Becoming an Active Anti-Racist: Exploring the Role of White Critical Consciousness Development

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Becoming an Active Anti-Racist: Exploring the Role of White Critical Consciousness Development

By

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The development of white individuals’ critical consciousness may play a role in fostering an anti-racist orientation and increasing engagement in anti-racism activism efforts, ultimately aiding in counteracting the deleterious effects of racism and oppression in the United States. The prevalence of whites upholding whiteness, white supremacy, and systems of power and oppression is well-documented yet there is little literature on how critical consciousness and an anti-racist orientation develops in white young adults. This constructivist grounded theory qualitative study addresses this gap by exploring the perceived life experiences that were influential on six white young adults' critical consciousness development and how their experiences inspired them to adopt an anti-racist stance and engage in anti-racism activism. The analysis of semi-structured interview transcripts revealed six facilitating factors (e.g., personality attributes and shared values), four themes, and ten concepts. The four emergent themes call attention to the nuanced developmental process wherein phases of the process intersect and are regularly revisited. Findings suggest that emotions are present in all phases of the developmental process of critical consciousness and play a fundamental role in shaping cognition, motivation, and action among participants. Findings are contextualized in the theoretical and empirical literature and implications, limitations, and future research directions are discussed.
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Introduction

Racism has been a persistent and inescapable component of the United States’ (U.S.) history (Banaji et al., 2021; Payne et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2019), impacting nearly every aspect of U.S. society (Griffin et al., 2007; The Aspen Institute, 2022). The ongoing impact of over 500 years of racial discrimination on communities of color in the U.S. has been well-documented (Alvarez et al., 2016; Banaji et al., 2021; Onyeador et al., 2021; Pieterse et al., 2012; Pieterse & Powell, 2016). Yet, the effects of racism continue to operate outside the conscious awareness of populations that are not adversely impacted by it (i.e., those who racially identify as white; American Psychological Association, 2021; Yearby, 2020). Though racial oppression has its roots in historical events, contemporary forms of structural oppression perpetuate those historical injustices (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Jones, 2000; Pager & Shepherd, 2008). Further, these structures likely reinforce one another, making efforts to dismantle one system of racial oppression challenging without parallel efforts in other systems (Gee & Ford, 2011; Powell, 2008). Oppressive laws, policies, practices, rules, and cultural and societal norms have been produced and structurally embedded in the socioeconomic systems in the U.S. (e.g., government, housing, banking, healthcare, etc.) by dominant racial group members (Bailey et al., 2021). Given that these structures in the U.S. were developed to serve the interest of white individuals, confronting and dismantling those structures will require focused efforts by those same white individuals who hold greater systemic power.

For communities of color to thrive, systemic oppression must be identified, challenged, and ended, something that will require committed action by those perpetuating oppression as well as those negatively affected by it. Despite the well-documented central role of whiteness in producing and maintaining racial inequality (Knowles et al., 2014; Liu, 2017; Spanierman et al.,
2013, 2014), most white individuals continue to rationalize and overlook the detrimental consequences of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, 2017; Grzanka et al., 2019). However, some are able to become critically aware of their power and privilege, which moves them toward an anti-racist perspective (DiAngelo, 2018; Utt & Tochluk, 2020). Contemporary research has offered limited insight into the process whereby white individuals recognize the impact of their whiteness and translate that awareness into commitment and actions that challenge systems of oppression (Diemer et al., 2015; Rapa et al., 2020).

While there has been an upsurge of scholarly work over the past two decades attempting to better understand how whites develop an anti-racist identity, further exploration and understanding is still needed, particularly regarding the process by which white individuals adopt an anti-racist stance and how that stance promotes engagement in anti-racism activism efforts (Mosely et al., 2021). Understanding how this process has occurred could lead to the development of interventions aimed at increasing the racial consciousness of those with powerful and privileged identities in society, consciousness that could lead to subsequent progress toward vital equity initiatives. This study sought to understand the life experiences that influenced the development of white college students’ anti-racist attitudes and how those attitudes contributed to their motivation to engage in anti-racism transformative action efforts.

**Whiteness and White Privilege**

Whiteness and white people are not synonymous terms. Zeus Leonardo (2002) elucidated that whiteness is a racial discourse, perspective, and/or worldview, while ‘white people’ is a descriptive term representing “a socially constructed identity, usually based on skin color” (p. 31). Rasmussen et al. (2001) expanded the notion of whiteness as “the historical legacy of colonialism and imperialism” (p. 12). Frankenberg (1993, 1996, 2001) further contended that
whiteness is a historically located, multifaceted, illusory, and socially constructed standpoint from which white people view themselves, others, and broader society (Applebaum, 2016; Leonardo, 2012; Rasmussen et al., 2001).

Social practices and ways of being in society are largely, if not entirely, informed by the values, beliefs, and interests of white people because social norms are rooted in whiteness (Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997). Thus, the notion of whiteness comprises certain functional properties that work to reproduce and maintain the racialized social order and therefore, the ongoing oppression of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Leonardo, 2002; 2013; Owen, 2007). Whiteness can be manipulated in ways that ensure the continual distribution of power and benefits to white people (Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019; Owen, 2007). Accordingly, we can understand white privilege as the unearned freedoms and rights deeply embedded in the white ways of being (McIntosh, 1998) predicated upon white supremacy (Leonardo, 2002; 2012; Owen, 2007). In other words, white privilege only exists in as much as white supremacy and whiteness exist (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Leonardo, 2009).

The function of whiteness in upholding and reproducing white supremacy becomes evident when we understand white supremacy to be a multi-faceted system of interconnected components working together to both perpetuate the dominance of one racial group and oppress all other racial groups (Applebaum, 2016; Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Owen, 2007). But not all white individuals remain ignorant (willfully or otherwise) of whiteness and how it protects them while damaging the lives of others. Some move to a stance of anti-racism and engage in active efforts to combat white supremacy.
Anti-Racism

Anti-racists are “persons who have committed themselves in thought, action, and practice, to dismantle racism” (O’Brien, 2001, p. 5). Recent psychological scholarship has focused on