and others' race
- 5) Immersion/emersion: Honest appraisal of racism and significance of white identity
- 6) Autonomy: Internalizes a multi-cultural identity with non-racist white identity at its core. (Helms, 1984)

Helms's (1984) statuses of white development have become widely accepted in the field as a framework considered to accurately illustrate the process of transition toward greater consciousness. Although numbered, the statuses are not linear and are to be engaged in a cyclical manner given that personal development does not always follow a set progression. People may identify themselves in each of the statuses at different times, providing an opportunity to access the process and movement of new teachers during DEI programming. Through this lens, DEI programming has sought to serve as a means to assist white student teachers to recognize how embedded they are in the white supremacist system, how they may perpetuate it, and to begin transforming their classroom practice.

Critical Feminist Theory

The findings of this study were also analyzed through a critical feminist lens. The pervasiveness of white women in education is established earlier in this chapter as a problem (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), and white women were the object of this study in order to gather perspectives of white women experiencing racial identity development while teaching nonwhite students. While historically the intersection of critical feminist theory and CRT has focused on the experiences of women of color (de Saxe, 2012), their combined tenets can also be applied to white women, given that its use is to challenge the white supremacist agenda and seek connection between issues of social justice that intersect race and gender.

Jennifer de Saxe (2012) stated that critical feminist theory can evoke multiple theories and meanings in which issues of gender are significant to any phenomenon of study where issues of patriarchy manifest in the lives of women. Also, key here is to recognize that critical feminism is rooted in critical theoretical principles of cultural politics, ideology, and hegemony (Darder, Torres, & Baltodano, 2017), hence issues of power tied to gender relations are central to the analysis. In addition, de Saxe reframed critical feminist theory as not just a tool but as a methodology that “educators can use to reconsider forms of resistance, empowerment, and experiences inside all educational institutions” (p. 195). The theory can be employed analytically to counter women’s societal subordination as well as a methodology for action. This critical feminist lens, in combination with CRT and critical whiteness studies, served as a useful line of analysis for this study, given that the existence of power relations within the classroom was examined as part of the critical narrative process.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was utilized for conducting this study. Participants were first-, second-, and third-year white female educators who were teaching full time in pre-kindergarten- to 12th-grade classrooms at either traditional public schools or public charter schools. Participants were currently experiencing or had previously experienced the DEI programming offered by the TFA LA program. The total participants were a combination of eight first-, second-, and third-year female educators, with four first-year, two second-year, and two third-year teachers. I collected narrative data using a combination of audio recording and field notes of critical narratives (one-to-one sessions). During each of the narrative sessions, prompts were used to support teachers in telling their stories about their experiences with TFA

LA's race programming. Once all critical narratives were completed and thematically coded, they were carefully analyzed for emergent and recurring themes.

Positionality

I am an alumnus of TFA LA and was a former TFA LA staff member who designed and executed DEI programming for white novice teachers. Currently, I am an alumni facilitator who supports current DEI structures and remains in a position of some influence over content choices and delivery for novice white educators. It is essential then that I acknowledge here the assumptions I bring to the study, given my particular positionality and experience. Presently, I embrace the assumption that race-based programming is essential for all teachers, especially for white teachers. AWARE-LA (2017) reminded us that it is essential for white people to be doing race-based work alongside other white people. The burden of self-discovery and journey needs to be felt within the same racial group to ensure that white people are not placing the burden of growth onto people of color. On the website for AWARE- LA, the operating norms state, "A white space serves as a resource to people of color who want to work with white people but don't want to have to spend all their energy dealing with the racism of white people" (Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere-Los Angeles [AWARE-LA], 2017, n.d.). This purpose was adopted by the white DEI programming in TFA LA, thus its effectiveness and continued purpose are embedded in the researcher's gaze.

The assumptions of the participants in DEI programming ranged from excitement to loathing that they need to be in professional development with TFA LA on Saturday multiple times throughout the year; those emotions can also extend to the particular race-based programming in this study. This range provided fodder for discovery, but it also may have been a

limitation for investigation. In addition, purposeful personal reflection was an essential and ongoing element of the study. Freire (2000) instructed researchers and educators to be transparent about context and agenda when practicing critical reflexivity. As the researcher, I sought transformation in the process, as well as to be part of further transforming the DEI programming for white educators. These intentional cycles of critical reflection, when combined with reflexivity, although viewed by some as a limitation actually provided me strength and a grounded purpose.

Limitations

One potential limitation of this study was directly related to my positionality as a former full-time TFA staff member and a current alumni facilitator. There was the possibility that participants might have felt reluctant to open up about their experiences in the race-based programming that TFA offers, thus positionality was addressed upfront as well as the parameters of the study alongside its purpose and intent. An additional limitation was the fact that I am no longer a TFA staff member and thus no longer had the same degree of influence over structural choices for DEI programming in the 2017-2018 school year, when the data for this study was collected. I have continued to have influence in regards to the content delivered when DEI groups meet; however, the limitation of no longer being on formal TFA staff could have potentially impacted the frequency and structure of the programming itself. As such, participants may have had different experiences with DEI given their different corps year, thus their development could be impacted. Finally, another limitation may have been the students who decided to join TFA. On its public website, TFA stated, “We are committed to profound systemic change, because we know equity begins with education” (para. 3). The public materials

go on to share information about the organization's commitment to diversity and the characteristics of teachers who expand opportunities for students. Given this marketing, it can be argued that people who are drawn to TFA may have an orientation toward social justice. As a result of this possible orientation, TFA corps members may be more open to DEI and identity-based programming. This could have impacted the study but cannot be assumed for all individuals in TFA.

Delimitations

There were two notable delimitations of this study. First, the study was conducted with novice educators. For the purposes of this study, I defined a novice educator to be an educator in the first three years of teaching, even though the field widely defines a novice teacher as an educator within the first five years of teaching. This was an intentional narrowing of the educator pool, but, as Synar and Maiden (2012) reminded us, over 50% of educators are leaving the profession within the first five years of teaching, with a large percentage of that turnover occurring within the first three years. A second delimitation of the study was the small sample size of eight participants. Thus, findings may not be readily generalizable to the wider teaching base of white educators or any other population. However, Creswell (2003) reminded us that the value of rich qualitative data lies in the context and subsequent findings of a particular study versus its generalizability. More importantly, the analysis of the data was guided by a myriad of research studies that have examined the notion of whiteness as a developmental concept.

Definition of Terms

Caucus space: Caucuses provide spaces for people to work within their own racial/ethnic groups. For white people, a caucus provides time and space to work explicitly and intentionally

on understanding white culture and white privilege and to increase one's critical analysis around these concepts. A white caucus also puts the onus on white people to teach each other about these ideas, rather than constantly relying on people of color to teach them. For people of color, a caucus is a place to work with their peers on their experiences of internalized racism for healing and to work on liberation (Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014; Racial Equity Tools, n.d.; Western States Center, 2003).

Critical feminism: Historically, critical feminism centers women of color; however, it can have a wider implication if used to critique large societal systems of power. Critical feminist theory positions gender as a significant phenomenon of study and can be used as a tool to counter female subordination in society (de Saxe, 2012).

Critical Race Theory: Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a backdrop for the social construct of race and recognizes that racism is engrained in society and is pervasive. It identifies that these power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy and that racial power is maintained over time at the expense of individuals of color (Barlas, 1997).

Historically marginalized community: In this particular context, a historically marginalized community was operationally defined as a school community with a student population of 85% or higher that qualifies for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program and math proficiency scores of 40% and lower and English Proficiency scores of 35% and lower as measured on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortia (Otero, 2016).

Internalized racist superiority: "A complex multi-generational socialization process that teaches white people to believe, accept, and/or live our superior societal definition of self

and to fit into and live out superior societal roles. These behaviors define and normalize the race construct and its outcome: white supremacy” (Crossroads Ministry, n.d.).

Novice educator: A teacher within their first five years as an educator (West-Burns et al., 2013). For this dissertation, I narrowed this definition to a teacher in their first three years of teaching.

white identity development: A process for developing a heightened consciousness about whiteness as a social construction. There are six statuses of racial identity that can be viewed as levels of racial complexity within the individual, with higher or more advanced stages representing greater sophistication in one’s conceptualization skills with regards to one’s own racial characteristics as well as those of other racial group members. Each status is present in a person at different times, yet the level of current consciousness within the individual shows if she or he can manage effectively their attitudes, feelings, and behavior within a diverse context (Helms, 1984).

white privilege: An invisible system that benefits whites and disadvantages people of color (McIntosh, 1989). White privilege is also the relationship of dominance between whites and people of color (DiAngelo, 2012; Kendall, 2012).

white supremacist system: A system that puts the belief that whites are superior to other races into practice (Irving, 2014). This system overtly and covertly benefits white individuals through normalized practices and entrenched ideology that reifies power structures with white individuals at the top (Picower, 2009). This white supremacist system can yield individuals who are white supremacists; however, this dissertation uses the term in reference to the larger system at play in the current societal structure.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provided an introduction of the study and a general overview of the research. The second chapter will provide a review of the literature in the field related to the construction and proliferation of whiteness, white female teachers and their development, and race-based programming. Chapter 3 will focus on the critical narrative methodology and research design that were utilized. Chapter 4 will present the data collected from the narratives of eight novice female teachers. Finally, Chapter 5 will provide an analysis of the data, summarize conclusions, and make recommendations for the field and for future study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter 1 established the prevalence of white female teachers in the pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade (PK-12) field and the fact that white teachers are frequently teaching racialized groups of students, in particular Black and Latinx students. This begs the question, what racial development is necessary for white teachers teaching racialized students? This chapter is a review of the relevant literature on race-based development, with an emphasis on the manifestation of whiteness in teacher preparation programs and in the practice of white female teachers in particular. Background information on identity development with a focus on white female identity development sets the stage for understanding how individuals have the capacity for reflection and growth. Through this literature review, a gap in the scholarship was illuminated: Race-based development, however deep and personal, has been occurring in pockets, and ongoing systematic reflection on one's enactment of whiteness has not been widely included or reinforced in teacher preparation programs.

white Female Teachers

In the 20th century, new opportunities began to expand for women in the United States as jobs moved from rural farms to urban centers; a key area for women in U.S. urban centers was in the teaching profession. Men recognized that education was critical to create more male business leaders and entrepreneurs and that women could serve that purpose as educators (Zinn, 2003). As stated previously, women make up the predominant group in the education teaching force (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Despite this dominance in numbers, women have fought for respect as educational professionals—a battle that is ongoing.

This study focused specifically on novice white female educators. This choice was made due to the nuanced intersection of the multiple identity markers and the positionality of the primary researcher as a white woman. White women, as the majority in the teaching profession, are in a unique position due to the fact that they both have benefitted from white privilege and have also experienced oppression due to their gender (Hughes, 2013). Denevi (2018) wrote about what she wished she had known before she began teaching; her message was targeted specifically to white women. She wanted other white women to know

- (a) that they are white; (b) that it matters because “We teach who we are” (Palmer, 1998);
- (c) that their students see race either implicitly or explicitly; and (d) that their failure to locate themselves as white and to talk about this positionality “means doing more harm than good.” (Denevi, 2018, p. 76)

Thus, it is the responsibility of white women to fully understand both identities if they are to positively impact the lives of their students.

As Zinn (2003) explained, past oppression caused negative feelings as women fought to be educated and enter professions. Today, as in the past, women want the opportunity to develop their own identities through their education and work (Hughes, 2013). Ossana, Helms, and Leonard (1992) offered the *womanist* model as a way for women to find value in any role that they choose for themselves. The womanist model is characterized by four levels: (a) pre-encounter, which includes acceptance of societally traditional sex roles; (b) encounter, where women begin to question gender stereotypes; (c) immersion-emersion, which is where active rejection of male supremacy begins; and (d) internalization, which allows women to define their

identity without concerns about other's perceptions or expectations (Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992).

Studying the history of women in the United States is essential to understanding gender identity. There are underlying attitudes from earlier times of female oppression that still exist in contemporary society, and those attitudes continue to undercut the potential of women in their chosen professions (Hughes, 2013). Women choosing to be educators are further affected by the fact that education was one of the earliest professions to admit women; the structures of some educational institutions today continue to communicate a lack of trust in the professional competency of teachers (Hughes, 2013). Women need to be aware of these dynamics and continue to question the logic behind it as an act of defiance of the current gender politics that persist in education. Women must develop an awareness of how past oppression affects their current profession. This opens a space of connection to students who are also experiencing past or current oppression, as well as an opportunity for continued self-reflection on the intersection of gender identity to other more privileged identity markers.

Race is also an important part of a person's identity (Helms, 2008). Phenotypically speaking, racial identity cannot be changed, so understanding what one's racial identity means in the context of current societal attitudes and structures is essential for white teachers if they are to be culturally competent and racially self-aware. Currently, white teachers are in the role of educating racially diverse students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), but not all of those individuals have learned to exist within a multicultural world (Howard, 1999). Lawrence and Tatum (1999) contributed to this conversation with their small-scale studies of courses that each scholar taught about multiculturalism and becoming antiracist educators. Lawrence and Tatum

reviewed studies about multicultural and anti-racist courses for teacher educators and found that the number of courses that were considered successful was quite low. As a result, they set out to create a course that was guided by anti-racist pedagogy and based on the principles of racial identity development.

The working theory here was that this dual focus could bring about changes in teachers' fundamental beliefs about race and racism. What they discovered was that their participants experienced shifts in mindset, but to varying degrees. Given this, Lawrence and Tatum (1999) posited that one course can serve as a catalyst, but one course alone is not enough to enable an effective progression through each of Helms's (1990) stages of white identity development. Similarly, Lawrence and Tatum argued that more time and sustained engagement in racial development is essential to ensuring lasting change. They recommend that "teacher education students need not just one course in anti-racist education but a series of courses where anti-racist and multicultural concepts build upon one another" (Lawrence & Tatum, 1999, p. 10).

Expectations

Saffold and Longwell-Grice (2008) reviewed multiple studies that investigated the mindsets and expectations that white women hold as they enter nonwhite spaces to teach. Many novice white teachers bring negative and often stereotypical views of children who come from different backgrounds than their own (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). DiAngelo (2018) noted that these mindsets are crafted due to segregation:

While most teacher education students live their lives in racial segregation, it is common for them to believe that racism is in the past, that segregation "just happens," that

everyone is the same and therefore they don't see color, and that being white has no particular meaning. (p. 83)

The majority of white individuals love, work, play, and die primarily in racial segregation, and our society does not teach us that this is a loss (DiAngelo, 2018). In fact, the further away that whiter neighborhoods are from communities of color, the more likely they are to be seen as “good.” The implicit message here is that there is no inherent value in the presence or perspective of people of color—particularly those who are poor working class, which leads to highly stereotyped views (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Segregation demonstrates that race does indeed matter, and the lack of cross-racial engagement makes it challenging to see racial disparities in measureable ways in every area of life (DiAngelo, 2018). If white teachers continue to insist that race and conditions of racial segregation are meaningless, then they will continue to misunderstand and misrepresent the realities faced by communities of color.

The “Feminisation” of Education

It is also critical to note that white teachers are currently operating in an education system that has been problematized for being “feminised” over time. As Zinn (2003) noted, education was a key profession for women in the 20th century. Women, both in the United States and around the globe, moved into education roles as they entered the workforce in higher numbers. This global phenomenon is firmly rooted in issues related to economic development, urbanization, the position of women in society, cultural definitions of gender, and the value of children and childcare (Drudy, Martin, O’Flynn, & Woods, 2005). Drudy (2008) expanded upon this as he described that there is a global perception that primary teaching is a “woman’s job” as it relates to a “mother’s role” (p. 311), and there is a pervasive essentialist belief that a “woman’s

nature tends to make her better with children” (p. 312). However, as women began to fight for their own rights to be equal to men, through suffrage and civil rights movement engagement, sentiments of respect towards women began to wane with the increase of rights and independence; this same pattern occurred for women in the teaching profession (Falter, 2016).

In the past three decades, the feminisation of education has brought about concern. Falter (2016) noted that the term feminisation has several overlapping meanings that vary from the numbers of both men and women in the profession to the cultural concerns related to perceptions of female bias in regards to the curriculum and pedagogical decisions. Falter (2016) further posited that while more women are in educational spaces, they are not at the higher levels of administration, and that schools as a whole are becoming more masculinised as they become a “treat to male power” (p. 21). Many advances that women have fought for over the last century have come under attack in the current neo-liberal era. As a consequence of efforts to reassert patriarchal norms, women, and in turn teachers, have become easy targets (Falter, 2016). Teaching, since it is overwhelmingly female dominated, has become a scapegoat because teachers have the power and authority to shape the future ideology and knowledge of a captive audience (Falter, 2016). In order to keep women in their place, educational policy makers, who are overwhelmingly male, have begun to dictate what teachers do in their classrooms and evaluate how they perform (Falter, 2016). Patriarchy, as a dominant structure, continues to prevail today even in a field that is dominated by female bodies.

Whiteness and Identity Development

Researchers have been interested in identity development for some time. Identity development is the distinct development of the personality of an individual (Erikson, 1963).

Pieces of the person's actual identity include a sense of continuity, a sense of uniqueness from others, and a sense of affiliation. Identity formation leads to a number of issues of personal identity and an identity where the individual has some sort of comprehension of themselves as a discrete and separate entity (Erikson, 1963). Many theories of development include some aspects of identity formation. One theory stands out: Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Erikson (1963, 1968) posited that throughout a person's lifetime, individuals experience different crises or conflicts. Each of the conflicts arises at a certain point in life and must be successfully resolved for progression through each of the eight stages of development (see Table 1).

Table 1

The Life Cycle: A Psychosocial Approach to Human Development

	Stage	Age Range	Psychosocial Crises	Significant Relations
I	Infancy	0 - 1½ years	Basic trust versus basic mistrust	Maternal person
II	Early Childhood	1½ - 3 years	Autonomy versus shame, doubt	Parental persons
III	Play Age	3 - 6 years	Initiative versus guilt	Basic family
IV	School Age	6 - 12 years	Industry versus inferiority	Neighborhood; school
V	Adolescence	10 - 24/ 26 years	Identity versus identity confusion	Peer groups; models of leadership
VI	Young Adulthood	18/22 - 40 years	Intimacy versus isolation	Partners in friendships, competition, cooperation
VII	Adulthood	30 - 65 years	Generativity versus stagnation	Divided labor and shared household responsibilities
VIII	Old Age	55 - 60+ years	Integrity versus despair	Humankind

Note. Adapted from *Identity and the Life Cycle* (2nd ed.), by E. H. Erikson, 1980. New York NY: Norton. Copyright 1980 by W. W. Norton & Company.

The particular stage relevant to identity formation takes place during adolescence, called *Identity Versus Role Confusion* (Erickson, 1980). This stage consists of adolescents trying to figure out who they are in order to form a basic identity that they will build on throughout their lives, especially concerning social and occupational identities. They face the complexities of determining one's own identity. Erikson (1963, 1968) said this crisis is resolved with identity achievement, the point at which an individual has extensively considered various goals and values, accepting some and rejecting others, and understands who they are as a unique person. Failure to form one's own identity leads to failure to form a shared identity with others, which could lead to instability in many areas as an adult (Erikson, 1963, 1968).

The identity formation stage of Erikson's (1963, 1968) theory of psychosocial development is considered a crucial stage in life, and in the context of this study, it is particularly notable with respect to examination of white women. One's sense of independence and sense of self forms during this time, primarily through a negotiation with social interactions. As such, who one is during this time and the way in which the surrounding society is constructed makes an imprint. It is worth citing here, however, that although Erickson's theory is useful to understanding the identity development of whiteness, it must not be seen as a universal construct. For example, Darder's (2012) work on bicultural development noted that Erikson's ideas were constructed within the epistemological context of Western notions of human development and should, therefore, not be automatically utilized as a universal model of human development.

whiteness and Racial Identity Development

Borrowed from the field of counseling, racial identity refers to "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with

a particular racial group” (Helms, 1990, p. 3). The concept of racial development was initially developed for counselors to use with people of color who were assumed to have distinct cultural heritages (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1988). Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1988) stated that this approach was promising because it facilitated both intra-racial dialogue and self-discovery. Scholarship has supported that racial identity development is considered an integral component of multicultural formation in various programs across education, counseling, and psychology (Mio, Barker, & Tumambing, 2009; Ottavi, Pope-Davis, & Dings, 1994).

One qualitative study by Simons et al. (2011) illuminated how 19 students acquired multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills through their own racial identity development (RID) from pre-service to post-service. Simons et al. found that in pre-service, almost all students were resistant to speaking about race, and nearly all had preconceived notions about working in a racially diverse community. The study used facets of racial identity development (RID) from both Cross (1991) and Helms (1990) to engage students in both interpersonal and intrapersonal learning experiences. Most pre-service students reported that interpersonal interactions heightened their multicultural awareness and knowledge. More than half the participants stated that applying the multi-cultural content to their work made them aware of their racial privilege; however, pre-service students struggled to make the connections between privilege and oppression (Simons et al., 2011). Additionally, white counselors used the concept of racial identity development to facilitate interactions with people of color. Atkinson et al. (1988) detailed how the counselors were trained before engaging with others, and they made a case that individuals can grow through self-reflection and explicit teaching. While critical, this also begs the question: What specific development needs to occur for white individuals?

Racial identity development illuminated the need for specific understanding related to white racial identity development (Han, West-Olatunji, & Thomas, 2010). Helms (1984, 1990) reformulated Cross's (1991) five-stage model that describes the psychological progress associated with Black racial identity development and applied it to white individuals. Helms (1984, 1990) also assumed racism as an integral issue of white identity development and suggested that each stage of development be considered a cognitive template that individuals use to organize racial information. Along these lines, Helms (1990) proposed white racial identity development progresses along six stages (see Table 2) in which an individual moves from a colorblind view of race to a less racist perspective.

Table 2

Helm's [w]hite Racial Identity Model

Stage	Key Characteristics
I Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adherence to “colorblind” motto - They see racial difference but do not find it salient and in fact may feel that racism is in fact propagated by the discussion and acknowledgement of race as an issue - No conscious demonstration of racism here
II Disintegration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prior conception of the world and because this conception is now challenged by this new information or experience - This person is often plagued by feelings of guilt and shame
III Reintegration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This stage is marked by a “blame-the-victim” attitude - They may feel that although whites do have privileges, it is probably because they deserve them and in are in some way superior to minority groups - Possible burgeoning of anti-racism, characterized by anger at whites, distancing, and a movement towards people of color
IV Pseudo-Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This is the first stage of positive racial identification - An individual in this stage does not feel that whites deserve privilege, they look to people of color, not themselves, to confront and uncover racism - Although this is positive white racial identity, the person does not have a sense of how they can be both white and non-racist together - Also marked by guilt and shame, can be paternalistic and seeking validation
V Immersion/Emersion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In this stage, the person makes a genuine attempt to connect to his/her own white identity and to be anti-racist - Usually accompanied by deep concern with understanding and connecting to other whites who are or have been dealing with issues of racism
VI Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When an individual has a clear understanding of and positive connection to their white racial identity while also actively pursuing social justice

Note. Adapted from *Black and [w]hite Racial Identity: Theory, Research, and Practice*, by J. E. Helms, 1990. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers. Copyright 1990 by Praeger Publishers.

While Helm’s work (1984, 1990) is viewed as seminal in the area of white racial identity, many have built upon her work. Ali Michael (2018) shared her personal journey through the six stages using vignettes to illustrate her thoughts and actions at each stage. Michael (2018) named

that white racial identity development theory “changed the game for her” (p. 67). She began to look for ways to be proactive as she stopped trying to feel guilty or make others feel guilty about their whiteness. In contrast, she used the theory as a guidepost to how she needed to grow to become a true agent of social justice and to hold herself accountable for her movement through the different stages of her evolution. As she developed consciousness in her role as an educator, she developed awareness of how to utilize her whiteness to work against systems that hurt kids of color, specifically Black and brown students, without having to be recognized.

Another critical model of identity development is that of Howard (2004), which is the only identity model that deals directly with educators. Howard based this model on his own identity development journey as an educator. He felt that “as white educators, we are collectively bound and unavoidably complicit in the arrangements of dominance that have systematically favored our racial group over others” (Howard, 2004, p. 50). His primary concern was the manner in which dominance played out in the classroom, and he arrived at three manners of being as a white educator: (a) fundamentalist white orientation; (b) integrationist white orientation; and (c) transformationist white orientation (see Table 3). Howard advocated for white educators to move beyond ignorance, denial, and grief while also acknowledging that white identity development is a process and a “challenge and hope” for those born with the skin color of privilege (p. 52). Coupling Helms’s (1990) development framework with Howard’s (2004) authentic multicultural white identity that focuses on educators can yield meaningful development for white individuals.

Table 3

Howard's Authentic Multicultural [w]hite Identity

	Stages	Key Characteristics
I	Fundamentalist white orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - View of the world through a single lens that is always right and always white - [w]hite supremacist hate groups represent one particularly hostile form of fundamentalist white orientation, but there is also an uninformed and well-intentioned version that simply has never been exposed to other perspectives
II	Integrationist white orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differences are acknowledged and tolerated but still not fully accepted - Integrationist whites are self-congratulatory in their apparent openness to racial differences, yet often paternalistic and condescending of people of color - Prefer to keep the peace, avoid confrontation and maintain control, rather than actually get to the core of separate truths and unique racial perspectives - Integrationist white teachers say to students of color, "I know how you feel," even when there is no real connection to their reality
III	Transformationist white identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Place of humility and active engagement in one's own continuing growth and reformation - Transformationist whites have acquired a paradoxical identity, which allows individuals to acknowledge inevitable privilege and racism while at the same time actively working to dismantle the legacy of dominance - Transformationist white teachers know it is their place and their responsibility to engage issues of race and multicultural education in the classroom

Note. Adapted from "How We are White," by G. Howard, 2004, *Teaching Tolerance: Building Community in our Schools, Fall*, 50-52. Copyright 2004 by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

white Teacher Professional Formation

Given that this dissertation focuses on novice educators, it is right to layer the lens of teacher professional identity upon Erikson's theory of identity formation. A teacher's professional identity has been acknowledged as an essential factor in understanding their professional lives, such as the quality of their teaching, their motivation to teach, and their overall commitment and resilience (Day, Stobart, Sammons, & Kington, 2006; Hong, 2010; van den Berg, 2002). In line with Erikson's (1963) theory of psychosocial development, professional identity is shaped by an individual teacher's past experiences. Professional identity also functions as a motivating factor for current actions and beliefs and formulates a roadmap for the type of teacher that they may become in the future (Hong, Greene, & Lowery, 2017). Although research frameworks vary from study to study, Hong, Greene, and Lowery (2017) stated that there are several common and recurring features of identity development:

(1) identity is neither solely determined by internal and psychological process, nor entirely controlled by social and cultural context. Identity is something established and maintained through the interaction between contextual factors and individual teacher's inner landscape, and (2) identity is not fixed or static, rather identity changes and develops through the interpretation and reinterpretation of social interactions which evolve over time. (p. 85)

Hong et al. (2017) highlighted Akkerman and Meijer's (2011) dialogical self-theory as a useful lens to illuminate the complex and dynamic nature of identity construction. Akkerman and Meijer's (2011) dialogical approach builds upon dialogical self-theory, which is the approach crafted by Hermans and his colleagues (Hermans, 1996; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans,

Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992). Dialogical self-theory weaves the key attributes of “self” and “dialogue” and integrates the internal space of self with the external relations with others. Dialogical self theory has been used widely in various psychology fields, as well as anthropology, social work, and education (Hong et al., 2017). In the teacher education area specifically, Akkerman and Meijer (2011) were pioneers in applying this framework to teacher professional identity and named three foundational dimensions: (a) multiplicity and unity, (b) social and individual, and (c) discontinuity and continuity.

Each of the foundational dimensions is critical to teacher identity development; however, the social and individual dimension is particularly relevant for this study. Akkerman and Meijer’s (2011) approach assumed that teacher identity is established and maintained through social situations and the negotiation of roles within particular contexts. Teachers make sense of their experiences through implicit and explicit negotiations within their social dynamic with others. In this process, teachers can experience “assimilation,” defined as when the interactions with the social environment confirm their personal values, or teachers may experience “disequilibrium,” defined as the experience of dynamics and relations with others that conflict with their personal values. Experiences of disequilibrium are considered essential for developmental progress, particularly when they are accompanied by deliberate reflection and a building of social agency (Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Hong et al., 2017).

Typical Responses of white Teachers

This discussion is useful for understanding the typical responses of white teachers as they navigate the phenomenon of whiteness in the process of their professional formation. These

overlapping responses generally refer to the manner in which white teachers enact dissonance, white ignorance, and/or blindness to white privilege.

Dissonance. Helms (1990) postulated that continual contact between Blacks and whites causes whites to experience cognitive dissonance. Whites experience ambivalence or even resistance to acknowledging racial privilege as perpetuating racism in that it challenges their existing beliefs about the social order and their place within society. This example also points to the problem of dissonance (as discussed in Chapter 1), which occurs when the majority of Black students are being taught by white teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), who are unfamiliar with their cultural or community context. Reflection encourages a teacher to identify the aspect of their persona that is being challenged and that may need to be discarded, as well as what aspects of the persona need to be strengthened. This study argues that challenging oneself is essential for growth as a member of the education community, particularly for white teachers who are members of the dominant group, despite identities tied to gender and class.

white ignorance. Adding to the scholarship, Leonardo (2009) challenged educators to seriously contend with what he terms the “myth of White ignorance” (p. 107), a construct that allows all white people to abdicate responsibility for their contributions to the racialized structures that exist in the world and also abdicate responsibility for how those structures disproportionately benefit their lives. He argued that an avoidance of issue of race or racism should not be equated to a lack of awareness of race or racism. The construction of white teachers as “oblivious to the question of race,” particularly by educators who are attempting to participate in critical reflection about race and racism, obscures their “full participation in race relationships” and the benefits they receive from the current racialized structure (Leonardo,

2009, p. 107). Leonardo further argued that such notions of ignorant innocence manifest in teacher education classrooms through the assumption that it is the obligation of people of color to “become tutors of Whites,” even going as far as “tapping Whites on the shoulder” to remind them (p. 110), once again, that they have left race out of the conversation or failed to see their racializing responses or contend with their racialized role in a particular experience, whether these are enacted in the presence of colleague, students, or parents of color.

Blindness of white privilege. In a study that rearticulated the silencing power of whiteness in education, Haviland (2008) found that her white participants engaged in safe self-critique as a tactic to evade recognition of the power held in whiteness. Even when asked to engage in direct race-based reflection, white participants found ways to obfuscate the responsibility. Haviland (2008) stated that despite modeling critical self-reflection and engaging the participants in detailed readings of Peggy McIntosh’s (1989) seminal work on white privilege, participants continued to be blind to or to struggle to recognize how they themselves benefit from white privilege and are implicated in the broader systems of white supremacy.

white Teacher Self-Awareness

In their research on preparing white women to teach in urban schools, Saffold and Longwell-Grice (2008) investigated how the women in their study understood culture—both their own and their students’—in the classroom. A learning from the study was that self-awareness was a key factor in the female teachers’ ability to understand the impact of culture in teaching and learning (Saffold & Longwell-Grice, 2008). Additionally, they found that even when an educator is aware of her own practice and presentation of self, there is still work to be

done to understand oneself as a racial being, particularly when communicating with students about the construct of race and racism.

Landsman (2018) added on to this concept through her personal anecdotes about her teaching experience. She stated that she “brought with [her] many of the assumptions about race and culture that a large percentage of white teachers have” (Landsman, 2018, p. 29). She went on to note that beyond demographics, previously held assumptions may help explain dissonance and disconnection, specifically between white teachers and Black students. She detailed that when she headed into the classroom, she had not examined her own whiteness. Moreover, during her 25 years in the classroom, the learning she underwent related to her whiteness and any self-awareness that she developed over that time was due primarily to her own interest and personal pursuit of her identity development and awareness with respect to issues of race in her classroom. Building self-awareness about race is not a box that can be checked off; rather, it is a sustained and ongoing process of development. That said, one must have a willingness to engage in the building of racial awareness and social consciousness in order to effectively undergo development in any aspect of one’s life—be it personal or professional.

whiteness in Teacher Preparation Programs

The focus on white teachers and their role in education is essential given that, as noted earlier, white teachers are the dominant group of individuals in classrooms today (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Within the context of racism, being part of the dominant racial group affords certain privileges to the white teaching community, such as centering whiteness in education at all levels. Haviland (2008) stated that in white-dominated educational spaces, issues such as race, racism, and white supremacy are likely to get glossed over. Moreover, scholarship

has reinforced that teacher preparation programs are white dominant in their structure and design, as well as in their reproduction of white teachers (Matias & Mackey, 2016; Philip & Benin, 2012; Sleeter, 2016). As such, whiteness in higher education, specifically in teacher education programs, is a significant discussion for this study.

Teacher preparation programs continue to turn out roughly 80% white cohorts of teachers (Sleeter, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016), which is in stark contrast to the growing number of students of color in schools (Philip & Benin, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Additionally, teacher education programs today commonly announce an orientation towards social justice and preparation for culturally responsive teaching. Nevertheless, there has been long-term dominance of white individuals in the higher education realm, resulting in teacher preparation programs that are largely perpetuating white dominant viewpoints within both their pedagogical and curricular approaches (Matias & Mackey, 2016; Philip & Benin, 2012; Sleeter, 2016).

Generally speaking, teacher education programs are making an attempt to prepare their predominantly white cohorts to reach racially and ethnically diverse students through a course or two about multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, or social justice teaching (Sleeter, 2016). However, standalone courses are insufficient, and although some white teacher candidates do persist in learning to become strong teachers of racially and ethnically diverse students (Ullucci & Battey, 2001), the literature continues to report white resistance to and fatigue from talking about and working with issues of race (Crowley & Smith, 2015; Flynn, 2015). With this in mind, the following discussion addresses the manner by which whiteness

manifests in teacher preparation programs and the role and response of white teacher candidates to the white-dominant climate of education.

The overabundance of white teacher candidates in teacher preparation programs is often used to invoke the imperative for teachers to deeply understand the implicit and explicit racialized practices that alter educational access, opportunities, and outcomes for students of color (García, Arias, Harris Murri, & Serna, 2009; Philip & Benin, 2012). There is consensus in the literature that teachers have often been encouraged to do the following: (a) examine the historical, social, political, and economic processes that have created and continue to sustain a society that disproportionately benefits whites (Leonardo, 2009; Mueller & O'Connor, 2007); (b) move from deficit views of communities of color and move towards a view that values cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005); and (c) engage in teaching practices that build upon the funds of knowledge of their students and that are culturally relevant (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Moll, Gonzalez, Neff, & Amanti, 2005). While there is consensus here, much of the scholarship in the field has not been optimistic and has shown that white teachers routinely engage in practices that ignore, avoid, disrupt, and resist attempts to genuinely explore race and racism (Haviland, 2008; Picower, 2009).

Scholars have called for the field to focus greater attention on the ways in which white teachers continually reproduce structures and reify ideologies that benefit whites (Giroux, 1997; Leonardo, 2009; Sleeter 2016). Picower (2009) explored how the life experiences of white prospective teachers shaped their understanding about race and difference. She found that whites protected and maintained existing societal structures by using what she coined “tools of Whiteness” (Picower, 2009, p. 200). The tools of whiteness generate from three main areas:

teachers' emotional experiences, existing dominant racial ideologies, and performances of identity. In other words, when teachers are challenged to think beyond their current white-normative ideologies, they draw from these three areas to avoid, refute, or subvert issues that would have them do otherwise.

As a result of her study, Picower (2009) urged teacher educators, and by default teacher education programs, to view these tools not only as “passive resistance” to examining race and the role of white teachers in perpetuating racism, but as an “active protection” of white supremacy (p. 197). Picower's study and those discussed earlier have been critical to understanding the systemic and individual factors that create possibilities and challenge white teachers' conceptualization of the work in a racialized society; however, studies have only begun recently to examine the role that institutions and programs of teacher education can play as critical mediators of learning and change (Philip & Benin, 2012).

The Role of Teacher Preparation Programs

As a key learning environment for teacher candidates, teacher preparation programs have a responsibility to address the racial development of their teacher candidates as educators prepare to teach in what remains a deeply racialized society. There are numerous facets of teacher preparation programs that must be addressed. For the purposes of this study, of key importance are faculty and coursework, as well as structure and program culture.

Faculty. According to Milner, Pearman, and McGee (2013), in 2007 78% of the teacher education faculty nationally were white. This fact has significant ramifications on what happens in teacher education programs, including how curriculum is designed, how mandated textbooks are utilized, and what topics are selected for further classroom discussion (Sleeter, 2016).

Furthermore, faculty ethnic composition can have a direct impact on how urgently a program works to address race and racism and the extent to which faculty members address race and racism, given curriculum choices and teaching approaches supported by their programs (Sleeter, 2016). Lin, Maxwell, Able-Boone, and Zimmer (2009) analyzed 416 early childhood education preparation programs and discovered a correlation between programs that employed more racially and ethnically diverse faculty and increased coursework focus on children and families who are culturally diverse. Conversely, the less racially and ethnically diverse the faculty, the less the coursework showed such a focus. Reflecting on the findings of Lin et al.'s study, Sleeter (2016) argued that a major challenge in shifting the gravitational center of a program successfully is linked directly to being "defined by White interests" (p. 52), whereby white interests must be satisfied. Faculty committed to a racially just agenda, therefore, must be prepared to address race and racism in coursework in pursuit of preparing teachers who are conscious of their racialized existence and its impact on their teaching.

Coursework. Virtually every teacher education program now includes coursework related to multiculturalism, racial, linguistic, or cultural diversity. However, in most programs the coursework takes the form of one or two discrete courses, with the rest of the program giving minimal attention to issues of race, ethnicity, or culture (King & Butler, 2015; Sleeter, 2016). Often, the multicultural education coursework itself is weak. Gorski (2009) conducted an analysis of multicultural teacher education course syllabi and found that more than half of the syllabi stressed celebration of difference rather than addressing systemic inequities. Furthermore, only 29% of the syllabi explored relationships of oppression, racism, and systemic power within schools and society. Gorski (2009) further noted that while the syllabi did not appear to be

designed to prepare teachers for enacting authentic multicultural practices or deepening their knowledge of themselves as the bearer of that responsibility, each of the syllabi was designed to meet the standards set forth by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. While this question is beyond the scope of this study, the need for further investigation of the gap between what national standards seek to accomplish and preparatory needs for teachers who are able to establish a culturally democratic classroom merits greater investigation (Darder, 2012).

Other research has found similar limitations in coursework supposedly focused on multiculturalism and diversity. In a 2014 review of research that examined programs that claimed to prepare teachers for diversity, Cochran-Smith et al. (2015) found that most of the research reviewed showed that powerful approaches to teaching diversity were isolated to a single class. About this, Siwatu (2011) cautioned that including a few multicultural courses may not alter pre-service teachers' views about diversity, most specifically about issues of race, and that, in fact, further limitations—particularly related to white privilege and colorblindness—can arise when topics of racism and whiteness are only addressed in one or two classes. There is, furthermore, consensus in the research that while the one class may be powerful, bracketing off diversity into a single course also limits how teacher preparation programs are holistically designed to prepare teachers for serving the learning needs of diverse students in schools (Siwatu, 2011; Sleeter, 2016).

Structure and program culture. For teacher educators concerned with learning, change, and growth, it is necessary to scrutinize the culture of teacher education programs as a concrete location in which dimensions of whiteness can reproduce and thrive. Philip and Benin (2012) defined program structure as the relatively stable arrangements of a program, such as admissions

prerequisites, course offerings, placements of students into cohorts or another arrangement, and student teaching requirements and items of that nature. Peterson (2002) defined program culture as the set of norms, values, beliefs, rituals, symbols, and stories that make up the “persona” of a given program. Peterson argued, “These unwritten expectations build up over time as [faculty, students, cooperating teachers, and administrators] work together to solve problems, deal with challenges, and, at times, cope with failures” (p. 10). These “unwritten expectations” become habits that then indoctrinate new colleagues over time.

white Teacher Candidate Responses

There are a variety of responses that have been identified as common among white teacher candidates when confronted with issues of racism and their positionality and role with respect to perpetuating (or ameliorating) racism within the classroom.

Colorblindness. Haviland (2008) posited that whiteness employs numerous techniques to maintain its power, including colorblindness, which is one such technique that requires further investigation. Racial colorblindness reflects society in which skin color is deemed insignificant. Tochluk (2010) explained that many people say that they are colorblind or don’t see color as an assurance to others that they are not prejudiced. While people may intend to be inclusive or positive in their language choices, phrases such as “I don’t care if you are White, Black, etc.,” are dismissive of individuality and deny real differences that exist in society predicated on skin color. Bonilla-Silva (2006) extended this argument when he stated that white supremacy is so ingrained in contemporary society that proclamations of colorblindness (or what he refers to as *color-blind ideology*) are actually manifestations of racism, which mask the underlying power dynamics that continually stratify society along color lines.

While argued for by some, there is significant criticism that colorblindness reifies oppression (Cabrera, Watson, & Franklin, 2016; Haviland, 2008; Tochluk, 2010). Critics have asserted that color-blindness allows people to ignore the racial construction of whiteness and reinforces its privileged and oppressive position (Gallagher, 2003). In color-blind situations, whiteness remains the normal standard. This color-blind approach allows educators to remain “neutral” since this approach claims that race is not a current issue of concern (Saffold & Longwell-Grice, 2008). As a result, white people are able to dominate when a color-blind approach is applied because the common experiences are universally defined in terms of whiteness. Insistence on no reference to race, critics have argued, means that individuals of color can no longer point out the racism they face (Gallagher, 2003), delegitimizing their struggles to transform the racializing process within the school and society that obstruct their individual and community well-being (Darder & Torres, 2004).

Furthermore, there are consequences for white teacher candidates who uphold a colorblind mentality in education. Matias (2013) argued that when white teachers refuse to identify themselves with anti-racist ideals, including rejection of colorblind ideology and false notions of racial equality, they cannot support pathways towards equity in the classroom. Matias further stated that white educators have two explicit options within their role in the racial structure: (a) to maintain a false color-blind ideology, which defaults to a maintenance of white dominance; or (b) initiate a process to become white allies, and in the process, question their positionality within the white supremacist system (hooks, 2003; Tatum, 2009). White teachers must then assume the onus of dismantling the white supremacist system, which includes rejecting the concept of colorblindness. Delpit (1995) explicitly cautioned, “If one does not see

color, one does not see children” (p. 77). The world is not colorblind, thus ignoring race in the classroom is both debilitating and a danger to establishing, cultivating, and nurturing socially just structures of teacher preparation.

Utilization of language. Research has stated that language is a critical tool that is significant to the social construction of experience and understanding of social phenomena (DiAngelo, 2011; Saffold & Longwell-Grice, 2008). As discussed in the introduction to this study, DiAngelo (2011) illustrated the problematic nature of using loaded terminology with negative connotations when speaking about people of color. Racially coded language simultaneously reproduces both racist images and perspectives and the comfortable illusion that race and its problems are for people of color, not white people (DiAngelo, 2011). Similarly, hooks (2003) critiqued the dominance of language when she addressed the manner in which white supremacy is reified through language, and Darder (2012, 2014) pointed to the hegemony of language as a major culprit in the perpetuation of racializing discourses and practices of racialized oppression.

In her work, hooks (2003) specifically called out the use of either/or thinking and its ability to reinscribe white supremacy. She used the example of an individual’s describing a campus community as “all white” as a generalizing statement rather than acknowledging the few individuals of color present. The language, consequently, eliminated the presence of any racial diversity, thus it conserves racism and other forms of oppression. Moreover, with respect to the relationship between language, ideology, and power, Darder’s (2017) view sustained the claim that the hegemonic language of whiteness is deeply ensconced within “the universal eugenic claim that its epistemology is uniquely superior and represents the highest cognitive expression

of human existence” (p. 49)—the same language that undergirds most teacher education programs.

Lastly, there is a growing body of work in teacher education that has been examining how white teachers use “White talk,” which “serves to insulate [them] from examining their individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 45).

According to McIntyre (1997), the tactics of white talk include derailing the conversation, dismissing counterarguments, interrupting speakers or introducing a different topic, withdrawing from the conversation, or colluding with others to create a “culture of niceness” that makes it difficult to understand what is really being said. Evans-Winters and Hoff (2011) built upon this line of scholarship, naming white silence as an act of hostility. By keeping silent, white teacher candidates are consciously disengaging from the material and protecting themselves from entering into a dialogical or reflective space in which their current mindset might be challenged.

Alternatively, Delano-Oriaran and Parks (2015) offered that silence and even pushback from their teacher candidates could have been a result of knowledge and skill gaps. Delano-Oriaran and Parks (2015) noted that their students in the rural Midwest had not developed the critical tools necessary to understand how to engage in conversations about race and white privilege. This lack of awareness, experience, knowledge, and vocabulary also led to much misunderstanding that resulted in white silence or pushback. While a different perspective, it is essential to consider this as another possibility for silence. Each of these related tactics associated with teacher talk are self-protective to white educators and point to the need for ongoing spaces in which such approaches can be identified, examined, and transformed.

Disruption. Leonardo's (2009) work offers a useful distinction between framing whiteness and white people. Leonardo (2009) framed whiteness as a racial discourse, whereas the broad category of white people represents a societally constructed identity, usually based on skin color. Within this theoretical construct, "Whiteness is also a racial perspective or a worldview . . . supported by material practices and institutions. . . . Whiteness is not a culture but a social construct" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 170, as cited in Utt & Tochluk, 2016). Within this framework, white people are not static figures but people with agency to invest in whiteness, thus reaping privileges, or agents of disruption (Leonardo, 2009; McIntosh, 1989).

Leonardo's (2009) analysis uncovered other patterns of interactions that limit deep engagement with race or racism, including opting out of racial dialogue, personalizing institutional analyses of race or racism, or derailing scrutiny of racial patterns. As a result, Leonardo proposed four ways in which whites may disrupt racial hegemony: (a) "disinvest in the notion that they do not know much about race" (p. 117); (b) "critically decode" supposedly "color-blind" discourses (p. 117); (c) question why they choose race as a legitimate theme to invoke in some contexts and not others; and (d) "participate in building anti-racist pedagogy against White mystification" (p. 117) by working to displace "White racial knowledge from its privileged position at the center of classroom discourse" (p. 118). While Leonardo's proposal describes how whites can disrupt the re-inscription of whiteness, it also introduces a quandary of how such engagement is prompted when society is structured according to white-dominant rules.

Allyship. Kendall (2012) stated that allyship is a process, and in that process, everyone has more to learn. Allyship is not an identity but rather an ongoing and lifelong process of solidarity that involves a lot of work. One type of ally is a white ally. A white ally acknowledges

the limits of her/his/their knowledge about other people's experiences but doesn't use that as a reason not to think and/or act (Kendall, 2012). Rather than remaining silent, a white ally not only confronts racism as it comes up daily but also seeks to deconstruct it institutionally and live in a way that challenges systemic oppression at the risk of experiencing some of that oppression. Being a white ally entails building relationships with both people of color and white people in order to challenge them in their thinking about race.

One key tenant of white allyship is a commitment to non-complacency (Kendall, 2012). Philip and Benin (2012) saw one of their participants, Curtis, embody this during the course of their study. As Curtis examined himself racially and became an educator committed to social justice, this was recognized by his peers of color. These cross-racial relationships enabled Curtis to engage in additional learning and scrutiny. The camaraderie provided the context for Curtis to re-envision what it meant to be a white ally, including moving from judgment and misunderstanding to solidarity and co-learning (Philip & Benin, 2012).

Race-Based Programming

People of color often express the sentiment that white people should work with other white people in order to learn about racism and address concerns about racial identity (AWARE-LA, n.d.; Utt & Tochluk, 2016). There is literature to support the notion that the construct of race is taught differently among different racial groups (Crossroads Ministry, n.d.; Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014; Helms, 1990). However, there is not extensive literature on race-based programming and how it looks similar or different to various racial groups. The impact of race and racism is felt in society, and as such, different institutions must investigate and respond to that phenomena, given that racism is institutionalized and reproduced commonsensically by

mainstream structures and relationships that inform most educational programs. If the preparation of teachers is to be transformed, it will require a fundamental rethinking—one that engages consciously the question of race within teacher education.

Race-Conscious Programming

Given the minimal scholarship on the topic, one field that is able to shed light on race-conscious programming is campus ecology research conducted on undergraduate campuses. Cabrera et al. (2016) set out to look at the intersection between racial development and campus ecology. For their research purposes, race-conscious programming was defined as programming that explicitly names or takes race into account. As such, campus ecology is defined as the makeup of social structures on the higher education campus. Among their numerous findings, Cabrera et al. discovered that the concept of inclusion, and by extension desired development, was both aspired to and felt differently by various racial groups on campus. They also noted that race-conscious programming can often be perceived by white students as “reverse racism” (Cabrera et al., 2016). In their study, “reverse racism” was referred to as discrimination against white people similar to traditional forms of racism enacted towards people of color. The phrase is placed in quotation marks intentionally both to stay true to how it was used and to acknowledge that the reality of “reverse racism” is largely a myth and is not reflective of contemporary racializing conditions (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Cabrera et al. also noted that the campus ecology literature has argued that fostering social comfort and inclusion is necessary to creating functional and just campus environments. However, they also found exclusion was used by racially privileged students to serve existing racial inequality. Bonilla-Silva (2006) highlighted

that race-consciousness is mistakenly equated with racism, and Cabrera et al. unveiled ways in which whiteness conflates perceptions of exclusion with actual exclusion.

To highlight a contrasting view, Cabrera et al. (2016) also cited literature that documented growth among students stemming from multicultural experiences. Ngai's (2014) work on "border crossers" highlighted how students engaged in campus programming did not reflect their racial background, yet these programs can provide opportunities for individual worldviews to be expanded through dialogue, knowledge sharing, and relationship building. In Cabrera's (2012) work, students participated in multicultural residence hall discussions on social justice to engage their own racial privilege while simultaneously exploring methods of disrupting racism. Both studies yielded positive impact but were not without expressed discomfort about race-conscious programming by white people. Race-conscious programming does disrupt some of the white space formerly held, as does any action or information that disrupts the idea of "colorblindness." This discomfort can lead to proclamations of reverse discrimination. Consequently, white students often conflate the erosion of unwarranted racial privilege with racism (Cabrera et al., 2016). Nevertheless, research also has confirmed that discomfort is necessary for the growth and evolution of consciousness related to white identity and its relationship to the practice of racism within schools and society (Helms, 1990; Hong et al., 2017).

Affinity Groups

One structure that can be utilized as a space for continued self-growth is affinity groups. Affinity groups are a gathering of individuals who share a similar aspect of identity (Michael & Conger, 2009). As such, there are as many possibilities for affinity groups as there are identity

markers. Michael and Conger (2009) remarked that no matter the shared identity marker that initiates the space, the objective remains generally the same: People with a shared experience find the space and opportunity to reflect on their lived reality. In their work on affinity groups in elementary school, Parsons and Ridley (2012) stated that school-based affinity groups are places where children can build connection and talk about the isolation they may experience in school; through this process, students build their capacity to feel less alone with their emotions and build a stronger sense of self. Parsons and Ridley (2012) also noted the benefit to faculty when they stated that as facilitators, faculty can gain valuable insight into ways that their school curriculum and broader culture can support students on their personal identity development journeys.

Denevi and Pastan (2006) presented scholarship on the white-dominant misconceptions about affinity groups. They named the common misconception that “diversity clubs are simply a forum for students of color to sit and complain about the wrongs that have recently been committed against them” (Denevi & Pastan, 2006, p. 72). The fallacy of this statement sheds light on white ignorance with respect to the manner in which racism affects everyone, albeit in different ways, particularly people of color (Denevi & Pastan, 2006). Throughout his work, Tim Wise (2004, 2012) posited that white shame can prevent white people from examining their privilege and their role in broader social oppression; nevertheless, he has continued to invite white people to talk about the effects of white privilege on whites with other white people. In their work, Denevi and Pastan (2006) were explicit that racism and white privilege are no-win situations for everyone, but white people do not talk about them in those terms. In order to do so, white people would need to both recognize their privilege, then be willing to relinquish it to pursue a more equitable society. This system of white dominance is what leads those in the

cultural mainstream to question the gathering of people of color affinity spaces; they are unknown spheres and challenge white supremacist culture.

white affinity groups. As stated above, affinity groups have numerous configurations; one such configuration is a gathering of white individuals. During the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, activists openly recognized that white individuals had a role to play in white communities for the purpose of change.

It must be offered that white people who desire change in this country should go where that problem (racism) is most manifest. . . . The white people should go into white communities where the whites have created power for the express purpose of denying blacks human dignity and self-determination. . . . There is no doubt in our minds that some whites are just as disgusted with this system as we are. But it is meaningless to talk about coalition if there is no one to align ourselves with, because of the lack of organization in the white communities. There can be no talk of ‘hooking up’ unless black people organize blacks and white people organize whites. If these conditions are met, then perhaps at some later date—and if we are going in the same direction—talks about exchange of personnel, coalition, and other meaningful alliances can be discussed.

(Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, 1966, p. 10)

As the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (1966) cited, white individuals have a responsibility to organize within white communities; however, to have meaningful organizing one must deeply know oneself and one’s positionality in the larger society. One way white teachers can gain a deeper understanding of themselves is through participation in a white affinity group (Michael & Conger, 2009).

In writing about a white affinity group at the University of Pennsylvania, Michael and Conger (2009) noted, “Somehow, white people discussing race together can seem wrong or threatening” (p. 57). They further emphasized that this can feel appropriate given the history of the United States and how images of such groups like the Klu Klux Klan or other white supremacist groups are often the first image conjured when the phrase “a white group” is uttered. Kivel (1995) added onto this theme in his work around separatism when he focuses on the use of the word “our,” as it has been taken up by whites to exclude people of color. Since the creation of the current United States, it was white people who excluded people of color from “our” schools, “our” neighborhoods, and “our” workplaces. This clear segregation was often coupled with violence for the expressed purpose of preserving racial separation (Kivel, 1995).

Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere (AWARE-LA, n.d.) offered a perspective on why white spaces are critical, noting that the burden for self-development needs to be on white individuals themselves. Often, the burden of racial identity development is placed upon people of color when white individuals struggle to own their role in the white supremacist culture (AWARE-LA, n.d.; hooks, 2003). Denevi and Pastan (2006) argued for the creation of white spaces that are dedicated to creating positive anti-racist racial identities. As a teacher-student pair committed to that work, Denevi and Pastan (2006) recognized that putting together a group of white students to explore their racial identity development and anti-racism was an arduous task. Michael and Conger (2009) also confirmed this difficulty, asserting that work done in white affinity spaces can assist white individuals in being productive members of interracial conversations about race rather than being members of an interracial group that constantly requires remediated attention, often dominating the discussion.

Benefits. White affinity spaces can be a powerful place for learning (AWARE-LA, n.d.; Michael & Conger, 2009). Michael and Conger (2009) noted that the object of their study, the white affinity group at the University of Pennsylvania, was a visible presence to white students and the community at large. The white affinity group served as a resource for white people to go to investigate their own feelings about race and also as a support group for those individuals who were currently dissatisfied with their own race-based development (Michael & Conger, 2009). Additionally, as stated repeatedly across this study, it is not the responsibility of people of color to attend to white people's growth and learning. A white affinity space can offer community and critical relationships for growth and learning about race and racial identity (Utt & Tochluk, 2016).

Drawbacks. It is challenging for white individuals to work through their racial identity and the privileges associated with it (Denevi, 2001; Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Wise, 2012). Denevi (2001) asserted that this is because there seems to be no counterbalance to privilege. Without a firm non-privileged identity to turn to, one may experience feelings of sadness, emptiness, and shame. Privilege maintains itself by locating itself as normal (Denevi, 2001), and a loss of normalcy has the potential to cause people set-backs in their development rather than a sense that they are moving forward (Utt & Tochluk, 2016). Nonetheless, it requires moving through precisely this sense of dissonance that is required in order to usher in new possibilities for developing an emancipatory approach to issues of race and working to ameliorate racism.

Racial Caucuses

Racial caucusing is a less-studied manner of conducting racial identity work. As such, there is less published research, but given its tie to the central argument of this dissertation, it

warrants mention. Earlier it was asserted that caucusing can lead to a more authentic and powerful integrated group. Caucuses are times when people of color and white people within an organization meet separately in order to do different work, then join together for entering cross-racial dialogues, if appropriate (Crossroads Ministry, n.d.; Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014). White people and people of color have different work to do in the fight for racial equity, given their different lived experiences with racism and their particular social location relative to white culture and privilege (Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014).

One of the goals of caucusing is to create space for inter-race and cross-race relationships that will strengthen dismantling racism work. Hence, Gulati-Partee and Potapchuk (2014) asserted that successful caucusing pays attention to creating activities and time that will support relationship building. Furthermore, successful caucusing is often based on having a clarity of purpose. Caucuses are the place to identify and speak about issues related to racism but not always the place to resolve the issues raised (Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014). The caucus can identify which organizational structures or processes should address those issues and when an issue is a direct result of a lack of organizational structure or process. In such instances, the caucus can give direction to develop such a structure or process. Organizations that use caucusing as a part of anti-racist organizational development have to think clearly about how caucus agendas create movement towards organizational goals.

Finally, caucusing must have a rhythm to its frequency. Caucuses for white people and caucuses for different racial identity groups will often have different agendas, so the organization as a whole must think about how each agenda creates movement towards the organization's stated aim for the caucus (Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014). Working in separate racial groups

removes the undue burden on people of color and places the onus on white people to do their own work; this also needs to consider integration between caucuses (Crossroads Ministry, n.d.; Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014). The integration of the caucuses is not about equal reporting; rather, it is about creating common ground, respecting one another's process, and sitting in the discomfort of intentionally segregated groups. Caucusing, moreover, is a means to an end, not the end in itself (Crossroads Ministry, n.d.). This work involves the entire organization through inter- and intragroup dialogue, making it a powerful strategy in building an anti-racist community.

Multi-Racial Partnerships and Coalitions

Ramos and Chesler (2010) remarked that most organizations and fields have diverse work forces but do not aim at becoming truly multicultural or inclusive; such efforts are usually the exception versus the norm. As such, they advocated for multicultural organizational development; however, they also cautioned that the work can be challenging to execute. Multicultural organizational development requires collaboration and challenges the white dominance of white people in the field in which this work is being done, which Ramos and Chesler's case was development consulting. Potapchuk (2005) indicated the necessity for building multi-racial partnerships and coalitions but also recognized the challenges. She named the awkward and sometimes frustrating positions people are forced to navigate when doing multi-racial coalition work, in part because of power imbalances inherent to relative positions of privilege. As such, she cautioned, "One thing that whites and predominantly white organizations must understand prior to working in a community is our historical record of betraying people of color, and how it plays a role in every partnership and coalition" (Potapchuk, 2005, p.103). To

both recognize and navigate this reality, Potapchuk (2005) suggested taking an asset-based approach when determining how all involved can contribute to a partnership. She further suggested addressing any intergroup tensions through a white privilege lens and a cultural conflict lens to understand the basis of any problem. Potapchuk underscored that the underlying white power structure must always be accounted for and that any other underlying tensions must be uncovered in order to move forward in a productive fashion.

Utt and Tochluk (2016) remarked that in order to create an anti-racist community within a school-based environment, one must build trust and engage in healthy dialogue with both colleagues and students of color. A number of anti-racist organizations have created accountability guidelines that provide helpful models (Cushing, Cabbil, Greenman, Hitchcock, & Richards, 2010). Utt and Tochluk (2016) focused on two key approaches to execute the aforementioned guidelines: a) listening, which included uninterrupted listening to the truths expressed by people of color; and b) communicating accountably, which places onus and commitment on white individuals for continued engagement. Both approaches should be used, but different situations or different individuals may want or need community in different ways because people, including people of color, are not monolithic. Accountability must be understood, then, through the context of authentic relationships and consideration of the context in which people are working (Tochluk, 2010).

Chapter Summary

The persistence of white dominance in education has direct implications on the education of students and the labor of teachers. This highlights the need for race-based programming that forthrightly engages with the racial identity development of white teachers. As Helms (1990)

argued, “In order to develop a healthy [w]hite identity, defined in part as a nonracist identity, virtually every White person in the United States must overcome one or more aspects of racism” (p. 47). Helms’s (1990) argument emphasized how even the well-intentioned white person has to become aware of racism as it exists in their life and commit to personal reflection about their role in creating and maintaining that system of white supremacy. Cabrera (2012) argued that for white individuals to develop their racial selves, they must work through their whiteness towards the end of being a social justice ally. However, Cabrera cautioned that the process to become a social justice ally must be an engaged and ongoing one versus an end that is achieved. This is consistent with Kendall’s (2012) conception that allyship is an ongoing practice instead of a static identity.

This review of the literature revealed that there is a plethora of research that has focused on the development of white teachers. Prevalent research topics have included white identity development (Helms, 1990), white teacher identity (Hong et al., 2017), and the manner in which whiteness impacts teaching (Delpit, 1995; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 2001). Some scholars have explored in depth the ways in which Helms’s white racial identity development model applies to teaching (Lawrence & Tatum, 2004; Tatum, 1997); however, discussion of sustained personal racial identity development, particularly for novice white educators, is a gap in the literature.

Tochluk (2010) advocated that a *culture of witnessing* needs to be created in order to be on the pathway towards allyship and an anti-racist existence. She argued that the primary work on that pathway is personal investigation. Being prepared to deal with one’s personal socialization and discomfort can lead to self-discovery and growth. Within education, this highlights the need for a study that focuses on the personal racial identity development of novice

teachers. This is precisely the intent of this qualitative study. The next chapter presents the design of a study focused on collecting the stories of novice white female educators who are teaching students from racialized communities. This study aimed to gain insight into the personal racial identity journey of novice educators and add to this body of literature.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

While reviewing the literature, I discovered multiple studies, literature reviews, and articles documenting the necessity of racial identity development for white educators. Multiple studies focused on the overwhelmingly white teacher force, (Broughman et al., 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2016), a few focused on white identity development as necessary (AWARE-LA, n.d.; Denevi and Pastan, 2006; Helms, 1990; hooks, 2003), and some studies zoomed in on the critical role that higher education plays as a delivery system for that development (Milner, 2006; West-Burns et al., 2013; Utt & Tochluk, 2016). However, there is a gap in the literature that describes the role that traditional or alternative teacher preparation programs can play when it comes to personal racial identity development. Thus, in this study I aimed to fill that void by employing critical narratives to capture the experiences of novice white teachers in their own voices.

This chapter discusses the qualitative methodology of critical narratives as it guided this study, which sought to better understand the racial identity development of novice teachers. The following discussion provides a description of the research methodology and research design for this study, including participant selection and description, data collection methods and analysis, as well as delimitations, limitations, and assumptions.

Research Questions

In an effort to conduct a study that honored the stories told by novice white female educators, as well as contribute to a gap in the scholarship that focuses on the specific racial identity development necessary for white educators teaching racialized groups of students, one

overarching research question guided this study: How does the racial identity of novice white female educators evolve during their first three years teaching? Linked to this question are three driving questions that guided the narrative protocol:

- 1) How do novice white female educators define whiteness and how has that definition evolved as a result of their experience in race-based programming?
- 2) How do novice white female educators describe the impact that whiteness has on their teaching, and how has that impact changed as a result of their experience in race-based programming?
- 3) How has the preparation novice teachers received through race-based programming influenced their classroom practice and relationships with students from racialized communities?

Methodological Framework

Congruent with the critical conceptual framework for this study, qualitative research was employed to conduct this study. While reviewing the literature, I encountered several studies that delved into the programmatic elements of identity development (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Siwatu, 2011), and some captured snapshots of participant experience in a single class or caucus experience (Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Michael & Conger, 2009). Fewer studies focused on authentically capturing the voices and experiences of novice female educators in particular. Thus, in this study I aimed to fill that void by utilizing critical narratives to capture the experiences of participants in their own voices. In short, narrative research is the search for stories (Sandelowski, 1991). Humans are complex beings, and the stories that they tell are equally as complex (Merrill, 2007; Sandelowski, 1991). The stories collected in this study

provided the researcher the opportunity to listen and learn about the participants' experiences with race-based identity development and how those experiences impacted them as educators.

The stories collected in this study provided me the opportunity to learn about the participants' experiences with white racial identity development and the individual racial development journeys of each participant. This methodology allowed me to identify themes that speak to the ongoing development that each participant was experiencing, the manners by which race played a factor in their role as a teacher, and the personal nature of such development.

Narrative research is an interdisciplinary, qualitative approach, and it is suggested that scholars interested in narratives "must traverse disciplinary boundaries to do their work comprehensively" (Merrill, 2007, p. 1). This approach includes various research practices, including personal narratives, autoethnographies, storytelling, narrative interviews, and an analysis of personal stories; however, what must be considered above all else is the relationship that these narratives hold to the larger societal conditions and power relations that helped to create and shape them (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Merrill, 2007). Because for most people "storytelling is a natural way of recounting an experience, a practical solution to a fundamental problem in life, creating reasonable order out of an experience" (Moen, 2006, p. 2), narratives help explain the phenomena of the human experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Moen (2006) argued that people create narrative descriptions about personal experiences and that people also develop narratives to make sense of the behavior of others. Following this logic, life itself could be seen as made up of a chain that links our ongoing narratives. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) drew on this line of thinking when they postulated that the foremost reason for engaging in narrative research is due to the fact that people are storytelling creatures who live

storied lives. As such, crucial narrative inquiry can be a lens through which researchers more deeply understand the ways in which humans experience and engage the world around them and how this is tied to questions of power and social location (Merrill, 2007). This study sought to understand the lived experiences of novice white female educators teaching nonwhite students, as well as the type of racial identity development that was essential to more fully understanding that experience within a societal context where racism and white privilege abound. Critical narrative inquiry, therefore, was most suited to fully capture the nuances of such an experience.

Furthermore, Mary Kay Kramp (2004) explained the adjusted relationship that occurs in a narrative experience. Narrative inquiry places the storyteller in the position of authority and places the researcher, or the receiver of the story, into the subordinate role. This reversal was essential because it emulates the ideal final product; the stories of the participants are paramount to the process, which is unlike traditional research. Kramp (2004) also named that the narrative process assumes personal involvement as an ongoing state of being for researchers as they collect and interpret participant narratives. The researcher must pay close attention to what the participants have to say and engage with participants through responsive prompting. Again, this requires a different power relationship than traditional research structures in that participants make decisions about how much or how little they share and the direction of their story.

Given the story is based on the intent of the narrative inquiry, the interview questions or prompts are left intentionally broad and open ended to allow space for the participants to go in the direction that is necessary to communicate their lived experience. Prompts will loosely provide some structure; however, participants will be given the opportunity to express themselves extensively and without reserve. This process gives each participant the power to

construct her own narrative, which can result in a greater understanding from the telling (Kramp, 2004). Moen (2006) asserted, “Narrative research in which teachers’ voices are heard in their stories of experience offers an opportunity to present the complexity of teaching to the public” (p. 10). As researcher, I agree with the complexity of both the profession and the participants engaged in the school-based experience, so I worked in this study to take the narrative experience of white novice teachers one step further in order to better understand what is required for them to become culturally democratic actors, particularly in their practice with non-white students.

Research Design

The following discussion provides the details for the research design that were employed to conduct this study with novice white educators.

Participant Selection

Given the relationship I have as a former staff member and an alumnus of the alternative teacher preparation program, Teach for America (TFA), participants were selected through a convenience sample from TFA. I asked for participants through a variety of methods: individual email or phone contact with current teachers who are in white identity development-focused diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programming at TFA and recommendations for participants from individuals currently in white identity development-focused DEI programming at TFA. All of the female participants who were selected identified as white, 18 or older years of age, and were novice teachers in their first three years in the classroom. Additionally, they were all currently teaching nonwhite students from historically marginalized backgrounds across traditional district and public charter settings in Los Angeles.

Initial Protocol

Once individuals expressed interest in participating in the study, I provided them with a sample timeline of their individual participation to help them determine if they were willing and had time to participate in the study. Flick (2014) reminded us that participants must be provided with sufficient and adequate information as a basis for giving consent. I then contacted via phone or email each participant who expressed interest and scheduled a narrative session. (See Appendix A for the introductory email to potential participants.) Once confirmed, the participants were sent an initial email that contained a basic demographic information collection form. (See Appendix C for pre-interview questionnaire). The sessions ranged in length from one to two hours. Participants signed a consent form prior to their narrative sessions and either self-selected or were assigned a pseudonym, which was used to present their narratives and interweave the narrative findings and trends together in my discussion. (See Appendix B for the informed consent form.) The study was also reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at LMU. Moreover, pseudonyms were utilized to ensure and conserve confidentiality.

Setting

At the time of the data collection, all participants were teaching at a K-12 school within the boundaries of Los Angeles County. The majority of the TFA Los Angeles placement schools are in the South Los Angeles or East Los Angeles area (Otero, 2016); however, some teachers were teaching in other areas of the city. Many of the interviews were held during the summer months of 2018, and as the new school year had started, participants were in an active shift in their tenure in the classroom. The narratives were all collected in a setting of the participant's choice in order to provide them a sense of comfort and ease.

Data Collection

Narrative inquiry. The stories presented in this study were crafted from individual narratives with participants. Given that the study participants are all Teach for America Los Angeles corps members and alumni, TFA-LA acknowledged the research. (See Appendix F for the letter of acknowledgement.) I used narratives as a methodology because I wanted novice female educators to “remember and recount their experiences” with DEI programming within TFA and reflect on the impact that DEI programming had on them as educators teaching a racialized group of students (Flick, 2014, p. 265). The narrative sessions were audio recorded in order to capture an authentic account of each woman’s story. Audio recording ensured the integrity of each individual story and allowed for transcription in the narratives’ entirety. Merrill (2007) reminded us that “the performative rather than the clarifying function of narrative is reasonably considered a radical ontological view” (p. 11). This was striking to me because it places each narrative participant as the creator of their own radical and personal story. It assumes that every individual has a radical story to tell, which is an assumption that I adopted as I listened to the story of each participant.

The following prompts were used as the basis of the protocol for narrative sessions: (a) describe your experience talking about whiteness with other white people on a regular basis and its impact on your teaching; (b) describe your experience talking about whiteness with other white people on a regular basis and its impact on your relationships with students; and (c) describe your experience of talking about whiteness with other white people on a regular basis and its impact on you personally. (See Appendix D for the prompts for narrative inquiry.) “Regular basis” was operationally defined as at least one time per six-week period.

Member checking. After reviewing the audio tapes, transcriptions, and my notes from the individual narrative interviews, I noted gaps in participants' stories or areas that warranted further questioning. When needed, additional prompts were devised by me and emailed to the individual participant. At the same time, trends that span across multiple stories were also identified. Ultimately, this triangulation of the data ensured that my interpretation of their stories was correct and told in a way that honored their journey and their shared truths. Finally, at the completion of their interview engagement, I also sent a list of counseling resources, since speaking about race and racism can be sensitive for some. (See Appendix E for counseling options).

Coding and Analysis of Data

The individual meetings were audiotaped and transcribed in their entirety. Transcriptions were completed by Rev.com, an online transcription service. Copies of the transcribed individual narratives were analyzed by me in order to code present themes. In this way, the audio tapes and transcriptions were analyzed in their entirety and trends were extracted. This was done to ensure accuracy, to more fully understand what was said, comprehend what each question meant to both the researcher and the participant, and to capture what I could learn from the data (Briggs, 1986). Kramp (2004) also suggested that close attention be paid to the language and word choices that each participant used when coding each narrative. Given the highly personal nature of the topic discussed, word choice, inflection, and story details have the potential to be revealing.

The analysis process began with the coding of the major themes and issues that were raised across the narratives. To ensure that unique and clear themes were developed, each transcript was analyzed then coded individually. This process also sought to honor the unique

contributions of each participant. Data were coded in two phases through color-coded highlighting and using color-coded flags. The first phase coded each narrative arc using a flow of (a) before TFA experiences; (b) during TFA experiences, with a focus on particularly positive and negative experiences; and (c) what is currently being experienced, with a focus on school-based experiences and a critical analysis of the world. The second phase identified common and divergent themes in the narratives. I initially coded for 17 themes, then combined and/or narrowed them down to the 10 most salient themes. Lastly, in-depth analytical notes were taken during the process of analysis. The narratives collected were analyzed through a critical race, critical feminist, and a critical whiteness lens in order to better identify and interpret the major themes and issues that moved across the narratives.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

The delimitations of this study included the following: all of the participants were novice white educators, the participants were part of the TFA organization, the participants experienced and/or were currently experiencing DEI programming, and the teachers were teaching racialized groups of students. This was an intentional narrowing of the educator pool, but as Synar and Maiden (2012) reminded us, over 50% of educators are leaving the profession within the first five years of teaching, with a large percentage of that turnover occurring within the first three years. Limitations of this study also included a small sample size of eight participants. As such, the findings are not necessarily generalizable to the wider teaching base of white educators or any other demographic populations of educators, yet they may have value to the TFA community given the program is a common tie for the participants. However, the value of rich qualitative

data lies in the context and subsequent findings of a particular study versus generalizability (Creswell, 2003).

Another limitation of this study is my positionality as a TFA alumni, current alumni facilitator, and former staff member. Although some may view this relationship as problematic given the topic of this study, my understanding of the educators' current context and shared identity markers provided me a more intimate understanding of the phenomenon I was studying. Furthermore, as the facilitator of the study, I ensured that all dynamics were named at the outset of the study and participants were offered multiple opportunities to share experiences during the narrative sessions and to clarify or add to their initial responses through email correspondence.

Conclusion

As a methodology, narrative inquiry assists researchers to gather data through the collection of stories. This method created space for abundant sharing about participants' lived experiences, which is both important and necessary work. Narrators strive to achieve the "most internally consistent interpretation of the past-in-the-present, the experienced present and the anticipated-in-the-present future" (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 165). Said another way, recounting experiences is a reconstruction of the past in the present. My goal here was to ensure that each woman was able to tell her story and in turn honor her commitment to personal growth and development. In this way, their stories can inform our understanding of the racial identity development needs of novice white female teachers who serve a student population that is comprised of societally racialized students.

CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL NARRATIVES

The purpose of this chapter is to share the stories of participants, which tell of the racial identity journeys of eight novice female teachers. This qualitative study was designed, more specifically, to better understand the experiences of novice white teachers who experienced race-based programming in Teach for America (TFA). This chapter focuses on each of the stories of participants, highlighting the major influencers over a multiyear period of time that led them to their current understanding of white racial identity. Privileging their stories is an intentional choice as to allow the journey of the participants to be highlighted. Moreover it is useful to note that I collected narratives during the summer and fall of 2018. Many of these educators were teaching during the 2016 election of Donald Trump, and they recalled its impact on both them and their students. Almost two years after this election, its significance was palpable for them in the telling of their stories, and its impact reverberated in their own racial identity journeys.

Participant Profiles

Table 4 highlights the profiles of the eight participants who informed this study. Their personal lives and experiences varied, and they also had intersecting threads, such as their participation in TFA and their profession. All were educators in historically marginalized communities in Los Angeles. These communities are located in South Los Angeles, where there is a mixed Black and Latinx population, East Los Angeles, where there is a majority Latinx population, and pockets of Central Los Angeles, where Latinx communities reside (“Mapping LA neighborhoods,” n.d.). It is also notable that all eight of the participants were special education teachers. What follows are the narratives of the eight participants.

Table 4

Participant Profiles

Name	Years of Teaching Experience	Age	School Level	Type of School
Kara	1	26	Middle School	Public District
Sarah	1	24	Elementary	Public Charter
Janet	2	24	Elementary	Public Charter
Jen	3	25	High School	Public District
Monica	2	26	Middle School	Public Charter
Anna	1	23	Elementary	Public District
Emma	1	23	High School	Public District
Wendy	3	25	High School	Public Charter

Stories of Racial Identity Journeys

The following section presents the stories of eight novice white female educators speaking about their racial identity journeys and their current understandings of their experiences before entering and teaching in a classroom of racialized students. As much as possible, I sought to honor their voices and include direct quotes that highlight salient points made by each of the eight participants.

Kara

I'm a very sensitive person, so hearing from somebody that what you said was problematic or that you're behaving in a colonialist way, that's not easy to hear. I would end up in tears at some point, and it'd be tough. But then I would come to hate myself for

crying because it's my white fragility: Can I take a comment and not cry? It was a frustrating process. There was a lot of, I wouldn't say self-hatred, but just really being frustrated with myself. (Kara)

Originally from the Midwest, Kara is a second-year teacher who moved from residing in New York to Los Angeles to join TFA. I sat down with Kara in the early fall of her second year of teaching in the week that she found out that she was being displaced from the school she had been teaching in for the past 14 months. This news was clearly present in her mind as she reflected on her experience as a Special Day Class (SDC) special educator at her current large comprehensive middle school in East Los Angeles, which was comprised of mainly Latinx boys. The school she was moving to was not geographically far away, but her role would be shifting, and the racial composition of her classroom was unknown to her at the time. Within the first five minutes of our conversation, Kara revealed a family tie to special education, as her nephew is on the autism spectrum, and the ways in which her time at a teaching-focused graduate institution influenced her journey as a white educator in a racialized school space. When speaking about the manner in which her graduate institution spoke about race, gender, and/or social justice, she said:

Yeah, that kind of confronted me right when I got there. It's something I never really thought about prior to that growing up around all white people basically. While I was progressive in the way that I thought, I'd never really considered the intersection of being a woman and being white as compared to other less-privileged identities, you could say. At first being confronted [with] that was very hard for me, and I resisted it, but then I eventually started to embrace it, and I sought it out. I joined groups who would call me out and gracefully educate me about my bad thought patterns. Ended up being part of a

group that made a lot of changes at [the graduate institution] and really started to educate myself about the way that I was raised and what that meant for how I believed things were in the world.

Kara considered her time at the graduate institution as formative and critical. She stated how specific classes opened her eyes. For example, she took a class about microaggressions by a leader in that field of research. Reflecting on that class, she stated:

As a white person coming into that [class], I wasn't even open to the fact that there could still be a lot of racism. I knew there was because I'd protested for Black Lives Matter before, but it was still like, "Oh, there's overt racism, but everything else is good." Starting to learn all those things and starting to learn how people can be affected by just the slightest thing, how it can really just cut you up inside, I know it really resonated with me. And I spoke out a few times in the class, and I'm sure I sounded very ignorant, but throughout that whole semester, I learned a ton of stuff. I got very emotional many times because it feels bad, because it's who you are as a person. You're not [as] aware as you think you are. That was the struggle, I guess was kind of letting go of what I thought I knew and being open to learning. It was difficult; it still is difficult.

In our conversation, Kara shared stories of both challenge and growth as she moved deeper into a reflective process about her own identity and the manner in which her whiteness in particular played a role in the way she existed in the world. She spoke about being challenged by others in her program and the role pain played in her growth. Reflecting on her experience, she said:

Sometimes, people were nicer about it, and they wouldn't say it to hurt me, but I'm grateful for the ones who did hurt me because that is when I learned the most, because I was hurting them. And I would have continued to hurt them if they didn't call me out like that.

She continued speaking about the impact those experiences had on both her mindset and actions:

And then of course when I left [graduate school], that translated to other white people. When I saw it in other white people, I would instantly not want to associate with them because I didn't want to go back to how I was when I should have maybe had more patience, but that was my automatic reaction. (Kara)

Kara carried these experiences into her time at TFA. She characterized her experience with the race-based programming of TFA to be "way too soft." When directly asked about her experience in race-based programming at TFA, she said:

I think they know their primary clientele or, I guess, their primary applicants are white middle-class people, and that's where they draw most of their recruitment, so they are much softer about issues of race and don't really challenge people to unlearn things that they should unlearn before they step foot in a classroom of Brown and Black kids.

Kara named that she was aware that she was coming from a graduate institution that prioritized "unlearning" and "growth" in both a pedagogical and practical manner. She feared that without TFA taking a more "no apologies, no comforting confrontation" of whiteness and its manifestation in the education system, it would continue to be a "white savior organization." She stated, "I'm not here to save anybody. Nobody needs to be saved by me." She, moreover, seemed

to recognize the complexities of her relationship with the organization, as she named that “without TFA, I wouldn’t have been able to get into this classroom the way that I did. TFA is an important organization.”

This dichotomous and conflicting relationship with TFA is one that Kara wrestled with. She noted that it impacts the manner in which she engages with other corps members about race. Kara expressed her thoughts about this:

I have empathy if they’re open to changing. What I don’t have empathy for is someone who takes up space, who is very ignorant about what they are doing, who thinks they’re good because they are doing TFA work, who are ambitious and who want to be in these policy positions and who really just don’t understand that the kissing ass and trying to prove how far they are along on their journey is the most distancing thing that you can do. And when you get to a point of not having to prove yourself is when I think truly the deeper work begins. If you’re still stuck in that spot where you think what you’re doing is saving people and, “Oh, I need to be a part of this group and this group, and oh my gosh, it’s so great to meet you, I’ve done this and done that.” No, you’re not ready. You’re not ready to do the deep work.

She further spoke of the inherent tension when working with a varied group of people who each share a common racial identity yet come into race-based work at different entry points:

I also understand it’s a bit of a balancing act because you have to meet people where they’re at. I don’t know if there’s such a thing as being able to have a beginner’s, an intermediate, and an advanced class for that. It just feels like something that’s of dire importance for TFA to effectively do its work. (Kara)

While Kara's experience in TFA has been "isolating" because she is not interested in speaking to corps members who are not willing to do what she determines to be deep racial reflection, this does not translate to her school-based experience. In a very opposite approach, she felt it essential to speak about whiteness and about racial dynamics in her classroom. She expressed that she entered into conversations about race and ability in her classroom in the first weeks of teaching. She said that she did not fear that speaking about race was "off topic." She described her experience in the following way:

I did socio-emotional learning days where I . . . centered it around Latinos, the Latinx community, and what it really means to be Latinx though I couldn't tell them obviously. But I would show them things. Like for example, we watched the movie *Walkout* [Bruce, L. Esparza, M., Katz, R. & Olmos, J., (2006)], which is one of the most iconic moments in LA education history, and told them, "This is your community; this is what your community did." And I did these things, and I had them learn about their disabilities and tell them or ask them to reflect on themselves like, "Why does this make you any less than anyone else? Because it doesn't. You just think differently." And advocating for their IEPs [Individualized Education Plans]. I had a caseload of 11 kids, and I ended up mainstreaming five of them, and it was one subject, you know? I was told I was the first special education teacher to ever do that, ever at that school. Yeah. That's what I did. I just made sure to have social justice the primary lens through which I operated.

She continued speaking about how her students perceived her and how her relationship with her students changed over time.

I think right away they were like, “Who the hell is this white lady, and what is she trying to tell me?” I think they thought I was a little bit crazy right away. But I think overall as the year went on, they started to accept me, and they started to really believe in themselves and understand what I was trying to tell them and how I was trying to empower them and not to just teach them. So, I think they received it well. I ended the year with lots of tears at culmination, so I’m pretty sure they got me. Yeah. I don’t know, but part of that is that I made a lot of jokes about my whiteness, and I acknowledged it a lot in front of them. (Kara)

Kara, however, acknowledged that her approach was not received well by veteran teachers, particularly right away.

I think maybe they thought that either I was trying to show off or maybe I was overconfident, or they just didn’t agree with my progressive stance. But I just got a text, I’m gonna look at the text. Because I just got a text from an older gentleman who teaches SDC [Special Day Class] sixth grade, and having just been displaced, lots of people are texting me and telling me how much I mean to the school. And what did he say? “I’m so sorry this has happened to you, especially in the way it went down. I want to let you know that I admire your progressiveness in the classroom and how you were able to give students the chance they deserve.” And my AP [Assistant Principal] the other day, he says, “You put seeds into our classrooms here, and I hope they get sowed for many years after this.” Right away, it was not received well, of course, but I think people came around to it.

Lastly, she noted:

Any time there was something that I did that was mildly white, I would just call it out. I would try to speak the language. They would say. . . what did they call my sandals? *Changlas*. So, I would say the word, and they'd be like, "Oh my god, miss, you're so white." You know? And I would just laugh along with it because it's true, I am. It was just a matter of really showing them that I was comfortable with that and trying to get them to trust me even though I don't look like them (Kara).

Kara reflected on her current thoughts about her racial identity journey and the ways in which she is currently defining her whiteness. She expressed some hesitation to name how she has grown during her time in TFA, but then she said:

If you're gonna fight against white supremacy and the white supremacy that's ingrained in you, it has to be a very deliberate fight. It can't be passive. And I feel like that's what I have been doing is this passive thing. You know, early educators, we have to do so many things. And if something is not being made a priority, it's gonna fall to the wayside. . . . I would say that while I have good intentions, I haven't been fully acting on them in the way that I should.

Kara entered TFA already having had her racial identity journey deeply impacted by experiences in undergraduate and grade school. While she did not credit TFA and its programming for having significant impact on her development, her identity was further formed by her Los Angeles-based teaching experience.

Janet

I didn't want to talk about [race] because of that experience. But then once we got to LA, it was a combination of working with being a white woman working with students of

color and with my [credentialing] classes mixed with the white affinity spaces, mixed with the monthly TFA PDs [professional development workshops]. All of that together, I couldn't escape it even if I wanted to. If I wanted to not think about it. If I wanted to avoid it, I couldn't. I'm grateful for that because I needed to try to be forced into having a conversation and to learn about it. (Janet)

Originally from the Midwest, Janet moved to Los Angeles to teach for her two-year commitment to the corps. While in her TFA placement, she was a special educator at a high school in Central Los Angeles. The students in her caseload as a resource specialist teacher were mixed Black and Latinx. Janet and I spoke in early fall during her third year teaching. She has since returned to her homestate and is teaching preschool in a mixed-race school. An education major, she had a social justice orientation and thus felt that TFA Los Angeles would be the correct fit for her. Janet shared that she knew that not every region had the same mission and focus that the Los Angeles region did, and that was a key factor in choosing to make the cross-country move for two years away from family and her partner.

Janet was part of a pilot program at her undergraduate institution that was partnering with historically marginalized communities around the university and ensuring that education majors were able to have student teaching experience while still in college. Janet spoke about her experience in that pilot program of 100 individuals:

I knew that where I grew up was very white, upper-class, suburban area. It was a suburb of [a major city]. I didn't like it because my family wasn't. . . . My family is white, but we were not. . . . We didn't come from money, so I was always the outcast in that school. I didn't want to teach in a community like that. I always wanted to teach with low-

income communities, and the university I went to partnered with local school districts for our student teaching and all sorts of things. But then it's all lower-income communities. Right away from my freshman year in college, I was exposed to working with all different types of kiddos in low-income communities. That's really where I fell in love with it. . . .

Janet continued:

At first, it was overwhelming because I really had not been exposed to any type of diversity before college. The first school that I went to, it was first semester of college they put us in a classroom.

Janet shared that there was a focus on understanding community in the pilot program.

She described how before each teaching placement, students were required to do an ethnography of the community in which they would be working:

A big part of our program was being aware of the diversity, and we were always graded on that whenever we were observed. That was always one of the big sections. Are we equal to all students, regardless of their background? Are we aware of their background, incorporate their background in the classroom?

She also acknowledged that while conversations were had about diversity, stereotyping and problematic language were used by people in the same program to describe students. She reflected on the role she played in her student community:

If we're in a lecture hall and somebody makes some ignorant statement, I wouldn't raise my hand then to counteract them. I guess I just didn't feel that it was appropriate. Yeah, I

guess I didn't have the language for it. I wouldn't have been able to back myself up the way I could now. (Janet)

Janet previously had been in classrooms with racialized students and had been in an education program that had at least some conversation about topics such as race and community relationships. As she moved into her TFA placement, Janet noted:

I went in there with the best of intentions. For whatever reason, my race had to come up. I didn't get it at first. Then, the [2016] election happened. November is what, two months in the school, three months in the school. That was still. . . . I think about that all the time. Going to school that next day was so heartbreaking. The kids, teachers, everyone was just crying. Everyone was just sad. Not that I didn't understand it—I was upset too. I wasn't viewing it in the same way that any of the students were. I think it's that moment when I felt very weak because I felt like, "Who was I to tell them it's going to be okay." Because if I said that, it would be like, "Yeah, you're going to be okay. You're white. What's going to happen to us?" Especially my students that are undocumented, they were especially freaking out. I really felt like I was at a loss for words, as if nothing I would say would make it better. I do remember that day being very hard for everyone, of course. In my own life personally, that was a hard day for me because I wanted to help my students, and I felt I couldn't solely because of my race.

She continued this reflection by speaking of students' responses to Trump's election.

Then after the election, kids were angry or whatever. They were, "Well, you voted for Trump, so what do you care?" I'm like, "Well, I didn't." I remember I was coaching an English class, and a kid said that to me, and I kind of gave a signal to the teacher like I

was going to talk. I said, “Why do you think I voted for Trump?” He goes, “Well, you’re white.” I said, “Okay, but I work here. Do you think that if I supported Trump I would spend my day here? Think about that.” Then it was like, “No, but, but, but. . . .” I said, “No, you guys need to think too because it put me on the spot. Because I’m white, you’re assuming that I’m a Donald Trump supporter.” I told them that’s not okay either. After that, especially after I said that, I got really close to those kiddos. . . but it was more if they thought about it was in a lighthearted way. If I was trying to do the coolest new dance with them or whatever. They’re like, “Oh my God, you’re so white.” I’m like, “I know, white as a toilet.” After that, more the second semester, they were cool about it. It wasn’t a big . . . it was a big factor in our relationship, but at the same time, it wasn’t necessarily a negative factor in our relationship. (Janet)

Similarly, Janet also spoke about the impact that the 2016 election had on her definition of whiteness and what she understood about her role in society as a white person:

When you’re learning about race and identity, whiteness through conversations with other white people or through reading articles or discussions. That’s one thing, and it gives you background knowledge, and it gives you a basic understanding. But being in the classroom with my students who are of color and are literally . . . one was literally crying so hard she fell to her knees and started praying. That image makes me cry. That image is burned in my mind. That is something you can’t experience from reading an article or being in a white ally conversation. To see those things in that student that I cared about. I had only known her for a couple months, but she was my resource student, and to see her so vulnerable, so broken. She was undocumented, so after that the

conversation changed from, “Yeah, I’m going to go to college, and I’m going to be a lawyer.” After the election, the conversation changed to, “I’m going to drop out because I’m going to get sent back to Mexico anyway.” As a person that hurt, but as a teacher I was like, “What do I do with this?” She’s in high school, she was in tenth grade at the time. Those grades matter. Then it became even more so important for me to be her cheerleader and be a support system for her because I understood that she was going through something emotionally with this, but she would regret it later on if she allowed it to affect her grades. In the moment, it made sense to her, like, “Well, I might get deported, so who cares?” But it took a lot of conversations and heart to hearts and a lot of crying. We would have lunch together, and I would drive her home sometimes, and we would talk just to hear her side of the story. Let her know that even though I couldn’t relate personally, somebody was listening.

Janet also spoke about the impact of the race-based programming at TFA. She described her first experiences with white affinity spaces as maddening. In particular, she described them in relationship to a comment made by the session facilitator:

The session leader made a comment. She said, “The first step to being a white ally is to have white guilt.” I was like, “How does that makes sense? Are you telling me that I should be guilty for being white?” She said, “Well, no, but in order to get to the point where you can be a white ally, you have to feel guilty.” I’m like, “No, I don’t.” I didn’t understand that. I was very offended. I was mad. I’m like, “Why feel guilty for being white?”. . . Basically, she told me, “No, that is the first step. This is how we do it. This is a continuum. These are the steps that you follow.” I was just really upset with the whole

experience. We kept having to do that, and then I just stopped talking. I shared a comment another time about my parents are in a sense from Romania. She quickly cut me off and said, “That’s not the same.” I said, “Okay, I know it’s not the same. I’m not saying that because they’re from Europe that they’re immigrants, how people of color are being treated. That’s not the point I was trying to make.” It was like everything I was saying was wrong. Like, “No, you need to feel guilty, and that’s it.” I just stopped commenting. I was very upset about it, but then it was over, and actually TFA started. We had the whitest ever faces that you were in. I don’t know. I think also it was just maybe the leader of the group that I was in. I thought she was harsh maybe. It was still a fairly new concept. At least for me, that was the first time I was grappling with being white.

This experience changed for Janet as she moved from the summer institute experience into the race-based programming affinity work that was designed and executed by the TFA Los Angeles staff. She described her first white affinity space experience in direct contrast to her previous summer experience:

I think after learning about it more and reading more about it, and then once we got to LA and we would have those groups. I was a little bit more understanding of what the space was for. It wasn’t about separating by race, but what the true reason was to get people a safe space. Once I got to the first white safe space, I was still annoyed because I was like, “Oh my God, we’re doing this again. I didn’t like it the first time.” Once I was there, I just remember not wanting it to end. Not that I didn’t want to go back over with them, whatever. I was just learning so much. It is a confusing concept.

Janet provided concrete examples of how the affinity spaces explicitly named elements of white supremacy characteristics and how to be aware of them and apply an alternative approach in schools. She gave a concrete example of how she applied the concept of “teacher talk” or taking up space as a white person in mixed or solely people of color spaces:

I was the only white person on any of the IEP teams that I was on. It took me until probably my second year to really be like, “Okay, let me take a step back.” For me, it wasn’t malicious because I’m white, but because I was the case manager. For me, this is my baby. This is my kid. I want to be at the meeting, but regardless of my intention because my intentions were good. Regardless of my intentions, I needed to be aware of how I was coming off. I’m the only white person in the room, and I’m the only one talking. . . . That is something that I didn’t realize until going to those white affinity spaces. Even when I had made that realization, it clicked, it still took me a while to start actually doing something about it. I would try, but I would catch myself going back to my old ways. It really was again for my second year. I was really consciously during the meeting like, “Okay, you’re talking too much.” Or I’d watch the clock, “Okay, you’ve talked for two minutes, now let someone else talk.” That was a big one for me was just not taking up as much space in the conversation.

Janet also spoke about the support system that she built in TFA as another key element in her own development as a white educator who was becoming conscious of her impact and her experiences:

My biggest support was a group of friends that I made in TFA. Because I couldn't really talk about it with friends or family from back in [her homestate], just because the election did not have the same impact in [her homestate] as it did in Los Angeles. It just didn't.

Lastly, Janet credited TFA for helping her develop critical analysis skills or interpersonal dynamics where race, class, or gender may be a factor. During our conversation, she shared a story:

I have one mother who dropped her kid off. They're a low-income family. Then, I have them talking to me, and we're just chatting good morning. Then every time when this dad who is a doctor drops off his kid into the class, she just will stop talking, just walks away from me and goes beside her kid and leaves. I don't know if she's intimidated; it could just be because it's a man. I could be making it up, I don't know, but it seems that way that almost as if because he came into the room, I need to give my attention to this person now instead of her. I don't know. I have noticed that. Again, I could be making it up, I guess, but that's the way I. . . . yeah, and she's a Latina women, and he's a white man. I feel because of TFA, I notice these things, that's what got me thinking.

As an education major, Janet has already experienced defining moments in her racial identity development journey prior to joining TFA. The programming, combined with her school-based experiences, extended that development. Throughout her narrative, she continued to express gratitude for how she had been shaped by TFA and was continuing to utilize the skills she developed in her new role.

Monica

I didn't put a lot of thought into it initially, honestly. 'Cause I grew up in [Southern California], I grew up playing basketball. I grew up around a lot of people who were looking different than me. I was playing. I didn't understand or take into consideration that that was something that needed to be addressed. I was just like, "Oh, yeah. We look different, but that doesn't mean anything." I didn't take the time to realize, no, it does mean something. There is a lot that goes into that. But I just . . . personally, I was very ignorant to the fact that race was something people dealt with on a daily basis at my age even. I guess that is the definition of privilege. You don't really know. Even if you are aware, you're not aware. (Monica)

Monica did not need to relocate for her time as a TFA corps member given that she was born, raised, and went to college in Southern California. Now a third-year teacher, she was initially a special educator at a large comprehensive middle school in South Los Angeles during her TFA placement. The students in her special day classroom were both Black and Latinx in about equal numbers, despite the fact that the overall population of the school was more than 70% Latinx. Due to a classroom safety issue, TFA moved Monica from her original placement to a small charter high school in the second semester of her first year teaching. At her second placement, she was first a resource specialist teacher, then a contained classroom placement teacher during the time of this study. Monica and I spoke in the late summer of 2018 as she was beginning her third year of teaching. When reflecting on her entry into teaching, she immediately named that her single mother was a career educator, thus Monica was skeptical about going into education as a career. However, in the gap year that she took after high school, throughout

college, and through her religious service group, she continued to find herself drawn into work with adolescents and those who were in cycles of poverty. After college, she applied to TFA, got in, and went into education with an acute awareness of both the joys and limitations of the public school system given her previous experiences.

In reflecting on the experiences that led her to apply for TFA, she recalled her first experiences engaging with students with disabilities. Through her religious service group, there was an opportunity to volunteer at a camp for students with special needs. Monica volunteered at the camp for a summer. When thinking of the impact of that experience, she recalled thinking about other kids:

“Hey, these kids are really cool. They’re just like me. They’re my age.” I had never really experienced being in that close of contact with people who were different from me, and I fell in love with it, and I was like, “This is really cool. I wanna do more, and I wanna learn more about these students and from them.” And then I realized, “Oh, they are if anything even more accepting of who I am and even more loving and even more all the positive things about us. They are all those things magnified.” And so I was like, “Wow.” I felt like I had found a treasure or something. I was like, “Oh, this is awesome. You guys are just like me. You just wanna be loved. You wanna have fun. You wanna dance.” They were different looks wise, different sounding, they might have different speech barriers that they needed, and also racially different. There’s all different types of kids.

Monica’s religious service organization was and still is a large part of her life, and she continued to do work with young people who were across various lines of difference than her. Her religious organization connected her with a faith-based nonprofit organization in Los

Angeles, where Monica worked for a year after college. The faith-based nonprofit is a center that aims to help individuals break out of the cycle of poverty by offering free resources and services that address immediate and long-term needs in the areas of poverty, addiction, and abuse.

Monica was providing education for youth whose families were currently unsheltered or they themselves were currently unsheltered. Monica remembered,

I was working with teenagers who did not have special needs but did racially look different than me, and seeing how they lived, a lot of them, and hearing their stories and their challenges. And I think I, before going into TFA, I was really exposed to a lot of different types of people, so I was able to empathize.

When directly asked if these multiple experiences made her confront her own race or privilege in any way, Monica responded:

Even if I didn't necessarily confront my own race or confront other's race or have explicit conversations about race before then, I think I had enough "exposure" to be okay in a setting where I was not necessarily comfortable. I was used to being uncomfortable and then figuring it out. I was just comfortable with being uncomfortable.

During her time at the faith-based nonprofit, Monica applied to TFA and was admitted as an early applicant for the following year's teaching corps. Monica joined a pilot program where she was part of a group of incoming corps members who explored the inequities of education and society and positioned each person to reflect upon their role in each. Monica credited this experience as being "amazing":

I think, honestly, if I could say anything about the race work that's done with TFA core members beforehand, that was the biggest piece for me that really shook me and really

changed my perspective before going into TFA. ‘Cause I had a completely different perspective from everyone else going in too. . . . I think there was a good 30 of us, or 40 of us that had different backgrounds, but we were all early applicants. We all knew that we wanted to do Teach for America and we wanted to start having these conversations before so that we could go in with a little more of an understanding of the other.

She also shared that she was in the racial minority of the group and that there was a majority of people of color. She named multiple moments of deep learning for her, yet one example illuminated her broader experience:

I don’t even remember what I said. I think I used the word “ethnic,” and I said something about how she looked ethnic, and this girl checked me so quick, and she was like, “That word feels offensive.” You know, she just checked me. That was the first time where I had been in a conversation where I was checked about my language. And first I was like, “Oh, shoot.” I felt really bad about it ‘cause I was like, “I don’t know what I said.” And then the more that we discussed it, I was like, “Okay, I understand.” And I think that specific moment really shifted my thinking in a way, where I was like, “Oh, that’s something you need to be aware of.” The words you use are super important. And I think, as long ago as it was, I don’t even remember the details about it, but I remember that made that conversation super real for me and the fact that there was a space where that could happen. Like, she didn’t need to check me, but she did. And I think because we had built a rapport. And so, I thought that was cool.

Monica recalled this ongoing engagement in TFA pilot work as “eye-opening” and that it led her to think about her past engagements, particularly in her faith-based community:

So, I started reading into this and even thinking about the nonprofit I was a part of with [religious organization]. I was just like, “Damn. We really do these things and don’t even realize it.” Or we create structures or these certain expectations. Or we’ll say, “Oh, we want a multicultural nonprofit,” or “We want a multicultural environment,” but really, I’m expecting all these other people to be like me in order to get to this place of multiculturalism. And that’s not multiculturalism, ultimately, when you’re just like, “Hey, it’s assimilation.”

This pilot experience led Monica to have additional context in her understanding of race and her positionality as a white woman as she entered the TFA summer institute experience. As such, she named that she was more critical of the summer institute programming for DEI; Monica did not believe that it “went far enough”:

It was a very different experience going into institute and seeing other people just starting. Feeling like I was really exposed to a lot of really amazing conversations around race, versus seeing what was given at institute and feeling like, “Wait, but this isn’t enough. There’s so much more to talk about, and there’s so much more that needs to get said.” But I felt like race was like, “Oh, let’s check this off the box. Let’s talk about it and then we’ve done our duty.” I just didn’t feel like there was a lot of authentic conversation around it, and I think there was one, a need for it, and a desire for it. I think a lot of people would have liked to have a lot more in-depth conversation about race at institute.

During her two years in the corps, Monica participated in various race-based sessions and programmatic experiences. When asked about her overall experience, Monica named that the spaces ran the gamut of experiences from negative to positive:

I think TFA really tried to create a space where race was a conversation. They tried. Execution wise, I think that's really hard. And I don't know how that would look 'cause everyone's different. . . . I don't know how that would look in a way where it's like everyone is getting what they want. We've talked about this, how someone's always gonna be unhappy about something.

She also acknowledged that the race-based spaces were challenging for her when she would need to empathize with someone who was just beginning to think about racial identity development. She shared that she would at times be “pessimistic” and “have a hard time” as she is “still learning how to listen,” and:

I would just get annoyed really quickly with people and their ignorance. And not saying I know everything or that I don't have any ignorance. I know I'm still working. We're all on different levels. But I have a hard time with how to address those things. I feel like I just get annoyed, and I check out with people.

In offering suggestions about how the spaces could be more productive for her or others, Monica explicitly named the *Teaching While White* podcast facilitated and co-founded by Elizabeth Denevi and Jenna Chandler-Ward (Ellis, 2019), among other items:

I think maybe what was missing was the conversation about process. I think the thing that stood out to me the most about this podcast and the things that I'm pulling from it are, as a white person, the individual work within yourself and your own biases and things like that. I guess that wasn't really a conversation within TFA. It was more so like, “How does it feel?” And a lot of times I saw it become a platform for, “This is how hard my life is right now within my classroom.” And it wasn't really centered around personal growth

or development. So maybe a more personalized experience. . . ‘cause I think group conversations like that are super beneficial. I think it would be very important and necessary. But I also think before you’re able to take part in a conversation like that, you also need to do the work of, “Who am I? How do I fit into this?” And all the things that come with that.

When thinking back on her own experience and how she developed as a result of the race-based programming, she credited different facets of relationships with her development. She credited a white female staff member who served as a mentor to her, and she was still involved in that dialectical relationship. She also credited her TFA peers and colleagues of color who have “not needed to, but pushed her to be better” and to recognize her humanity even in moments of challenge. She summed up by saying:

Well, I think it ultimately comes down to treating people like humans and remembering humanity in people, even when they don’t act like it.

The conversation turned to her current school year, which was just beginning at the time Monica was interviewed, and how she wanted to focus on issues of race and societal inequity in her classroom. The conversation centered around some of the resources from DEI sessions, such as Tema Okun’s (n.d.) work on white supremacy culture, and how Monica is reflecting on the impact that she wants to make:

I’m still figuring that out. I think I’m at a school that’s really structured, and I don’t know that that’s a positive or a negative thing, thinking about that article about white supremacy. But there are a lot of structures and things that are expected here in our students and in the teachers and a really tight agenda for what is and isn’t talked about.

When asked if that structure is communicating anything about race or power structures to the school community in implicit or explicit ways, Monica shared “maybe.” She pondered here about what it would be like to have a more explicit social justice thread in her classroom this year:

Not that there would be any pushback or negative feelings toward it. Well, there might be. But conversations about race. . . . I think I would have to be really prepared. It could definitely happen, and it should happen. I think I haven’t made that a priority here because of my own comfort level and my own trying to figure out everything else. That’s something that’s definitely been ignored or been like, “Right now, they need to learn this, and they need to learn specifics.”

Monica was working to align her thoughts and actions in the classroom, and she also recognized that she has continued growth to make. When directly asked how she has seen her understanding of whiteness change over the past two years, Monica shared:

I feel like I’m in a place where I’m aware of racism and how it affects those around me and how it affects me and my own racism. And I think that I haven’t done the amount of work that I would like to do within myself. . . . I think I’ve heard a lot and I know a lot, [but] there’s so much more to know.

And she continued in this reflective manner when considering herself in the larger context as an educator:

And just hearing certain things, feeling convicted, like, “Oh, wait, these are certain things that I believe in or believe that they’re core parts of who I am.” And yeah, I’m not actively pursuing helping other people to get there. I feel like I’m almost part of the

problem. Yeah, in specific relationships that I have with other white people or other white teachers, I could do more. . . . I would love if there were people in my life that were there to call me out and help me in my growth, but I don't really know a lot of white people. Enough people of color are in my life that are woke and know the deal, but I would, I guess, I would like to have more white people around me that are able to have those conversations with me on that level. . . . You see racism play out every day in school, especially in schools. And when you're not saying anything, which probably 99% of the time I'm not, that's where I'm like, "Wait, I believe in this, and yet I'm kind of just coasting and allowing it by not saying anything about it or not confronting it."

Clearly thinking about the ways in which she shows up in various spaces, particularly educational spaces as a white woman, Monica was continuing to think about her role as a white woman teaching in a racialized community. When asked about the impact that she wanted to have in the classroom, she spoke of the system level and the person level:

I think about a huge question I would ask myself or even think about is: As a white woman coming into a classroom of all students of color, I have a huge responsibility because I can either perpetuate certain cycles that may have been created by other white people that they've experienced, or I could . . . explicitly or implicitly. It freaked me out, honestly, and that's why I think about it a lot. Because you could do things without even realizing you're perpetuating certain cycles. Yeah, I could be doing something that is perpetuating white supremacy and not even realize it. And I think that's what kind of triggered me to really be thinking about that question . . . but what am I doing to either break those cycles or to try to break them, or what am I not realizing? I think that's why

it's important to know these things, so that you are more aware of what you are or aren't perpetuating.

As we closed, Monica shared that she was grateful for the investments that people have made in her and that this conversation has prompted her to wonder what investments she is making in the development of others at this moment in time.

Emma

I mean, it was a culmination of I'm very white. I have blonde hair. Like, I'm very evidently not Hispanic, and I do not look Latino. And now 100 % of my students identify as Latino or Hispanic. And so, just the obvious appearance factor. And then also being a new teacher, I think I was unsure of a lot of things. And so, the combination of that and being a new teacher and race. But I came in last year, and I knew there could be comments about me being white, and a lot of the teachers at my school, like they would come in, "They're going to make fun of you being white. They're going to say something about you being white." (Emma)

Emma moved from a large Central Southern state to Los Angeles to join TFA, yet she grew up mainly in South America for her early years, then the large Central Southern state for her later years. When speaking about why she selected Los Angeles as region in which to teach, Emma stated that she wanted to work with a Latinx, Spanish-speaking population, as well as reside in a more politically liberal and accepting city. Emma came out as gay her senior year of college, and she wanted to live somewhere that she would be accepted for the multiple identities that she holds. I sat down with Emma early in her second year of teaching. She is a special day class special educator at a large comprehensive high school in South Los Angeles. The current

population of her school is 94% Latinx and 5% Black. However, Emma named that she does see an overrepresentation of Black students in special education at her high school:

Previously involved with youth mentoring through a religious organization while she was in college, Emma was moved by that experience. When speaking about how that experience led her to TFA, she said:

I started the conversation about Teach for America because of kids, right? So, I was like, I just want to be able to work with kids. And it was never from an educational standpoint at the beginning until I started finding or doing my own research. Reading *Just Mercy* was one of the things that opened my eyes to the social justice work that was being done in schools.

Emma went on to share the large impact that both the content of Bryan Stevenson's book, *Just Mercy*, had on her early conversations and learnings about race. In college, she was an ambassador for TFA, and one of the professional development opportunities afforded to campus ambassadors was a book club experience about *Just Mercy*. Emma spoke about the significance of the book club with her other campus ambassador peers:

[It] was my first kind of academic conversation about race with talking research and talking about experiences, and that was so eye opening. And those were conversations that I loved. And I had a woman who was white as my boss. And I worked with another white girl and then two guys, and both of the guys identified as Latinx . . . and we read that together and talked about it. And we would have conversations about race and how it's eventually going to affect our students. And I found out that I was teaching SPED, and it was just like a beautiful situation, and we all talked about it.

Coming into her TFA experience, Emma was in the early stages of her racial identity journey. She stated that the summer institute experience and the affinity spaces that occurred at the institute felt harmful to her. She described how there were affinity spaces for white individuals and then affinity spaces for people of color. Reflecting on why that experience felt challenging, she shared:

I don't know if [participants in the study] have been talking about their situations in the affinity spaces, but we had a leader who . . . so, we would break up, right? The white affinity and then the POC group. And in our white group specifically at our school, we had a leader who . . . I don't know if he was properly trained, or I don't know what the situation was, but every time someone spoke, he would say something degrading about what they said.

Emma did not feel affirmed by the facilitation of the group, and she further commented on the overall structure of the affinity group space time. Each group would meet separately, then come together for interracial dialogue. Emma explained:

So, people of color talk about their experiences, and white people, and the white people in our school would come to the room and not say anything. Like, we would just not talk. Then, the people of color would get frustrated because we weren't talking. And it was because our leader was telling us not to talk, you know?. . . And so, there was so much tension.

She continued speaking about the summer institute experience and how the DEI spaces felt divisive between white folks and people of color:

There were times where like it wasn't the white people walking out, it was like the people of color walking out because they weren't able to have conversations with us about race because we wouldn't talk, because we were basically told not to talk. It was all about not putting the burden on people of color. And so, it was really hard because it was the first time where I kind of felt the tension between white people and people of color in a setting like that, you know? And I heard other stories about great affinity spaces. So, I think it definitely depends on how it is led and what the conversation looks like, and the people that are participating. But with that also being said, a lot of my friends in Teach for America are people of color or identify as people of color. So, conversations that I have with them are very eye opening when it's in a smaller setting. So, I think that that might be. . . . I'm just now making this connection in my head.

As she reflected on the tension, she was able to both name how the structure and facilitation of the experience felt out of line with the ultimate goals of the affinity spaces. Despite this experience, Emma continued to seek out community with people of color, and such experiences revealed new opportunities for dialogue. However, Emma expressed that this experience did close her off to speaking about race for a period of time because she did not know how to move forward:

I did not want to talk about being white at all. I didn't want to. But I also didn't want to burden people of color with, like, talking to me about their experience, but that's all I wanted in the back of my mind, was just to be able to talk to them without having to talk to white people about it first.

During this time period of confusion, Emma remained resolute to her commitment to understand her whiteness and her role in the world as she was seeking community with others:

We have a responsibility to educate ourselves about their experience. But also, like, there's that part of relationship building where you need to be able to talk to someone about their experience. And like, when you know people that have those experiences or when you know people . . . yeah, when you know people that have had those experiences, it becomes much more real to you than it does when you're researching it on your own.

Emma stated that the majority of experiences with affinity spaces were poor and that they were not the primary venue where she was able to grow in her racial identity development. When asked about how she would improve upon or change the affinity group model, she offered the following:

What I would love to describe the affinity spaces as, it would be like I would like for it to be natural, you know? The affinity spaces were definitely forced. And I think the affinity spaces in talking about race is extremely important, so my automatic instinct is to say to not make them mandatory. To have spaces where people can come and talk about race or they can talk about gender. They can have focus groups, but then that's going to leave out a large population of people who just don't want to go to those spaces, you know? That should probably learn a thing or two about identity or be able to process things that they're going to have to be dealing with in the classroom.

When Emma arrived at the high school where she teaches, she was promptly confronted with her race in the classroom by two students in particular. About this, she said:

There was a lot of testing going on, especially in terms of race. Like there was this joke last year where they would say, like, “Go back to [her homestate], Goldilocks.”

We spoke further about how she was processing that experience and any impact that those types of comments were having on her:

Well, I don’t think I did for a long time. I just heard it, and I was like, “Well, you know” and “What?” I just didn’t know what to do. And I never really had conversations with them, but they would always make comments about how, like, I was really wealthy and how I was white. (Emma)

While Emma may not have been processing those comments directly in the moment, she also shared a series of actions she took that communicate a desire to connect and to be “culturally responsive” in ways that felt right and appropriate to her. Emma named a number of steps she took over time and more assertive ones as she built ongoing relationships with her students. She shared a specific example that she felt illustrated her ongoing work:

It was in February, so it was Black history month, and I was, like, sharing these Black history month things. And they’re like, “Well, why don’t you ever share, like, Mexican things?” A student said that to me. And I was like, “Wow, you’re right.” That was the first time where I was like, “I need to be talking about race.” Obviously, the institute and through Teach for America, there’s so many conversations that happen about race and how you . . . we don’t want, as a white people, like, not burdening other people with the responsibility of telling us what we need to know and being responsible for learning about, you know, marginalized groups of people. So, I think it really didn’t start until second semester of last year when that comment, “Why don’t you ever tell us about

Mexicans?” I was like, “Well, you’re right.” So, from there I had the opportunity to start putting in papers and research projects about leaders who had impacted the Mexican community. So, that was, like, the first real racial moment where we talked about it with dialogue.

She also reflected on her attempts in her first year of teaching:

I entered the year, like, not wanting to talk about race at all. But with the standpoint of celebrating, like, the race and ethnicities of my students. That’s what I wanted more than anything, was I wanted them to feel valued, and I wanted them to be able to express things that were happening in their lives or things about culture. And I wanted that to be celebrated without having to talk about my own race, which is difficult, because it’s not something where I can stand up there and say, “Let’s celebrate together as people of color,” because I’m not a person of color. And so, I had to find that line. . . . I’m still trying to find the line of how can we celebrate without it being something that is very obvious that I am white and you are not, you know? (Emma)

Now in her second year, Emma is teaching many of the students she had in her first year of teaching as well. Throughout our entire conversation, the topic of a shifting and deepening relationship was present. Emma shared the ways she actively used to humanize herself in order to create moments of vulnerability around sensitive topics with her students and others:

I always show pictures of my family, or I’ll show pictures of my friends. And it’s, like, a conversation we can have that’s open. . . . And a lot of things that they’ve gone through, whether it’s talking about family issues or living situations or, like, mental health issues,

it's things that even though I cannot relate, I can say something to them. . . . I think that when finally I got to be authentic with the students, and you build relationships with students, they're going to see what you're doing more than if you're just coming in as a white person who is obviously different from them.

She was also able to articulate her perception of the changed relationship between her and her students:

There's, like, a level of comfort that we have with one another. And so, I would not say that I have a student, any students this year, that would intentionally try to disrespect me or to. . . . I don't know if disrespect is the right word, but they would never try to hurt me. Whereas, like, at the beginning of the year last semester, I would say that that's what they were trying to do. And maybe they weren't, but that's what I felt when they would say things like, "Go back home," or "Go back to where you came from." Like, it was hurtful.
(Emma)

Emma articulated that this year the school site went through an administration change and that the school is now being led by a white woman when it had previously been led by a male of color. For Emma, this change represented a change in the dynamic of the school:

I think that's been the major shift has been . . . people in higher positions are white. Or like higher people in our district are white. . . . Last year it was a Hispanic man, but yeah, this year we have a white woman. Yeah, I guess representation-wise it is diverse, but it doesn't represent the population of our students. Last year, it was so freaking cool because I had my assistant principal for SPED, was a Black lady, and then Ms. X was the director of SPED, and she was a Black lady. And so, when I would sit in these high

profile IEP meetings, everyone who had power in the room was Black. And I had never been in a situation like that because I grew up in [the Central South]. My high school is mainly white. My college was mainly white. And so, the jobs that I was working was with other white people. And so, this was, moving to California was the first time where I got to sit in the room and just be led by people of color. And I loved it. It was such a cool experience.

When asked why this experience felt “cool,” she said:

Probably because I had never experienced it before. Yeah, but also being just so impressed with their leadership in general. And as women too. So, you know, a woman being the head of the SPED department, and a woman . . . just powerful women in general because they were Black and because they were women. And even now, you asked me about our principal now. I think it’s so cool that our principal is a woman, regardless of whether she’s Black or white or Hispanic. (Emma)

At this time, Emma credited her students and school primarily for helping her develop awareness about her responsibility as a white individual to understand her whiteness:

You know, as a white person, I think now I realize I have a responsibility in the classroom, versus coming into it, I didn’t. I thought of it as a responsibility, but . . . it always felt like it was stretching it, or I don’t know what the right word is. It wasn’t authentic, and I think the authenticity comes with the relationships. And so now when we do things that celebrate people of color or people who have been marginalized or things dealing with intersectionality, there’s a much more authentic feel to what I’m doing, and the students respond to that more. And I think it has to do with relationships that have

been built with my students. I had them last year, and I have them this year; we're going to be together all year. And if I'm here next year, I'm going to have them again.

Emma entered her TFA experience with few prior major impacts of her racial identity development, yet with intense curiosity and a willingness to engage. Her early experiences with TFA programming then subsequently at her school site initially turned her off to DEI work. However, it was those same students who awakened in her a need to investigate her whiteness, and Emily leaned into that call. She was continuing to determine the development pathway to take, and she remained open to it.

Jen

I feel like in high school I knew I was white and I knew that came with privileges. I don't think I ever knew how or why. And I think that's just because when I was younger, the way our schooling was set up we had these little track houses, and that's where we lived. My family sent me to the elementary school that was the nicer one on the other side of town. I don't know why it was nicer, but for some reason it was. Not nicer in the sense of the school itself, but the kids were more well behaved, I think. I still don't really know why, maybe it's something with the way that the town was set up, they probably put the higher-income kids there. I don't know. (Jen)

Jen was from a desert town in California that she described as "pretty low income." She then came to a large state university in Southern California for college and from there joined TFA. An avid yoga enthusiast, Jen traveled to India twice to train in yoga and taught classes to youth while there. Further, she was originally placed in a different TFA region, so she did her summer institute training on the East Coast before being transferred to Los Angeles. I sat down

with Jen just as she was starting her third year of teaching at a large, comprehensive high school in Northeast Los Angeles. Her school has embraced a co-teaching model, thus Jen works as the resource specialist teacher in two general education math classrooms throughout her school day to support students with special needs. The student population at her school site was predominately Latinx. Jen described the town that she grew up in as about “half Latino,” and she was engaged to a Latino man; she was explicit that this is a population with whom she felt comfortable.

When asked how she came to know about TFA, Jen credited the on-campus recruiter at her university. She stated that it was in undergrad when she learned about the “education gap” because she noticed disparities in her ability to get to college as a middle-income white student in comparison to other peers in her hometown:

I noticed that I’m middle income, I’m white, I got to college. But a lot of my peers who were low income did not. It was strange being at [college] and people being like, “20 people from my high school go here.” And I was like, “What? Is this a thing?” I didn’t realize some high schools were that good to have so many students. Our high school only had two or three that year. Three. And that was awesome.

Jen’s awaking about disparity continued in college when she and a female friend of color from her hometown wanted to room together. The friend had received a scholarship to attend the university and had a preference for a particular dorm that was slightly more expensive than some of the other dorms on campus. Wanting to be with a friend, Jen decided to also live in the more expensive dorm. In describing the initial impressions from that dorm experience, Jen said:

In that dorm was the higher income kids because it was a bigger room. We were suitemates with a bunch of girls. All of them were from Beverly Hills, so we saw the other side. That was when people were walking around, the first day going door and door and introducing themselves. And then they were like, “Hey, you’re from this high school.” All the high schools were, like, Long Beach or Beverly Hills. More higher income areas. I was like, this isn’t diverse. I’m not used to being around all these white people, but I’m white. I was used to the white people from my hometown, but they were different from the white people at [college] because those ones actually came probably from more privilege.

In reflecting on both the town she came from and her college experience, Jen shared how she has come to understand relative privilege:

I remember school was always pretty good. But, I was white, and I knew that my family had more money than the families that didn’t—the kids of color. . . . So, I guess I always knew that I had a sense of privilege in that way. And then when I went to middle school, it was the same each way. And then when I went to high school was when all the other white kids came in, and they were the low-income white kids. That’s when I feel like I realized that I’m white, but that’s not the only reason why I have privilege. I also, my family has money . . . and so, then there became a level of me understanding my whiteness but then also understanding that I have some money.

Then, after coming to a large university and having experiences like the one in the dorm, Jen said:

But then I went to [the university], and I realized, “Actually, we don’t have that much money. . . .” It’s all relative, yeah. I’m white, but I don’t feel like I identify with these people. I had this weird reckoning. I would hang out more with my [hometown friend] who was Mexican and her friends. And she met all those people during this [college] summer program. And it was only for people of color, I think. So, I would hang out with that group. That’s where I met my fiancé.

The relationship that Jen had with her hometown friend was a pivotal one as a both a tether to her roots and also as an illumination of what was and was not accessible to each of them on campus. Jen told a story of both of applying for sororities and how different sororities were perceived to be available to each of them, mainly based on race:

[hometown roommate] wanted me to join the Latinx one with her. But I’m like, that would be weird. I don’t want to be the one white girl. So, I went to my version. I wasn’t that against my ethnicity I guess to where I would join the other one. I didn’t want to be that different. Strange.

While Jen joined a different sorority, she also stated that a majority of her friend group were primarily Latinx and that she did not feel like she “fit” into the large, predominantly white sorority.

Jen was able to name multiple examples of race she experienced as part of the sorority, but one felt particularly striking to her:

And then another strange thing that happened in my sorority. Because I was in my sorority, but then I would always hang out with a group of mostly Mexican, Central American people. And during my junior year, they gave out to juniors these superlatives.

How it works basically is someone who knows you well would put your superlative in. And someone that I was friends with, she gave me most likely to marry a Mexican or have Mexican babies . . . the people in the sorority, they kind of know that I'm not always with their higher income group or whatever. *Their* white group.

Jen carried these experiences with her as she entered into the classroom at a school that was primarily Latinx. She described how she felt showing up at her school:

I remember just feeling like, "This feels like I'm at home pretty much, just not in the desert. . . . This is a community that I do know about and I can actually help with more and I feel more comfortable with."

As we explored the manner in which Jen navigated this particular community as a white woman, she named that she has not had many conversations with students about the fact that she is white and that they are from a racialized community. She cited time (the school has 54-minute class periods) as the major barrier for her; yet she named that kids joked with her about her life, and she joked back as a way to build relationships with them:

One student will be like, "Miss, what did you eat for dinner last night?" And I had gone to a thing and they had free salad, so I had a salad. I was like, "A salad." That's not what I normally eat, but she was like, "That's because you're white." And they just laughed. It's more jokes.

When asked directly about her experiences in the TFA-led affinity spaces and race-based development, she spoke less specifically about her own personal development but rather about the broader experience as a whole:

I think it's interesting to hear people's experiences. Because even if I'm a white woman, there's another white woman in TFA, and we probably don't have the same experience . . . it's interesting just to learn. More like a sociology aspect. (Jen)

While Jen struggled to articulate exactly how she had been shaped by the professional development of TFA, she shared a multitude of examples where she critically analyzed a situation through a race-based lens. Jen shared examples of a former colleague speaking about “those people” and thinking, “Oh my God, this lady is being super racist, and I don't know if she even knows.”

Jen also shared her feelings about the educational landscape in Los Angeles and TFA's role in both the charter and district school spheres. She had some previous teaching experience in a highly structured charter school that informed her perspective on how both white-dominant culture and complacency can permeate the education system. She spoke about the tenuous relationship that each can have in the educational landscape and how both TFA and schools of education are on the hook for helping develop teachers who critically analyze their surroundings:

I feel like TFA should maybe train, not train, but have discussions with the corps members on, “Is this the best practice for your kid?” Because if you think about it, all these corps members that are going to all these crazy charter schools. . . . The ones that are very rigorous and they are structured. They are being taught mostly by their schools. TFA things are trying to teach them how to be a teacher too. But then they are already kind of learning that structure . . . so, maybe if the TFA things would more teach them on how to be critical of what you're being taught as a teacher, it might make them stay a

little bit longer because they might realize that there are small changes that they could make so that their kids are happier.

Jen was thoughtful of the broader landscape and what role she wanted to play as a white woman at her school site. She also named that her upbringing and continued engagement with people of color in her broader world had more of an impact on the way she understood whiteness than any formal programming with TFA. At this point in time, Jen described herself as comfortable in the space that she was in at her school and with her students:

I think because I'm so comfortable around my students. I don't want to say I don't see color because I do, and I think that that's problematic to say. But I do feel comfortable around them. I'm more solely thinking of myself on the same level of them, so not always thinking about my privilege. So that's something I need to remember, especially when it comes to mindfulness and stuff. Because I feel like that crowd in the U.S. is a lot of white people. A lot of white women. . . . I don't want to have that savior complex or whatever with that. That's something I'm always thinking about.

From an early age, Jen was passively aware of racial differences in her hometown, and while curious, she also accepted them as “normal.” College was formative in her racial identity awareness, and she brought that into her TFA experience. Jen did not describe her identity journey as significantly impacted by TFA, yet she was able to name many school-based moments when race was brought explicitly into the conversation. She was continuing to determine her place in her school and broader society.

Sarah

I came into teaching very interestingly ignorant, which I say “interesting” because I studied sociology as an undergrad. I studied race and gender in education, but I studied it as an academic. I didn’t study it on the ground. I wasn’t in these schools, living these realities at all. (Sarah)

Sarah, originally from the Southern United States, moved to Los Angeles to join an educationally focused service organization. Originally a psychology major in college, Sarah had always thought about possibly going into education, but it was not until after the loss of a patient at a hospital placement that she made the firm leap from psychology to education. At the time of our interview, she was in her second year of teaching at a public charter elementary school in East Los Angeles. Sarah grew up in a low-income family and articulated what it is was like to grow up with government assistance; however, Sarah was also aware that her experience as a white child in poverty was different than that of a child of color. Sarah described her upbringing as “black and white” in a number of different regards. She not only grew up in the white section of [her home city], but she also described thinking that she was raised to be liberal in many ways. At college, she sought out a more progressive community as she lived into her identity as a queer woman, and she welcomed a more progressive lifestyle upon moving to Los Angeles as well. When reflecting on her initial move to Los Angeles, she shared:

Los Angeles is huge. When me and my husband moved here, we were the only white people in this neighborhood. I don’t speak the language, and I don’t look like the people I’m living with in this building. That means something.

In her time before joining TFA, Sarah worked in East Los Angeles as part of another educationally focused national school-based service program. She described her time at the school as “crazy fulfilling” and unlike anything she had been exposed to before racially:

I’m from a predominately white school as a high school. College was pretty mixed, but I had never worked with Latino children before. I had never even imagined a place where there would only be Latino children learning because that was just literally not the reality of my socialization. You were either white, or you were Black. That was the reality in [her home city].

Sarah described working at the high school as a transformative experience that opened up her worldview to the educational experience of a racial and ethnic population that she had little exposure to prior to arriving in Los Angeles:

When I got to the school, I didn’t even consciously think about the race or the ethnic identity of my students because I was just like, “They’re students, everyone is a student.” I was very much, I don’t want to say completely colorblind, but as a teacher I was. Students are students, students need to be taught and mentored, and things like that. That’s how I’m going to go about doing this. But as I stayed with [the service organization] longer, I realized that, no, these students have a heritage, a culture, a history that is so different from my own. There was a struggle that they faced that I was never aware of that children face.

As she continued in her position as an educational service worker, Sarah stated that she began to struggle with building relationships with her students and the placement at the high

school overall, but she could not seem to understand why. She stated that she entered an internal reflection process:

Why is this hard? Why am I having a hard time with this placement? I slowly began to realize my students were trying to tell me things and express things that I wasn't quite listening to because I was coming from this almost colorblind thing. They were like, "Oh, my *tia* has to pick me up every day because of this and that." Even these words and this language, 'cause Spanish is not very popular in [her home city], so there were literal language and cultural things that I missed. I just wasn't even processing them. It wasn't until one of my students dropped out of the program and she eventually dropped out of high school that I was like, "Oh shit, there are many factors out here that involve culture and race and inequity that I just have chosen not to see." So, it was at that point that I was like, "I think teaching is something I really want to do and want to stick with because it's so much more than I thought it could ever be." There's so much more to teaching than just student and teacher.

These experiences prompted Sarah to apply for TFA and continue in education as she left the service organization. She specifically wanted to stay in Los Angeles and in a progressive space after speaking with friends who were doing the service organization in other parts of the country. She shared a specific example that sealed her decision:

We had done community outreach programs. We got special training of how to talk when the Trump election stuff happened. We got training on how to talk to our students about it. They were like, "Don't pretend like the election didn't happen. Use your sessions to talk to your kids about it." My friends in other [cities with the service program] were like,

“Oh my god, no, we’re not allowed to talk about any of that. . . .” I felt like I was being given tools to be more informed and more critical.

Sarah described joining TFA as a continuation of her journey towards self-understanding and racial identity development. She was explicit that in her first year of teaching in East Los Angeles, she was struggling to make sense of herself as a white woman. She spoke of grappling with the socialized thinking that she was raised with and the differences between the city she came from and the city she was now living in:

I think I could have easily been like, “Oh, it’s not my fault. I was socialized this way, so I shouldn’t be held responsible for the ignorant thoughts that I thought, right?” I think when I first started teaching at my school, which was predominantly Latino, I think I had some of those thoughts. When my principal would correct me on how to talk to a parent or how to pronounce a student’s name, I feel defensive. I’m like, “Oh, well, you know, I’m a good person, I’m trying my best.” She’d be like, “Chill, I’m helping you. I want you to know these things ‘cause you don’t know them because you’re not from the community.”

She continued speaking about how she wrestled with the real cognitive and emotional turmoil that came with being a newcomer to a community:

I think that in terms of first-year teaching, it was definitely a layer of still understanding the difference between Los Angeles and [her home city], but also understanding navigating my school site, which was predominantly Latino, and me being white. It shouldn’t have come from a place of shame or guilt ‘cause a lot of it did. I was like, “Oh,

I feel so shameful of my ignorance.” I was like that for a really long time. For a really long time, I felt sorry for myself. (Sarah)

As her first year of teaching with TFA unfolded, Sarah continued to unlearn some of the habits and tendencies that previously had been norms for her. Guilt was one of those tendencies, and she reflected on a thought process that ran often through her head:

Why do you feel guilty? Oh, I feel guilty because I can’t do anything about it, right? I think that being socialized white, a lot of it is being socialized to know that you have the power to do things, and that when you have the power, you should do it. . . . It’s totally the white savior narrative. I think that was my biggest unlearning of last year. My biggest unlearning was unlearning how to be a white savior even if that’s not what I meant. Even if that wasn’t my intent, that was my impact, right, for TFA language?

Through relationships that yielded direct conversation at her school site and in the broader TFA corps, Sarah learned that she was not going to be able to solve the root causes of poverty. She recalled being lovingly told by a coworker:

What you can do is when the student is feeling hungry, you can direct them to the cafeteria workers, who will get them the extra food and the extra snacks that they need. You can use this resource that already exists in this community for these children to get them what they want. And that’s not you doing it, that’s you being a connector to that resource.

This struck Sarah hard and shaped her way of seeing her role in the system. She described herself as someone who gives gifts as a way to show her love for others, but she reflected on gifts as a quick fix in the current situation she was in. She reflected more deeply about this and realized:

That's part of just my personality, but it's also part of my socialization: "I have x amount of money. I want to give you a thing because I have this money, and I want you to feel better, right, and boom, we're done. . . ." It's hard because it does come from a good place, obviously, but it just falls back into that white savior, quick fix narrative.

Sarah credited much of her development to the two programs that she was a part of, an educational service organization and TFA. She spoke about the social justice slant that both programs integrated in their practice:

I feel like with [the educational service organization], I definitely got the on-the-ground experience, and from TFA, I got the theoretical equity injustice piece. I think both of them are obviously equally important.

TFA was where race-based affinity spaces occurred, and Sarah reflected on her experience over time. The first white affinity spaces began at summer institute before Sarah began teaching, and she described the spaces as poorly facilitated and problematic:

Our white affinity space day-by-day was either a place for white people to cry about being white, or it was like white people calling each other out for problematic things. It was like the Thunderdome. It was insane. It didn't feel productive. It just felt like another echo box that wasn't working towards allyship at all. It was also really uncomfortable because there were only two affinity spaces at my institute. You were either white, or you were a person of color.

She continued speaking about what she perceived to be tenuous about the experience:

The fact that there was that Black and white divide, I think, also brought about tension because I had friends in the people of color group that were like, "This is so

unproductive. I'm hearing these narratives that aren't my narrative, and I appreciate them, but I have no space to talk about my narrative." Then once we had our own individual time, we had this whole group session where people raised their hand and talked about what they talked about in their affinity space. That was also really poorly facilitated. It was just not productive. (Sarah)

Sarah's reflection on the structure was relevant because the structure changed over the course of her first year in the corps to have multiple groups for the subgroups within the large moniker "people of color" and added in additional social identity affinity groups. She commented on this change:

[It] made DEI more meaningful, too, because for DEI you could be with all these different people and these different affinity spaces and feel like you could have productive conversations in DEI. We had people in our DEI sessions that were like, "Oh, I'm really glad you brought that up. In my affinity space, we talked about this and how this hurts me or impacts me." And another person would be like, "Oh, in my affinity space I'm in this one, this is what we talked about, and I understand your point." So, there was a lot more openness and willingness and acceptance of, like, there were many different affinity spaces to go to, and it's a good thing that we have them.

When speaking specifically about the white identity group, Sarah found it helpful and also wanted to be pushed further. She commented that the facilitation needed to be stronger and named items that she would like to see be included:

I felt like there could have been more critical conversations 'cause I feel like the white affinity space is where you really dig into whiteness, where you really dig into unpacking

the white saviorism and the white privilege you may or may not have ever realized existed as a cathartic experience. That way you can be a better teacher and a better ally and a better moral human being, instead of just like, we're going to read all these articles about whiteness, and after we're done reading them, you're going to feel better.

Sarah saw the white affinity spaces as critical spaces for development because white teachers need a place to learn about habits that may be impacting the manners by which they show up in schools as educators:

I think it's so crucial to be really intentional about what those white spaces are going to look like because they shouldn't be a space of comfort. I don't think we should have that be the same as a Black affinity space would be at all. I think it should be very critical and crucial and loving all at the same time, and I think that's just what's better for children, too. Ultimately, me learning that I was being a white savior to my children and not a mentor was more valuable than being told I was a white savior in an affinity space.

Teach for America in particular has helped Sarah to reflect on the manner in which she analyzed interactions with students and her broader surroundings. She named a concrete example related to this:

Even the other day, I was with a kiddo that I had never been with before, and I called him Alberto. He corrected me; he was like, "No, Miss, it's Alberto," with a rolled "r." My automatic response was of, "Okay, I get it," and then I stopped for a second, and I was like, "No, that's his name. His name is Alberto with a rolled r, it's not Alberto." It's not like, don't Anglicize his name. I got so defensive over him correcting me, and he's a kindergartner. It's like, "Whoa, let's step back and think about that for a second." I think

it is because of being socialized in a predominately white space and being, for better or for worse, told these things about whiteness. I don't want to say when you're wrong about something, but when you get corrected about someone else you're interacting with, it's just like a defensive thing, right? And Alberto, he doesn't think less of me. He's not like, "Oh, miss, I hate that white woman." That's not how he feels at all. He just wants me to say his name right.

When thinking about her overall growth as an educator now in her second year of teaching, Sarah noted:

It's also been very interesting because on this journey, I've definitely had moments as I mentioned before where I'm resistant to acknowledging my white privilege because why are you trying to make me feel guilty? I don't want to feel guilty. But it's also unlearning that recognizing race and ethnicity and SES [socioeconomic status] is not a guilt system, it's an equity system. With equity comes having awareness. You need awareness to have equity. I think for me, it's been knowing how to listen and how to talk and how to share and how to receive.

Sarah further acknowledged her growth in her understanding of whiteness and how whiteness as a construct situates into broader society. She stated:

If I did a before-and-after snapshot, I think before I definitely came in with a like, "I'm white, but that doesn't have to mean anything perspective." Yes, I'm white, but I'm the teacher, and we're all teachers, so we all should teach kids. Very colorblind, very explicitly colorblind mindset. But now the narrative is more of like, "I am white and have a very unique identity that can come from a place of empowerment for others and

shouldn't come from a place of guilt." I think before it was very colorblind, guilt-driven, woe is me, we're all the same. Now it's a very much by acknowledging your whiteness, you're always acknowledging inequity, therefore, you're working towards equity.

Sarah named her gratitude to TFA and the role it has played in her development even though she also had healthy critique to share about certain practices employed by the organization. She also explicitly named her desire to continue her racial identity formation.

Ending our conversation, she shared:

After I'm done with my TFA service, there is the almost nervousness of doing something else because just I have gotten such critical development in that area. Surely, the next job I have won't feel the same.

Wendy

I would love to be in a group of white people where we can just, yeah, we're white. Let's talk about the real stuff. We can also embrace and love who we are. We're not going to celebrate whiteness in a KKK-type way, but also this is who we are. We can still do the work we're doing and meet together and dive deeper into what does it mean. I haven't felt like I've been able to do that. (Wendy)

Wendy, a third-year teacher at the time of the interview at a small charter high school in Central Los Angeles, was a resource specialist teacher for a caseload of predominantly Latinx students with disabilities. During her first two years of teaching, Wendy taught at a large comprehensive district high school that was situated in a historically Black neighborhood in South Los Angeles. After her second year of teaching, Wendy was looking for a different experience and transitioned to her current school. Wendy came to education in a reluctant

manner. Originally from a historically conservative section of Southern California and from a “big Italian family” of educators, Wendy had thought about other career paths outside of education after college. However, in college Wendy knew others who were applying for TFA, and she “just applied to see,” still thinking that she was not headed into the field of education. Multiple other women in her family were educators, and Wendy shared that she was reluctant to follow in the family footsteps. However, this perspective shifted in her last semester of college when she took a sociology of education course:

We just talked a lot about the disparities within different schools, different school districts, the demographics, all of that. Through that course I really understood, oh my gosh. I had so many advantages because of my class, because my mom was a teacher, partly because of my race. I think more so it was being middle class. I went to schools that were fairly diverse, large Asian and large Mexican population and white. I always grew up with diversity around me. In some areas, it is majority white. Anyway, through this class, thinking about who was in my honors and AP classes, even though the school was pretty split racially, it was the white and Asian middle- and upper-class kids. Very, very, very few Mexican at all. I can say Mexican because everyone I grew up with was Mexican.

In reflecting on her experience in this class, Wendy named how the class initiated reflection on her personal education journey:

[The class] really opened up my eyes to understand why I have been given so many privileges, so many advantages because of just how I was born and the people I grew up around, my parents and my class, my race, my mom having the education. My mom

advocating for me to be in honors program in fifth grade. That really kind of just led this course for me. Honestly, college for me was very easy. I went to [X] University, which was not a prestigious university, but I had no difficulty there. I felt very prepared. I loved my classes. Of course, I worked really hard, but it wasn't a struggle. I was never on academic probation. I felt like the AP classes I had were very similar to the classes I had at university level.

It was those realizations that propelled Wendy to go forward with applying to TFA. In our session together, she reflected on this "new-found knowledge":

I think my guiding principal was with this new-found knowledge. I was to try and undo some of those things that have led to the cycles where some of my friends, even the poorer white kids, have still never graduated college. I went back and saw them. One was working at Home Depot. One was doing this and that. Not that those are horrible things, but they are not the things that are going to lead to these ideas of having more successful career or being able to do this and that. That's really what propelled me to Teach for America. I think it's kind of romanticized, joining it. I also knew because my mom was a teacher, my sister was a teacher, I wasn't going to save anyone's life. More so it was to go in and to try and be a teacher even though I was a white teacher who at least could undo some of those things or try to not fall into the pattern that perpetuates the class and racial divide. That was kind of my big push to join.

Wendy continued to say that it was more the social justice component over the classroom component of TFA that led her to confirm her offer from TFA. She viewed the transition from being a sociology major to working in a social justice organization to be a "very natural

transition” given that she spent most of her time in her major speaking about systems and inequity:

Once Wendy began the formal TFA programming in Los Angeles, she was immediately impressed by the focus on race by other white leaders around her. In particular, Wendy recalled hearing the executive director of TFA speak at summer institute:

One of the first things she named was, “Yes, I’m a white woman from an upper middle-class family.” I had never heard a white leader say that, and I was really impressed by that. I feel like that first day, that’s all that we talked about. Our upbringing, our race, class, gender, ethnicity, all of those things, all of it.

During her time at summer institute, Wendy realized that there were not many white people in the LA corps, and she responded positively to that reality:

I remember they were like, “We’re 80% people of color.” This is amazing. Actually, the more people I connected with were not white. Still to this day, my friends, none of them are white from Teach for America besides [name]. I think there was an elevation of voices of people of color or marginalized people or people who don’t usually, historically have power. I think being in that space, it was always like, yeah. Just very normal.

Looking back on it, it’s such an amazing experience to have had, been surrounded by people of color. Listen to their perspective first and having that.

When asked how this focus on elevating voices from marginalized groups felt to her, Wendy responded in the affirmative. She linked her processing of that focus back to the work that she had done in her sociology major in college:

I had done a lot of unpacking and am really grateful for the mentors I had, even my friends of color who helped me through. I kind of came to TFA already doing a lot of that work. Obviously, was still more to go. I never felt shut down. I think I had kind of already gone through those moments of shame and regret, apologizing for my ancestors. I had kind of gone through that already.

Wendy, however, expressed multiple points of frustration with different affinity groups over the course of her time in TFA. She expressed that she felt continually caught between wanting to have deep conversations and being frustrated when the conversations would stay at a surface level. At one point in her critique, she equated white affinity spaces as feeling like a “funeral”:

No wonder why people don’t want to join these groups. They are not willing if this is the vibe. I think it’s a Catch-22. That white affinity space, that was so needed. You also need a space to kind of say some fucked-up stuff and not have other people of color there to judge you and characterize it.

In her current position, Wendy shared that she has been thinking at length about the intersection of advocacy and race, as she is a white special educator. When speaking about a specific student situation at school, Wendy was replaying a conversation that she had with the school psychologist in which they were analyzing the role that each would play with the family in an upcoming meeting. She was considering multiple present dynamics: (a) the role of language, as the family is Spanish-speaking and Wendy is English-speaking; (b) the role of race, as the family is Latinx and Wendy is white; and (c) the broad power dynamics of any school-based meeting. About this, Wendy shared:

I think at a certain point just being aware of those power dynamics. Sometimes, my privilege allows me to not think about it. I have to remind myself. I remember last year one of my colleagues, she is a Mexican woman. She's very outspoken too. She would say, "Wendy, you and I could say the same thing, but they'll listen more to you." We would have conversations like, "What does this mean?" I think part of it was my position, as special ed, I can kind of wield more of a power. We have to do this.

As Wendy continued, she shared a message that had been given to her regarding the use of her white privilege:

"Wendy, you gotta use your white privilege to help our community." She actually was . . . I'm still in contact with her because she is now an AP at another school. She really encouraged me. "Wendy, use your whiteness, use it. You have the vocabulary. You have the credibility. Use your whiteness for good. Keep speaking up for our Spanish kids. Keep speaking up for our kids of color." I had never really had somebody speak like that, speak like that to me before.

While cautious in considering her positionality in each situation, Wendy shared that she had done her best not to "step on toes" and to use the power that society has ascribed to her in ways that benefit students. Reflecting on why she felt comfortable taking on this type of advocacy role, she said:

I'll also say that growing up I always felt very empowered to be myself. My parents always encouraged me no matter what. No matter being a female, I could do anything.

Wendy was open and vulnerable as she shared the struggles that she was having at her current site, particularly when it comes to her role within the school structure and

administration. She has now experienced working with multiple principals across two different types of high schools, and it has led her to contemplate the dynamics of leadership and how to navigate conflict:

What does good leadership look like? What does good white leadership look like in a space that's majority people of color? I think that's something that should be focused on in an admin programs for sure.

Wendy did not have an answer to this question, yet she did share that she is committed to continuing to figure out her definition of good leadership and how she can be a white leader who is not working "for" but working "with" the communities she serves.

Anna

I always feel like, "Is there more? What else can we do? How else can I bridge these gaps that I feel in the space that I take up in my classroom compared to my students and their families." I feel like I always come back to, "If I'm not here, knowing my school and my classroom, it's going to be a long-term sub." That's not good for kids. (Anna)

Anna was in her second year of teaching at a public district elementary school in Central Los Angeles. Anna taught in a self-contained program for students of varying ages and disabilities. She also said that every student in her classroom was classified as an English Language Learner and all were either Latinx or Bengali. She originally realized that she wanted to teach later in college. Coming from a college on the East Coast, she described the licensing as an "expensive and rigorous route into education." Ultimately, she was able to enter education by adding on an additional master's degree after her undergraduate studies, yet she came to that choice through a public health lens. Anna started college with a public health focus, and one of

her class outreach assignments was to teach sex education to ninth graders at a local high school. She described that experience in the following way:

The first day I was in the classroom, I was like, “Just kidding, public health is cool, teaching’s where it’s at.” That really lit my fire for teaching because I was like, “Oh my god, these kids are ninth graders, and they don’t know how their basic biology works.”

Like the questions that they had, I was like, “I’m glad you’re asking this, but oh no. Who has failed you?” Like, “What happened?”

Originally from Massachusetts, Anna grew up in a community that was affluent, and its school system was strong in public education. She came to Los Angeles to join TFA. She described Los Angeles as the right fit for her and her partner of seven years due to the intersections of both of their career fields. When describing the move, she shared:

I also really wanted to find a place where I could put in more than two years. That was a really important piece for me. I had a couple of friends who did TFA, one of my cousins did it, and one of the things they really pushed me to figure out with placement was find a place that even if you don’t stay you can envision yourself staying. Don’t come in to it with one foot out the door. So, I felt like LA could be that place for me.

In reflecting on her journey into education and the major moments that brought her to TFA, she reflected on her pre-practicum assignment in college, where she spent one full day every week in an elementary school in a special education-inclusive environment. Anna described the situation as being able to co-teach in the room one day a week and it being “the best.” It was the single experience that led her to decide to pursue a pathway in special education. In reflecting on that first teaching assignment, she had continued realizations about

how this teaching experience in a historically marginalized community was distinctly different than her own educational experience. Others in her education program were placed for pre-practicum into a suburb that resembled the one where she grew up. In discussion about the different placements with her classmates, she reflected:

They would be like, “Oh yeah, we went to Walden Pond with our iPads and took pictures of leaves, and then this app told us about the trees, and then we did all this stuff,” and I would come back, and I would be like, “Oh, like today we realized we didn’t have any pencils. The whole school is out of pencils.” It was February. Our kids are writing in crayon for the rest of the year.

It was experiences such as these that Anna described as choices for her. She chose to do her pre-practicum in a large public school district that served students from racialized communities, and she chose to join TFA also knowing that she would teach in a similar school. Anna described the reflective thought process about her positionality that she entered into then and how it has continued with a mentor teacher at her current school:

Is going into these communities the best thing for me to do? Should I leave space for educators of color, for especially men of color? Thinking about all this . . . definitely elementary school, but I think as they get older too, is this a place for me? Am I doing the right thing? I still go back and forth on it, but she really said, “Think about what would happen if you didn’t pursue this. Think about the fact that we know, we’re not exaggerating, like the data is telling us, the least experienced, highest turnovers, the most jaded and disenfranchised folks are the ones in these classrooms.”

She continued:

We're not in space historically right now where there's a huge sea of educators of color who are being turned away from these classrooms. We're still building that. We're still building that base of excited young people who look like the kids they teach to get in the classroom. She's like, "If you start realizing that, maybe times are changing." I can step away from this, and the person that's gonna take my place is a better fit, leave, but if you think about, "If I step away, who will take my place?" and still kinda looks like it looks now, maybe it's okay to stay. (Anna)

Anna credited development of this type of reflective process to the work that she did in academic spaces, particularly in college. She stated:

I learned really early on I feel, like in my adult identity development, like what it meant to be white, what it means to be a white woman, what it means to be a white woman who was learning about equity and injustice.

Coming into TFA, Anna had already done some individual work on her white racial identity development, so the TFA race-based programming did not feel like a "fit" for her. When speaking about the summer institute programming, she noted:

Institute felt like a lot of handholding, like people weren't there yet, and I was like, "That's fine, we're all on our journeys," but I was like, "I wish we could have, like, differentiated affinity spaces for the folks who like maybe had already had their intro and, like, could do more, like, narrowed-in work versus the folks who were still coming to grips with the fact that white is race or that, like, because you're a woman doesn't automatically mean you have the experiences as all other women," or you can say like,

“Well, I’m a woman, so I’m oppressed like a Black woman.” Like, there’s some folks who were still working through that harmful mindset.

Anna was hoping for an experience that was focused on a more advanced process of white racial identity development rather than an entry-level process. In Anna’s experience of TFA programming, she also felt that there was too much of a focus on leadership development that was disconnected from the race-based work:

I feel it could have been a lot more helpful to continue to do, like, okay, like build off institute. We did this, like, me identity. Like, what does that look like, continue to build off that, just like in the classroom as a human, as a teacher, as personal positional power instead of jumping to me what felt like six steps ahead to be like, “Be a leader at your school and in your community,” and I’m like, “I’m still trying to figure out what that looks like as white woman in a community of, like, folks of color,” but we didn’t really touch on that. It was just like, “You need to be a leader in your community,” but I felt like it didn’t . . . the nuance for me as a white woman who’s not native to LA in any way was missing.

While Anna did not name the TFA programming as a key influencer in her development, she also was able to state the complexity of her past and current focus on issues of race and social justice. When asked directly about what has been most influential on her racial development, she said:

I feel like for me, like, it’s mostly been either, like, just like micro-interactions, like, in the classroom. And also, just living in the space that we’re existing in; just navigating the political social, like socio-political landscape that we have right now and developing for

myself, “What does it mean for me to be a white teacher?” And the president that we have right now and the state of Los Angeles that we have right now and what does that just mean for me personally? But it’s kind of been something that I do. . . . I feel like not separate from TFA but just like not through TFA or because of TFA.

She continued to speak about her multifaceted relationship with TFA:

That also might be because I kind of came into TFA already having some of that and also knowing why I, like, the reasons in which I was doing TFA and, like, how like who I am shows up in the classroom because I’d been in the classroom, and knowing like TFA is a good place for me to get into a classroom because even though I’m a white woman, I have these different thoughts and feelings and understandings of that. (Anna)

Each of these areas of learning, college and classroom experience, led Anna to see teaching as a position that has power and authority. About this, she explained:

To me, teaching is a radical political act. Being a teacher in front of a classroom of kids is so much power. Like, we are shaping the next generation of thinkers, creators, everything hand-in-hand with families. Like, we need to be mindful of what that looks like, how that comes out.

For Anna, the role that she was in feels “serious” to her, and she was able to see the impact that she was currently having with students as well as possible avenues for larger-scale impact in the future. When speaking about her current classroom in relation to her larger aspiration, she said:

I’m just excited to know that, like, at least I believe that change is possible, we can do things that impact not just, like, the eight kids in my class, but there are things that I can

be doing to impact our school, to impact our district, impact our education system as a whole, and that movement to me is really exciting. I knew I wanted to go into teaching but also knew that given who I am and, like, all my things, like I know that I'm going, I already do, but I'm going to grow frustrated feeling like there's only eight kids in my class. . . . It's so small. At the same time . . . it's like one human life, that's huge, but feeling that, like, it not enough given what can be doing at the systems level, especially someone who, like, studied the systems level, and so that's why, like, studying and being able to get my master's in policy and administration. . . . I'm excited that I have the opportunities to, like, what I'm hoping to be part of a turning point for our education, for our teachers, for our kids, for our schools. So that's really exciting for me. It's like terrifying, but it's exciting.

Anna articulated a plethora of defining moments for her throughout her college and master's program experience. Given the robust nature of those experiences, she has been disappointed with the TFA DEI work and felt that it "is not enough." That said, her classroom experiences gave her opportunity to develop, as she was marrying her beliefs with her daily craft. She did not name TFA as a formative developer along her white identity journey but acknowledged that her ability to be in a classroom was not separate from TFA. Her complicated relationship with TFA was not only emblematic of so many of the narratives before Anna but also an expression of how identity development is complex.

Emergent Themes

One of the aims of this study was to determine the ways in which, if any, race-based programming played a role in the racial identity development of novice white female teachers who were teaching in racialized communities and how that development evolved over time. Of particular concern was how these eight novice teachers—Kara, Janet, Emma, Anna, Monica, Jen, Wendy, and Sarah—defined and possibly changed their definition of whiteness and the ways in which whiteness showed up in their school-based practice. Through the voices of these participants, eight unique narratives emerged, with their insights held at the forefront of the discussion by including the salient points raised during the narrative sessions. The novice white teachers in this study all had their own salient moments; however, there were three emergent themes that permeated the narratives. Those three themes included relationships matter, a desire for something different, and intersecting whiteness with power. Each theme is explained below.

Relationships Matter

A major theme that came through each of the eight critical narratives is that relationships matter. Relationships here focused on three specific areas: relationships with students, relationships in shared spaces, and relationships with TFA colleagues.

Every one of the participants spoke to the fact that they believed that building relationships with their students was essential. They all recognized that it took time for the relationships to germinate with their students. Many of the participants spoke of their awareness that building a relationship with their students may take additional time given the hierarchical nature of a white teacher being in power over students from a racialized community. The challenges with initial relationship building took multiple forms. Emma, for example, spoke

about the ways in which her high school students assumed stereotypes at the start of her time with them. She spoke openly about the ways in which her students teased her and ascribed certain stereotypes about white individuals to her. As read in her narrative, she described some of the names as “hurtful” in her first year of teaching. Now that she was teaching the majority of the same students again for a second year, she said:

And this year, it would shock me if any of my students had said anything about that. And so, I mean, it just speaks numbers on what relationships . . . the importance of having good relationships with your students. (Emma)

Similarly, Janet also spoke about the fact that there was a specific group of high school students who were “mean” to her in the first semester, but that changed with her continuing to “show up”:

Thinking about my resource kids, and this still, this is going to give me goosebumps or make me cry or something. But it was before Christmas break, and I remember one student was, “I like my assignments, I thank you. You were actually an okay teacher.” I was like, “What are you talking about, you weirdo, I’m going to see you in three weeks.” He said, “No, this is the time of year all of our teachers quit.” I was like, “No. I’m going to be back. I’ll see you in a few weeks.” He says, “Yeah, yeah. I know. You’ll see us in a few weeks, whatever.” Then when I did come back, he saw me, and he just started crying. He was like, “You came back.” I was like, “Yeah I came back. I told you I’d be here.” After that, I don’t know. The whole next semester, the entire environment changed in my classroom. I don’t know if they had just built that trust, and they saw I wasn’t leaving.

Janet contrasted this with her own personal experience in education:

That meant something to them. I never had that issue in my education of teachers quitting. I never had teachers quit and then get a sub or whatever. Apparently, this is what they went through. From their experience, they didn't have consistent teachers, so to me, I was just doing my job. That's what you do: You show up every day. But to them, that meant something.

Both Emma and Janet spoke about moments in which they confronted negative assumptions about white people held by their students. They each spoke about how they were hurt by those assumptions and how prior to teaching, they were unaware of struggles, such as with teacher retention, that occur in historically marginalized communities. Once Emma and Janet discovered these struggles, they felt a responsibility to push against the previous realities of their students and to be present. That presence was a deliberate action that built relationships over time.

Participants spoke to the fact that their students were alert to both the intentional gestures made to build relationships and how the participants responded to cues from students. Sarah shared that her students confronted her in her first-year teaching and asked her to adjust her behavior:

“Miss, we don't know anything about you. Why haven't you told us anything about you?” In my mind, I was like, “Oh my god, I can't tell you anything about me 'cause I'm white and you're not, and we're different, and that's not appropriate. It's all about you.”

Each of the participants responded to this proverbial call from their students, and some responded initially through being superficially responsive in their actions towards students. Anna

shared one small example of being responsive on a multicultural level: “I always buy the multicultural crayons so they have a box of different skin color choices, and we have the multicultural construction paper.”

However, the true relationship building emerged through ongoing dialogue and a mutual interest in the exchange of culture and ideas. Sarah shared her approach to this dialectical relationship:

I from this very unique place. This is my family life. I grew up poor, “poor white” kind of narrative, and they were like, “Ohhhh.” Once I, we started exchanging our differences instead of stating them, that’s when things started to feel a lot different. They were like, “Oh my god, that’s so cool. Can you show us pictures?” I would show them pictures of my house and New Orleans and Mardi Gras, and they’d be like, “Oh my god, that’s just like this thing. Let me show you this thing, Miss.” Eventually it became a conversation and not just, “I’m the white teacher at school, and I need to only talk about Latino culture to be in relationship with my kids.”

Anna added that a couple months into school she realized that having the crayons was not enough because there was no engagement with what those crayons or paper meant. She, too, adjusted her approach and now describes her classroom’s engagement with the materials in the following way:

I feel like I just fall back to options and choices with conversation. It’s like, “Well, you have the construction paper to pick from for your self-portrait. You get to choose. Be empowered in your choice,” and it’s a lot of that, like, “Tell me why. Why did you choose that color? Why did you choose that crayon?” A lot of the just like empathetic

curiosity, just like inviting them to think, “Well, why did I?” Even if right now it doesn’t click, it might start.

Emma also opened up a dialogue with her students, and now, she perceives them to feel mutual care for each other:

Now that I know them and they know me, like, we love each other. Whenever there is a moment where we get to celebrate Hispanic authors or people who identify as, like, Mexican authors or we’re celebrating holidays, or like they’re inviting me to their quinceaneras, things like that, where we get to have that conversation. I’m aware that I’m white. They know that I know that I’m white, and so it’s not something that has to be discussed anymore.

Emma and her students cultivated a trusting relationship such that her students were including her in the important moments of their lives. Emma was continually aware that she is white, and she had previous discussions of race before with her students. It was that previous dialogue that has opened the door for a deeper relationship between teacher and students, and it is a testimony to the possibility of relationship when challenging topics, such as race, are not ignored.

Relationships with those in the shared space: Facilitator and peers. Both the structure and the content of shared, race-based spaces, namely the DEI sessions offered by TFA, came up from multiple participants during the collection of the narratives. One notable comment about the structure came from Monica:

Because we really didn’t meet enough to even know each other well, and I think also it’d be cool to have a space where you feel like you could challenge other people and their thinking and it would be received well.

While this comment is relevant and helpful feedback on structure, the underlying message in the comment is also a commentary on relationship and the desire for a relationship with others who are also in active investigation of their personal identity. About this, Monica also shared the following suggestion:

So, I think definitely, even when you think about programming in TFA, storytelling can be a form of professional development. And I think having conversations. . . . I think there were some beneficial TFA conversations, but I think what's key in that is having someone that's leading it.

She further shared that the quality of the facilitator matters in any space where a group is speaking about race. When asked about what she needs from a facilitator, Monica responded by saying:

A facilitator that is on point and really knows what they're talking about, the right questions to ask, when to interject and when to not, and knows how to facilitate because I think that plays a huge role in it too. I've seen people check out really quickly when race conversations start and certain things aren't called out or brought up to begin with.

Sarah also spoke about the need for strong facilitation:

I think for starters maybe not a professional but a well-seasoned facilitator, a facilitator that has lots of personal, academic, and professional knowledge on unpacking whiteness, first and foremost. And two, 'cause I think for me I didn't exactly know what it meant to unpack whiteness in my original affinity space.

Janet summarized well when she stated, "Inevitably, this is going to be uncomfortable when we're all being so vulnerable." Race is a sensitive topic, and those who have come to do

work on their own personal identity are putting themselves into a space of possible vulnerability. Many of the participants also spoke about the fact that they have attempted to have conversations about race with students to varying degrees of success. Facilitators can be thought of as models for classroom teachers. The manners in which they facilitate conversational lines about sensitive topics can be looked to as models for educational practice. Thus, the manner in which the space is created and how the space is facilitated matters.

Relationships with TFA colleagues. There was broad consensus among participants that friendships, both cross racial and with white friends, were a major source of development for their own understanding of their white racial identity. There was not consensus, however, on whether or not those crucial friendships were with other TFA corps members. When speaking about her peers, particularly TFA peers, Monica viewed them as a major pillar of support:

Relationship. I mean, like you went through the fire with me. The people who really have been there. I've experienced life with or who have told me about their life and been real, and I've seen that. I think the people that I keep around me are people who are able to show their true selves in good and bad. And I think when you know that someone is willing to be self-reflective enough and be honest enough to talk about the bad in themselves, you know they're a human being. They're real.

As was mentioned in her narrative, Janet also credited her TFA peer group as one of the key levers for her to process the election of 2016 and the subsequent impact that the election of Donald Trump had on students and communities of color in Los Angeles. As expressed in her narrative, the 2016 election was a key moment of her development and understanding of her

whiteness in a racialized school community. When speaking about her loved ones in her home state in the Midwest in contrast to her peer group in Los Angeles, Janet noted:

They didn't really quite understand because actually my boyfriend, the smartest guy I know, college degree and all, that he had no idea how ICE [Immigration Customs Enforcement] works. I was like, "What do you mean?" He's like, "What do you mean ICE is coming? It's hailing in Los Angeles?" I was like, "No, what are you talking about? Are you trying to be funny?" He's like, "No." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "I don't know what you're talking about." I couldn't really rely on my friends back here. It was really important in TFA and with my co-teachers, which were . . . also TFA. We talked about it in our classes at [credentialing university]. I don't remember what classes I was in, but I do remember it coming up. I do remember getting a university-wide email from [her credentialing university] of, "It was a scary time, if you need resources, or whatever." I liked that a lot. I liked that as a university they were aware enough that this was going to affect people, affect their students. That they took that initiative to say, "If you need anything or whatever, let us know." That meant a lot to me. Even though again, I wasn't feeling as affected by this election as others.

Wendy brought forth examples on the same theme as she spoke about first finding friends in the TFA corps at summer institute. She shared that she did not connect on a relational level with many of the other white corps members, in particular the women. When prompted to reflect on why that was the case, she cited a specific incident with one white woman in a DEI session at summer institute. Wendy recalled this other white woman struggling to speak about race and in fact "feeling very attacked." Wendy spoke directly to her about her reaction:

I remember trying to coach her. This is not about you, the individual, but about the structure. She was like, “Yeah, but it feels like everyone is coming after me.” We had this really long conversation about it.

Wendy remembered communicating, “I understand what you’re going through because I’ve been there,” but the desire for dialogue was not yet present on the part of the other corps member. However, Wendy did say she connected with one white man, who she stills remains in close contact with today. When prompted about the inner workings of that dynamic and why that relationship felt different, Wendy first noted that he was also a sociology major and that because of this shared background and language, they had a lot in common.

We would just talk about it: What does it mean to be white in these spaces? He was someone who would be like, “White people are the worst.” I’m like, “I know, right?” I think it was also helpful to have someone who wanted to engage at a deeper level.

The Privilege to be Different

In the narrative sessions, the majority of the participants agreed that having white affinity spaces and/or a space for white racial identity development to occur was important for novice white educators who are teaching in racialized communities of color. However, over half of the participants felt that the current programming was not a fit for their specific needs during the time they experienced it. Multiple participants commented on the content of what was being presented and how it felt misaligned to where they viewed themselves in their own racial identity journey. In particular, there were multiple comments about other participants in the group who were just entering the white racial identity journey and how the content of the spaces felt geared towards that group of people. For example, Monica noted:

We didn't really do anything or talk about anything that I felt changed me forever. I felt like, maybe people are hearing this for the first time, and this is good for them and their development, but it was nothing that I haven't already heard within [the TFA pre-work pilot] or within the conversations that I had had with people, in things I had read or processed. So, I felt like this is definitely something that needs to happen right now or a conversation that needs to be had. But it didn't feel beneficial for me or my growth.

Wendy spoke to the fact that she would "ditch" the race-based programming sessions during TFA professional development days in her first year out of self-protection. A close white male friend was attending and relaying to Wendy how the group was unfolding. She recalled thinking:

That's why I can't go. No shame to them because if this is their first time talking white supremacy, I get it. I've totally been there. I've totally been the one who's like what, this and that. Not realizing that's totally racist.

In reflection, Wendy believed that it was her responsibility to be in a pattern of disruption of whiteness as a socially constructed idea; however, at the time she was not able to participate in the emotional labor of growth for others and continued to stay safe for herself. Anna also exemplified this point as she stated that she also was not ready at first to take on the level of conversation that was needed in her first year.

I feel like a lot of us that are first years also are like, "I'm not ready." Like, "I'm not the right person." Like, "Let our second years figure that out. Let me figure out where the bathroom is."

The broad desire for something different than the structure and content provided by TFA was evident in the examples provided by the participants. This also speaks to the

privilege that is held by white individuals in the way that they feel agency to poke holes in the current program offerings and want it customized to fit their unique desires. When participants were sharing critiques of the DEI programming, each was making suggestions as to what would have been helpful to their personal pathway and racial identity journey. There was almost no emphasis placed on being a learner and/or contributor in the space to the benefit of the larger group. This more individual-centered focus can be viewed as an expression of white privilege and a deflection of responsibility to contribute to the development of the white community. Further, as a participant in a space where the stated purpose is to investigate whiteness and white identity development, participants were confronting white privilege. McIntosh (1989) has noted that when one is considering privilege, or loss of privilege, deflection or other actualizations of characteristics in the pseudo-independence stage may occur. As this occurs, educators can feel stuck and unsure of how to process these new learnings, leading them to feel guilt, shame, or embarrassment in their work with other, including those in the space and/or their students.

I would be remiss if I did not state that multiple participants found value in the DEI process while also offering critique. However, on the whole there was significant air time spent in the narrative sessions devoted to the manners in which DEI content, structure, and design could be altered.

Intersecting whiteness with Power

In many ways, each of the aforementioned themes lead to this theme because as Sarah shared in her narrative session:

We were talking about in America there is a very real racial hierarchy, and its white people at the top, and we go down from there. We were saying it's hard because even though we have a hierarchy, and even though it affects everyone, even if you aren't white, you still benefit from some parts of the hierarchy. We were saying how we have Asian friends who are like, "We would never date a Black person." There's definitely benefits of the hierarchy for some but not all. That's why it's really hard to dismantle that.

The majority of the participants were able to name that their whiteness gave them power in the classroom and then were able to articulate the different ways by which they analyzed that power. In particular, Sarah spoke about growing up low income and how she believed that she was able to identify with some of the experiences of her students, such as being on government assistance programs. As she spoke with her students about the commonalities of their experiences, she realized that her white-skinned privilege resulted in a fundamentally different experience with the same assistance program.

I think for my experience, we had social workers that would come to the house, and I got therapy outside, I got free meals. There were monetary resources available to me in my community that kind of cushioned what that felt like. When I talk to my students and when I talk to their families, and because of just the injustices in East LA, they don't have that. I have parents who are like, "I'm trying to get my kid outside counseling services, but regional center said it'll take three months and that I have to bring them after school, and I don't have a car, and I can't do that." There's these different structures that were in place for me, that I would argue was because I came from a predominantly

white neighborhood, that was granted to me as opposed to my students who come from arguably the same financial situation but a different ethnic neighborhood. (Sarah)

Sarah was aware that whiteness provided her advantages in her childhood experience, and given her awareness of those systems, she was able to recognize the difference in the current experience of her students.

In their reflections, both Anna and Kara spoke about the power that they held being in front of a classroom full of students from racialized communities. Both of these participants had previous experience teaching in racialized communities prior to joining TFA, and thus they had a longer trajectory to understand how to situate themselves into the societal white supremacist system and how they may perpetuate or fight against it in the classroom. Each of them named specific ways in which they were actively transforming their classroom practice based on their transforming consciousness. Anna expressed:

I would love [race-based programming] to be in teacher prep everywhere all the time, always because I feel like, I mean we see, and it's like worst cases in viral videos of teachers who are bringing themselves to the classroom in really harmful ways. To me, teaching is a radical political act. Being a teacher in front of a classroom of kids is so much power. Like, we are shaping the next generation of thinkers, creators, everything, hand-in-hand with families, like we need to be mindful of what that looks like, how that comes out.

When providing specific examples about the ways in which her classroom practice is changing, Anna stated:

Thinking about classroom management and behavior management, like that's a really white thing. That's a really white, middle-class pedagogy in a lot of cases, and I feel like I only knew that in part because of the social justice class in education that I took and in my sociology courses, and really thinking through, and I wrestle with this sometimes, but you know, I'm semi-lax about raising hands.

Granted I only have eight kids, but knowing that, like, that is a very like white, middle-class thing, the one at a time, the waiting your turn, the not chiming in you know? Like, that's what respect looks like to me, but knowing that in some of our communities, it's respectful to like show that you're listening like orally, like with a response. There's so much wrapped up in even like something we take so for granted as raising hands. I feel like TFA really hammers classroom management home, but I really think a lot about like that to me is a space where there might be a blind spot, like within TFA and [the credentialing university], like are we perpetuating like a very white, middle-class dominant pedagogy on teachers who teach kids of color? What do more multicultural justice and equity-oriented measurements look like?

In a similar vein, Kara stated:

I don't want to enforce any kind of white supremacist ideals because a lot of children of color and people of color are kind of taught that maybe that's how it should be, and so it's like, I don't want to confirm that perspective.

When providing specific details about the ways in which her classroom practice is changing, Kara focused on how she approaches the white-centric nature of the curriculum.

I think in education [white male leadership] happens a lot because our curriculums are written that way. We do highlight stories of white men and more recently white women and tend to forget the narratives of other people. And our society actually forms us into that kind of thinking people from just what we see in the media and all around us.

Reflecting on how she integrated the curriculum into practice, Kara shared:

Maybe it was that partly and just not having fear of going off topic. I did socio-emotional learning days. I taught in East LA, so I centered it around Latinos, the Latinx community, and what it really means to be Latinx though I couldn't tell them obviously, but I would show them things. Like for example, we watched the movie *Walkout*, which is one of the most iconic moments in LA education history. And told them, "This is your community, this is what your community did." And I did these things, and I had them learn about their disabilities and tell them or ask them to reflect on themselves like, "Why does this make you any less than anyone else? Because it doesn't. You just think differently." And advocating for their IEPs. I had a caseload of 11 kids, and I ended up mainstreaming five of them, and it was one subject, you know? I was told I was the first special education teacher to ever do that, ever at that school. Yeah. That's what I did. I just made sure to have social justice the primary lens through which I operated.

A primary trend through the narratives was that the participants recognized that white dominance is pervasive in society and has infiltrated not only education but also other systems that intersect with education such as governmental assistance. The participants recognized and could name that their whiteness was the ultimate cradle of power and that it was their responsibility to act in ways that disrupt that hegemony.

Summary of Themes

The narratives of the eight novice white female educators provide a glimpse of the ways in which their racial identity evolved in their initial years teaching. Further, these narratives provided insight into the ways in which white female educators describe the impact that their whiteness has had on their teaching and their relationships with students from racialized communities. The aforementioned impact has been influenced in different ways by the race-based programming conducted by TFA.

Several important themes can be gleaned from the interviews with participants for this study. These themes include: (a) relationships, with sub-themes of relationships with students, relationships with those in the shared space, and relationships with TFA colleagues; (b) the privilege to be different, specifically an adjustment to the content or format of the race-based programming; and (c) intersection with power, specifically the manner in which the characteristics of whiteness intersect to create or reify dominance in the broader world. In the following chapter, an analysis of the data is presented in ways that respond to the central research questions that guided this study. Conclusions and recommendations identify actions that can foster the white identity journey for novice white female educators who find themselves teaching in racialized communities different from their own backgrounds.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The teaching force in the United States is predominantly white, which is in stark contrast to the growing number of students of color in schools (Philip & Benin, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Scholars have long questioned the capacity of white teachers to engage with the issues of students of color, and scholars have consistently shown that there is a negative social and academic impact on students when white teachers employ racializing attitudes and practices on students of color (Darder, 2012; Emdin, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In his work, which focused specifically on white identity development for educators, Howard (2004) articulated that white dominance will play out in the classroom because teachers are not immune to the fact that the white racial group is favored over others. Howard (2004) and Michael (2018) insisted that meaningful development can occur for white educators if they engage in a sustained and ongoing process to investigate their white skin privilege and the system of dominance that is afforded to them as a resultant factor.

Through the theoretical lenses of critical race theory and critical feminist theory, alongside the body of literature in critical whiteness studies, I explored the ways in which the racial identity of novice white female educators evolved during their first three years teaching through the storytelling of eight educators currently working in low-income communities of color across Los Angeles. My desire was to understand how these educators self-described the process, the major influencers on their own racial identity development, and in what ways that evolution was informed by their participating in race-based programming as a part of the Teach for America (TFA) Los Angeles corps.

Through the use of one-on-one narrative inquiry sessions, I was able to gather a wealth of qualitative data, which I share in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I provide an analysis of the findings, consider their implications, and make recommendations based on the research. Again, it should be noted that the intent of this study was not to critique the content or the format of the TFA's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programming. Rather, this study's intent was to gather the stories of the impact of that programming, situated among other life experiences, for women who had participated in various versions of TFA DEI programming. The eight educators who participated in this study openly shared their personal stories of being novice white female educators in schools and classrooms that were vastly different from their own racial identity. What follows is an analysis of the themes that emerged in this study, which are examined through the lenses of critical race theory and critical feminist theory. Critical race theory is characterized by multiple themes or elements, yet one that is focused upon here is the way that racism is a central and "normal" part of U.S. society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006), as well as the ways that critical race theory challenges dominant claims of race neutrality, equal opportunity, objectivity and color blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Critical feminist theory can also evoke multiple theories and meanings, yet the ways in which power is tied to gender relations is also central to the analysis. This study asserted that the stories of women are unique and matter as a key point of analysis, given the prevalence of white female educators in the broader education landscape (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Undergirding both theories is the body of scholarship surrounding white consciousness development, commonly referred to as critical whiteness studies; this scholarship intersects with Janet Helm's (1984) theory of white

identity development. The eight participants varied in their own personal progress across Helms's (1990) stages of white identity development and the major influencers upon that development; together, they serve to offer insight on the evolution for the participants as a group.

Race Consciousness Building

Upon entering the TFA program, each of the participants had considered race, in particular their whiteness, as a relevant factor to their identity. Multiple participants spoke of the places in which they grew up and how that was a first introduction to race in some way. Jen spoke about the school system in her hometown, noting "there was something about the way the town was set up" and how her parents sent her to the "nicer school" on the whiter side of town. Janet added on the angle of class when she spoke about her "very white, upper class, suburban" hometown. She spoke about the fact that her family did not have the same class access as others at her school and how she "was white, but was not one of those wealthy white people."

A lack of racial diversity yield stratification within a homogenous group, prompting Janet to ponder the ways in which white people were different, while also accepting that their experience was normal. As Delgado and Stefancic (2000) stated, "Because racism is an ingrained feature in our landscape it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture" (p. xvi); there was acceptance of habits and norms because it was what was modeled for Jen and Janet. Other participants, like Kara, described a racial awakening in college because "growing up around all white people" had not previously afforded her that opportunity. These experiences moved the participants from the Contact stage to the Disintegration stage, given their exposure to new information about the reality of racism, heightening awareness of white racial privilege, and the systematic disadvantages experienced by people of color (Helms, 1984). However, knowing that

racial identity development is not linear, participants' stories illuminated how both defining moments and sustained connection impacted their individual development.

Defining Moments

As each of the participants told their stories, there was considerable time given to what I am calling “defining moments” that required them to confront their whiteness. Bonilla-Silva (2006) and Delgado and Stefancic (2000) both asserted that these types of awakenings are challenging, given that racism is all-encompassing and omnipresent. When white superiority has been so ingrained, it cannot always be recognized by its beneficiaries (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000), so it warrants analysis in that the majority of these defining moments are most frequently in relationship with students.

Many of the participants spoke of their awareness that building a relationship with their students may take additional time given the hierarchical nature of a white teacher being in power over students from a racialized community (Barlas, 1997). The challenges with initial relationship building took multiple forms, yet there was a major trend of initial tumult in the relationship. This can be explained by the societal power structures based on white privilege and white supremacy that maintain power over individuals of color (Barlas, 1997; Lazos Vargas, 2003), as well as the manner in which students sought to disrupt the power structure in school-based relationships. This was seen as Emma's students called her “Goldilocks” and told her to “go home,” as well as when Janet described a group of students being “mean” to her for multiple months of school. In both cases, as well as permeating through the narratives of other participants, there were key moments that participants could point to as moments in which their understanding of the context shifted. For example, Janet spoke to the days and months after the

2016 election during which her students were emotional and immediately had more limited views of their possible future pathways. Janet named that the emotion she felt was not something that “could be read about in a white ally space”; rather, it viscerally changed the way that she understood both her place and the place of her students in the broader society. In short, it changed her forever. The majority of the participants could name not just one but multiple defining moments that served to shift their consciousness. Not only was there emotional impact, but these defining moments led them toward greater consciousness of whiteness and illuminated the need for new ways of relating to their students of color. Participants stated that these pivotal moments forced examination of how they embodied action in their educational spaces. Ultimately, these moments in the current dynamic of white teachers and racialized students, or white teachers in a racialized school, aided each participant in gaining greater consciousness about their cultural world view and positionality as a white teacher in the United States.

Sustained Connection

In conjunction with defining moments, the participants spoke about the sustained connection that they held with their students and how that further informed their development as white educators. It must be noted that each of the eight teachers was in a position of power and that there was forced connection given the context of schooling (Barlas, 1997). Nevertheless, through that sustained connection awareness was brought to those power dynamics, and further consciousness was developed. Wendy entered the classroom in a Pseudo-Independent status in her identity development (Helms, 1984). She had already considered her role as a white woman in the world and had grappled with her privilege, but she was still finding her way out of guilt and shame. Wendy spoke about how she needed to investigate her role as the “holder of

knowledge” and determine what systems of dominance she was re-producing given her role in the school, yet she did not know how. Dixson and Rousseau (2006) spoke about how challenging it was to call into question the dominant ideology because one must privilege the experience of people of color over themselves in an attempt to reconcile with the fact that the United States is not a post-racial society. This challenge came through in different ways for each of the participants; however, each of them spoke about how they needed to investigate their own practices, and this necessity is supported in the literature (Landsman, 2018; Saffold & Longwell-Grice, 2008).

I want to be clear that sustained connection alone does not build consciousness. However, human connection and relationships can be conduits for self-investigation, as one is in a relationship where one must negotiate with another in the interest of equity. In the case of the eight participants, sustained connections to their students and their peers helped move them through the first statuses of Helms’s White Identity Development (1984). This increased consciousness illuminated the power and privilege held by themselves as white women in schools, and each spoke to grappling with that awareness in an effort to create and sustain connection.

white Dominance

Historically and societally, whiteness has been equated with superiority, leading white individuals to have the majority of the power. Ijeoma Oluo (2018) asserted:

You are racist because you were born and bred in a racist, white supremacist society.

White Supremacy is, as I’ve said earlier, insidious by design. The racism required to uphold White Supremacy is woven into every area of our lives. There is no way you can

inherit white privilege from birth, learn racist white supremacist history in schools, consume racist and white supremacist movies and films, work in a racist and white supremacist workforce, and vote for racist and white supremacist governments and not be racist. (p. 218)

One way that white supremacy manifested in this study was that participants did not feel that the race-based programming provided by TFA was sophisticated enough to meet their needs. In addition to commentary in Chapter 4 about the imperfection of the content, multiple participants also commented on the shortcomings of the format of the race-based development spaces. There was not a single common thread regarding key issues with format outside of what has been mentioned previously about the need for a strong facilitator and facilitation. When asked what would be seen as indicators of a strong facilitator, participants named strength of facilitation, the person being “further along” in their own white identity development, and knowledge about the content. Additionally, it must be noted that there was an expressed desire among the participants to ascribe white dominant techniques onto a race-based development space, such as bringing in experts or tracking their progress over time against a model of perfection, speaking to the insidious nature of white supremacy culture (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Ascription of Dominance

In his work, Leonardo (2009) explicitly called out the fact that disruption of a white-centric norm can be challenging due to the fact that society is structured according to white dominant rules, and Bonilla-Silva (2006) stated that racism and its social morays are normalized. Given the large systems at play, it is not surprising that participants desire to solve perceived

problems using white-dominant tactics. At one point, Monica suggested building up the group's base knowledge through the use of experts:

Speakers coming in, white people, people of color, people speaking about ways that are against the norm. . . . I just like the context of, "This is in a school setting. It's racism within a school setting." So even though some of these conversations, well, all of these conversations could be had in general, this presentation is very specific to something I'm passionate about, which is kids. And also, I'm a white teacher, so this is also applicable to me.

The desire for what Freire (2000) termed banking knowledge from an expert reifies the fact that only certain people are experts and can share about how white dominance is impacting educators. This limits the ability of meaning-making by the group itself, which can also unintentionally put the burden of work onto others, including people of color (AWARE-LA, n.d.; Denevi & Pastan, 2006).

Further, Sarah had a desire for action steps and actual tracking of her progress and growth. When reflecting on how she would have wanted race-based spaces to be formatted, she stated:

All I knew was that I had [white privilege], and I benefited from it, and it was going to affect me in the classroom. But I wasn't exactly told or taught how to grapple or do action steps towards unpacking it. It was just, "You have it, it's a bad thing to have, it's going to affect your class, you need to be aware of it." I think helping corps members, one, there's awareness, but also, two, tangible action steps even if they're just thought exercises on how do you actually think about and talk about and grapple with that

whiteness, that white privilege, I think would be really useful. I don't exactly know what that looks like. Does that look like a survey, and you get on a grid? And you're like, "Oh, I'm here, but I want to be here." I think some way of showing and tracking growth in any direction would really have been, I think, more helpful.

Michael and Conger (2009) stated that the white affinity group can be a resource for those who are currently dissatisfied with their own race-based development, and Utt and Tochluk (2016) spoke to how the white affinity space can offer community and relationships for growth and learning. Yet again, there is a desire for an expert to share the exact moves about how to grow into one's racial identity development journey, again removing the expertise from the group itself and looking for knowledge from an outside agent. This inherently limits the critical engagement of the group as dialectical engagement and reflective learning is now absent (Freire, 2000). Taken further, Sarah was also craving someone to give approval on how much she has grown in a single period of time. This conflicts with the critical assumptions of this study in that no one stated outcome can determine to what extent the TFA DEI programming has had an impact on individual teacher racial identity development. In this example, Sarah was desiring growth, yet she was also asking someone other than herself to evaluate the process and evolution of her own race consciousness. This, however, can function to unwittingly abdicate her responsibility, power, and agency, which can be tied to both her positionality as a woman and as a white woman seeking approval (de Saxe, 2012).

whiteness and Gender

Each of the participants in the study is a white woman. While they each have a subordinate identity marker of gender and may hold additional subordinate identity markers tied

to class or sexual orientation, their white-skinned privilege has continued to give them power (Picower, 2009). This dominance of race came through in the narratives although the women only indirectly made connections to the intersectionality of race and gender in their narratives. Emma, however, spoke about the ways in which a few students in her first-year teaching would make sexual comments towards her and the other female students in the class. She spoke about her uncertainty about how to navigate that situation and that she also knew that she was the leader of that classroom and that she needed to speak up in some manner. Her ability to navigate the dynamics and view herself as the one with power in the classroom came not only from the hierarchical dynamics of schooling but also from her inherent understanding of herself as a white person with power (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) asserted that an “intersectional experience” is “greater than the sum of racism and sexism” (p. 141), yet whiteness was the lever that gave multiple participants the power to assert themselves if their gender identity was in challenge.

One point of further analysis was the manner by which participants experienced their school sites. Two participants, Emma and Wendy, both spoke to the fact that their male school leadership was a significant part of their experience. In the previous school year, Emma’s school was led by a Latinx man, who she respected and described as a strong representative of the community for students. The next year, the school was being led by a white woman, and its special education department was being led by a white man, which Emma described as a significant departure from the last year’s experience during which the department was led by Black women. While sharing about how the culture of her department has changed this year, she shared a concrete example of the white man speaking down to her and over her in a meeting with

a family. As described by Falter (2016), Emma was being put in her place as a woman in a female-dominated profession by the male leadership minority in the school.

Wendy also investigated the power dynamics of being a woman at her school with a change in leadership this year.

Last year, I had a female principal. I didn't feel a lot of attention there. This year, having a white male principal, I've had to navigate more of what does this mean to be a woman? I feel like there's a male ego around some of these discussions that we're having, and I'm literally being belittled or reprimanded inappropriately. I can't help but think, "Is this because I'm a woman?" He's not used to women speaking up and telling him, "Sorry." Is it about positionality or power or all of these things?

Both women were experiencing the feminisation of education where the minority in the school, men, were asserting dominance over the majority, women. Even as this was occurring and their salient identity marker of gender was being examined, both consistently analyzed their role in the situation with a racialized lens of being a white woman, once again nodding to the fact that racism is so pervasive that even when additional identity markers are being examined, race does not leave the analysis.

One participant, Anna, was able to articulate the ways in which she gives womanhood strength in her classroom. She teaches elementary school and noted the ways in which her students would compare her to their mother figures. She took this metaphor and gave voice to "ladies [being] in charge." Her form of resistance and empowerment was to claim femaleness as a "superpower" and to educate her class about the strengths of females in their lives as role models (de Saxe, 2012). It must be noted that Anna still held the power in the classroom, yet she

was making conscious choices to counter women's societal subordination in her choice of language and curriculum (de Saxe, 2012).

In their work on white self-awareness, Saffold and Longwell-Grice (2008) uncovered that self-awareness was a key factor in their female teacher's ability to understand the impact of their culture in teaching and learning. The majority of the participants were able to name that their whiteness gave them power in the classroom then were able to articulate the different manners by which they analyzed that power. For the majority, they were not able to name the manners by which their womanhood gave them power in the classroom; rather, they almost exclusively articulated the ways in which they were oppressed by this facet of their identity—if they mentioned it at all.

Recommendations

In developing the study, both race and gender were considered to be salient factors. The study focused on white women because this population is the dominant teaching majority (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), as well as because white women have both a subordinate identity marker, gender, and a dominant identity marker, race. Through this study, I discovered that while each person is an intersectional being with multiple identity markers, in an educational setting in which a white teacher is teaching students from a racialized community, investigation of race is paramount. It is with this in mind that I make a variety of recommendations.

Recommendations for Higher Education

The highly white nature of education and the unchanged nature of that dominance in past decades is well documented (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), yet the overwhelming majority of teacher preparation programs have approximately 80% white graduates (Sleeter,

2016). This is particularly relevant to this study, given that all TFA corps members are required to be enrolled in a teacher credentialing program during the first year of their commitment to gain their preliminary teaching certificate; this requirement does not apply to corps members entering the program with an active teaching credential. As such, the vast majority of corps members are exposed to the Eurocentric culture of higher education. Haviland (2008) problematized that reality when concluding that in white-dominated educational spaces, concepts such as race and white supremacy tend to be glossed over. The participants, who all attended the same institution to gain their teaching credential and/or master's degree, supported this in their stories. Kara shared that she felt "most teachers were problematic in and of themselves." When asked why, she shared that "microaggressions were evident," particularly towards educators of color in the class, and that when "called out" by the class, "colorblind" answers such as "my girlfriend is Mexican" were provided. There was broad agreement in this study that the credentialing program made little effort to include an investigation of race in coursework. The only antidote shared was when Sarah named that a bright spot in the credentialing program was "my TFA professors, just because we have a common ground and common language; [they] are more explicit about bringing identity into the classroom."

This is not surprising as the majority of the faculty who teach TFA corps members are adjunct faculty members with limited ties to the university. As an adjunct faculty member in a teacher credentialing program myself, I am acutely aware of the lack of preparation and supervision that is provided to part-time faculty members. In the six years I have been teaching at the university level, I have been observed only once, and not a single syllabus I have crafted has been given substantive feedback.

In regards to the content of coursework, many teacher preparation programs do make an attempt to include coursework about multicultural education (Sleeter, 2016); however, this cursory attempt is insufficient, and the scholarship has supported that white teachers routinely engage in practices that avoid, disrupt, and resist attempts to genuinely explore race and racism (Haviland, 2008; Picower, 2009). This cannot continue, and addressing this challenge exists at multiple levels. To counter this phenomenon, several policy recommendations should be instituted.

Ongoing course audits for race-based engagement: First, teacher formation programs must conduct audits of their coursework and determine the essential ways in which teachers have an opportunity to examine their race, its attributes, and the ways by which those attributes may manifest in the classroom once those teacher candidates begin to teach students. Without the opportunity to fully process one's race and the ways in which it interacts with systemic power within schools and society, teachers are alleviating themselves of the responsibility for the ways in which their actions show up in classroom spaces (Gorski, 2009). This can limit long-term effectiveness and does not contribute to a more emancipatory and socially just educational experience for students. I recommend that the structure of teacher formation programs evolve to include this opportunity in an ongoing manner. Each course must be reconstructed to include an analysis of one's race in relation to the course topic. Full saturation is the only option to holistically consider one's race in relationship to the educational experience.

Ongoing faculty preparation regarding race-based awareness: Additionally, school of education faculty must also be prepared in new and different ways to facilitate the aforementioned learning. With the majority of faculty being white (Milner, Pearman, & McGee,

2013), self-work must be a priority so that faculty are not reproducing structures of white dominance through the manner in which they conduct classes. A focus on enhancing both the knowledge base and the facilitation skills of faculty must be considered.

Sleeter (2016) posited that a lack of faculty self-investigation can have continued impact on how curriculum is designed, what topics are being selected, and how class is executed. Schools of education must invest in supporting their faculty in this formation, in particular their white faculty, to unpack their own racial identity and the way that it manifests at the personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels. McIntosh (1989) offered an initial entry point for white individuals to develop awareness that white privilege exists, however, teacher education faculty awareness is insufficient given the power they hold as professors. A developmental formation arc by which white faculty investigate their own consciousness of racism and its presence in their mindsets and actions is critical. McIntosh (1989) insisted that a first step in white identity awareness is to raise one's daily consciousness. Sleeter (2016) pushed further to encourage active reflection on how Eurocentric habits and traditions reify white dominance in one's action. Professors engaged in ongoing praxis is a possible model for novice white teachers so that new educators can see the process in action and be given the space to also be in process.

As faculty become increasingly more aware of their own positionality and build increased consciousness, then an ongoing assessment and investigation into classroom and institutional practices becomes part of the fabric of a given institution. School of education faculty, particularly within teacher education, must commit to this professional investment in that it is essential to disrupt the reproduction of white dominance in educational spaces and has a long-

lasting impact on the preparation of future white teachers, who will invariably find themselves teaching non-white student populations.

Recommendations for Practice

In addition to policy recommendations, there are a number of recommendations for practice at TFA, as well as other alternative education programs.

Expand the pilot pre-work experience: To begin, the manner in which race-based programming is focused on in the corps experience must be examined. When looking holistically at the developmental arcs for each of the eight participants, interesting overlaps emerged. At least two of the participants participated in a formal pre-work pilot that had an explicit focus on understanding the inequity in education and the ways in which race, class, and other systems of oppression intersect with education. The pre-work pilot also assisted future corps members to situate themselves within those systems, no matter what their race. The remaining six participants all cited some sort of transformative experience in their time before TFA, either in college or a work experience. For all of the participants, this awareness brought them into at least the Contact stage, and for most participants, into a Disintegration stage according to Helms's (1990) White Racial Identity Model. Before entering the corps, participants were able to see that racism was alive in the world, and they were at minimum recognizing that their experience as a white person in the world was different. In most cases, they were investigating their role as a white person in society. Making pre-work engagement mandatory, particularly for white corps members, would provide all corps members a common starting place. This is additionally beneficial because many of the participants spoke to the overwhelming nature of the first-year teaching experience; one in particular noted that she "was just trying to find the bathroom."

When thinking about the emotional and cognitive availability of educators, the first year of teaching is a challenging time to additionally take on development related to white racial identity. If this development has already begun and can be continued in year one of teaching, educators would be able to align present experiences with already held knowledge, making the group learning more robust.

Formal mentorship for novice white teachers: Moreover, the concept of mentorship, in particular by other white women, was mentioned as a recommendation by multiple participants. Multiple participants spoke to the fact that they themselves needed support that was targeted to their own personal journey, and the group race-based development that TFA was offering was insufficient to meet their unique needs. Multiple participants cited how the engagements with their students, what I have termed defining moments and sustained connection, shifted their understanding of the broader world and their place as a white individual within that system. Some entered the TFA program with a paradigm of the world that normalized the existing social system, which itself perpetuates racism. These defining moments, opened up the participants to see that the issue of racism was bigger than themselves, and left multiple participants struggling with this shift. Mentors could be a unique lever to aid CMs in processing that mental and emotional shift.

While matching up individuals with supportive mentors can be challenging, it is also possible when one considers the pool of TFA alumni and the staff and faculty at the credentialing university with whom TFA partners. The racial journey of each of the participants is so nuanced, thus a mentor with whom a deep and trusting relationship can be built could be a key lever in continuing that development.

Differentiation in race-based programming: While the purpose of this study was not analyzing or commenting on the effectiveness of any part of the TFA programming, given its presence in each narrative session, I would be remiss if I did not comment on the DEI programming at summer institute. Universally, all of the participants took issue with both the content and the facilitation of the DEI programming at summer institute to different degrees. Many commented on the quality of the facilitator and how the summer staff was ill-prepared to address the micro and macro aggression that happened both within multiracial spaces and within affinity group spaces. Further, there was almost universal commentary about how the programming was not differentiated to the degree necessary to engage in authentic conversations with a consistent group of people. This hindered development, as the programming was consistently designed for the person who was having their first engagement with race-based dialogue. This large-scale trend, the manner in which the content was delivered, and the content itself must be examined. One possible remedy may be linked to the aforementioned recommendation around stronger pre-work that directly addresses the intersection between systems of oppression and education.

Recommendations for Institutions

Much of this dissertation has focused on the need for individual and group identity formation, however, there must be an institutional focus as well. Individuals exist within larger societal or institutional contexts and efforts for structural change can be heavily resisted if the larger entity is not also ready to experience change. Hence, as such, attention must be paid to the entire school or organizational structure. Multiple participants cited that they felt as if they were working in isolation or that they could not share the culturally competent or race-focused work

that they were doing with their larger school community. This fear that it would be deemed “non-academic” or “extraneous” is an indication of the larger institution not being ready to receive active challenge of its current dominant structures. Additionally, the participant stories indicate that work in isolation, while meaningful, is insufficient to change the dominant narrative of schooling that persists in the larger society.

In order for institutions to have a willingness to take on this type of formation, there first must be an admission that: (a) the institution has a dominant culture; and (b) that dominant culture is not inclusive of all people within the institution, despite any rhetoric of inclusivity. Arriving at that admission as an institution is a significant first step; yet, meaningful transformation occurs when that dominant culture is replaced by a liberatory framework. All of this points to the fact that the larger institution must also experience developmental formation to create an alternative narrative of schooling, classroom practices, and its educational participants.

Future Research

With a student body in America soon approaching a racialized majority and the teacher workforce still made up of over 80% white females, the composition of American schools is rapidly becoming racially divided. Currently, there is literature to support the notion that the construct of race is taught differently among racial groups (Crossroads Ministry, n.d.; Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014; Helms, 1990); however, there is a dearth of literature on race-based programming and how it looks similar or different to various racial groups. This dissertation supports the assertion made by AWARE-LA (n.d.) and Utt and Tochluk (2016) that white individuals need to do work with other white individuals in order to learn about racism and address concerns about racial identity development. The narratives in this study have provided

some preliminary evidence that there is a need to study race-based programming with novice educators in a variety of places to determine what further trends arise. A larger pool of data will provide the opportunity to iterate on that developmental sequence and adapt it to the unique group of educators who are the participants.

Further, there is limited current research that collects the stories of those who have experienced race-based identity development as educators and who have since left the education profession. Of particular interest is whether individuals who have received robust race-based programming are continuing to implement learnings and analyze their current surroundings. There could be further implications of race-based development or critical racial analysis in other fields, yet those stories have not yet been collected. This study should be used to build on more extensive research for the implications of race-based programming, both inside of and outside of the field of education.

Additionally, it was outside of the scope of this study to determine the student impact that white racial identity development in teachers is having in the classroom. One logical conclusion that is additionally supported by the literature is that as the consciousness of teachers grows and changes, then different actions must be taken (Howard, 2004; Landsman, 2018; Saffold & Longwell-Grice, 2008). Unfortunately, this study was unable to gather the perspectives of students on how they themselves experience the actions taken by their teachers or the extent to which those actions exerted white dominance. Further, this study was not able to gather the perspectives of students about how they experienced the curricular choices made by their teachers and schools more broadly. The mainstream experience of schooling is still that of a banking model in which students are being filled with knowledge (Freire, 2000). This

construction is not liberatory; rather, it is designed to reify the white-dominant structures of the broader society. A student perspective about how their teacher reinforced those ideals or actively worked to construct alternative spaces is an essential area for further research.

Lastly, the study was designed with an assumption that gender would play a key role in the novice educators' experience. This assumption was not realized in the stories of the participants, even when probed for explicitly. As such, an area for further research can be to investigate the construction of gender and the way in which this does show up in these novice white female educators' teaching experience.

Epilogue

The battle is and always has been a battle for the hearts and minds of white people in this country. The fight against racism is our issue. It's not something that we're called on to help people of color with. We need to become involved with it as if our lives depended on it because really, in truth, they do.

— Anne Braden, (Kentucky Arts Council, n.d.)

Writing this dissertation has been one of the most challenging experiences in my professional career in that during the process, my world fundamentally changed. While writing about TFA, I left staff, and while writing about the identity development of white women, I lost my grandmother, who was both a key role model and mentor for me. These two major changes led me to question if I was still worthy to write this dissertation and if I still had a valid story to tell. I consider myself a white progressive educator who wants to be in the work, yet I was

spending each of my weekends not doing the work, but instead sitting behind a computer writing about the work.

I was reminded consistently both by my wonderful chair, Antonia Darder, and by our supportive dissertation group, that I was worthy to tell the stories of these eight phenomenal women. I was this profile of white woman and novice teacher when I stepped into a classroom in Watts back in 2005. That one action set my life on a pathway that I did not know was possible and redefined the world as I knew it. Entering classrooms has also upended the worlds of these eight participants, and their stories, all of our stories, deserve a voice.

Freire (2000) stated that to name the world, you must change it and come to terms with its complexity. I have spent my 14 years in education finding the words to name the injustice and white dominance of the American education system. I have spoken those words to white family members and friends who have not left their cradles of privilege long enough to be uncomfortable. I have removed myself over time from people who were out of sync with the world that I have come to know and name because I seek co-conspirators in the world versus reifiers of dominance. All of those actions have required me to be vulnerable, and accept the consequences of that truth telling; for me many of those consequences were unexpected and ran the spectrum of emotion. In the past 14 years, the way that I name the world has fundamentally changed. Every day, I am coming to terms with its complexity and seeking out the strength to not let that complexity halt progress. It is hard, but at my core, I continue to firmly believe that education is a radical political act of love, and the story of committed white teachers seeking to disrupt racism is a story that is worth being told.

**APPENDIX A:
INTRODUCTORY EMAIL**

Dear POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT,

I hope that this email finds you well today! I am writing to see if you would be willing to participate in a research project that I am undertaking as my dissertation through my Ed. D program at Loyola Marymount University. The study will focus on novice white female educators and will be capturing stories about the type of racial identity development necessary for this group of teachers. Further, I am focusing on Teach for America corps members as this group of novice white female educators are exclusively teaching in historically racialized communities, thus there is a mis-match between teacher and student background. I would be so grateful to have your voice and experience captured in this study.

The primary time commitment for participation in this study will be a 60-90 minutes one-on-one conversation with me at a time and quiet location of your choosing. I am aiming to have all conversations between May and August. I will be audio recording our conversation so that I can transcribe the conversation to track significant patterns and themes. After we complete our conversation, I will send you the transcription so that you will have the opportunity to review it and further clarify anything that you shared during our conversation.

You will also be invited to an optional focus group which would entail another 90-120 minute commitment. The focus group will be optional, and it will provide all who attend an opportunity to hear the common themes that emerged from the one-to-one conversations and comment on those as a group. While I would be honored to have you as a part of that process, I want to be respectful of your busy schedule as well. The focus group will likely be in August or September and I will coordinate a time and location alongside all who express interest.

If you are willing to participate in the study, please complete the attached informed consent form and return it to me at your earliest convenience. I look forward to hearing from you!

Warmly,
Stephanie

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

Date of Preparation March 20, 2018

Loyola Marymount University

Talking about whiteness: The Stories of Novice white Female Educators

- 1) I hereby authorize Stephanie Goodman, doctoral student at Loyola Marymount University, to include me in the following research study: **Talking about whiteness: The Stories of Novice white Female Educators**
- 2) I have been asked to participate in a qualitative research study designed to understand my experience as a white teacher reaching in a racialized community as well as my perspective on the racial identity development- also known as diversity, equity, and inclusivity development- necessary to be prepared for that experience.
- 3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is that I am a white female educator that is part of the Teach for America program.
- 4) I understand that if I am a subject, I will engage in an individual interview about my experience as a white female teacher that is experiencing diversity, equity, and inclusivity development through Teach for America, that will last approximately 60-90 minutes. I will also be asked to participate in an optional focus group that will last approximately 60-90 minutes with all of the research participants in order to discuss unique and common themes among our experiences. The investigator will ask me questions and record my responses.

These procedures have been explained to me by Stephanie Goodman, doctoral student at Loyola Marymount University.

- 5) I understand that I will be audiotaped in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these tapes will be used for research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the tapes will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.
- 6) I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: Minimal risk related to sharing my personal experiences and teaching philosophy. However,

given that the sensitive topics of race and gender will be discussed, counseling options have been provided to me.

- 7) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are contributing to research on the type of racial identity development necessary to prepare white educators to teach in racialized communities.
- 8) I understand that Stephanie Goodman who can be reached at sgoodma3@lmu.edu or goodman.stephanie@gmail.com will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.
- 9) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.
- 10) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice.
- 11) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.
- 12) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.
- 13) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.
- 14) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Moffet, Ph.D. Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 at david.moffet@lmu.edu.
- 15) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".

Subject's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C
PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How many years have you been teaching?

2. In what year did you join Teach for America?

3. Did you move to Los Angeles to join Teach for America?

4. What is your age?

5. Please describe the school at which you work.

6. What grade level do you teach?

7. What subject matter(s) do you teach?

APPENDIX D
PROMPTS FOR NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Note: Prompts are broken out by research question.

1) How do novice white female educators define whiteness? How do they believe their definition of whiteness has evolved as a result of their experience in race based programming?

- How do you personally define whiteness?
 - What led to you constructing whiteness in this way?
- In what ways has your personal definition of whiteness shifted as a result of being in race based programming at TFA?
- In what ways, if any, has TFA programming had an impact on how you define whiteness?

2) How do novice white female educators describe the impact that whiteness has on their teaching?

- In what ways has the construct of race come up in your classroom/at your school site?
- To what extent do you see white dominant characteristics show up in your teaching?
- To what extent do your multiple identities- being a woman and being white- show up in the classroom?

3) How has the preparation they received through the race based programming influenced their classroom practice and relationships with students from racialized communities?

- To what extent have any of your teaching practices changed as a result of TFA's race based programming?
- How would you describe your relationships with your students?
 - To what extent has race been discussed between you and students this year?
- How would like to be better prepared to engage with student from racialized communities?
-

APPENDIX E COUNSELING OPTIONS

Speaking about topics such as race and gender can be triggering to some individuals. Below are suggestions for counseling if a need for that has arisen as a result of our time together:

- 1) As a current full-time teacher, you receive health benefits. A primary space to seek out counseling can be through your current health plan.
- 2) As part of the Teach for America program, you may be going to school at Loyola Marymount University to receive your teaching certificate or master's degree. The Student Psychological Services (SPS) at LMU provides confidential individual and group therapy's walk-in consultations, emergency psychological services; and psycho-educational outreach programming. There is no charge for the services. SPS is accredited by the International Association of Counseling Services, Inc.
 - a. SPS services can be reached at (310)338-2868 during regular business hours. If a participant needs to speak to a clinician after business hours, they can call (310) 338-2868 and follow the prompts. An appointment can also be scheduled through the website here:<https://studentaffairs.lmu.edu/wellness/studentpsychologicalservices/makeanappointment/>
- 3) Teach for America has worked with an online Therapy application, Level Therapy, that was founded and operated by an alumnus. Current corps members can access the application at low cost as a member/alumna of the TFA program.
 - a. Access to the application can be found here: <https://www.trylevel.com/>

APPENDIX F
LETTER OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Attn: Institutional Review Board
Loyola Marymount University
1 LMU Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90045

To Whom in May Concern:

I am writing this letter to confirm that Stephanie Goodman, a Teach for America alumnus and student in the Ed.D. program at Loyola Marymount University, has my permission to speak with current and/or recent alumni from the Teach for America program for the purpose of her dissertation study.

Miss Goodman has informed me that the focus of her research is on racial identity development in novice teachers and that she will be conducting research with novice white female educators in particular. I understand that Teach for America will be a common thread among participants and as such, elements of the diversity, equity, and inclusivity programming, will be discussed.

I understand that after completing an initial pre-interview questionnaire, this study requires participants to engage in a 60-90 minute interview process, and that participants will be invited to an option 90-120 minute focus group. Miss Goodman has assured me that these commitments will in no way infringe upon any commitments that teachers have with the Teach for America program. I am aware that the timeline for both interviews and the focus group will be May-September of 2018.

Miss Goodman has committed to sharing the results of her study with me once they are completed.

Feel free to contact me directly should you require verification of this letter.

Warmly,

Lida Jennings, Ed. D.
Executive Director
ljennings@teachforamerica.org
310.739.6812

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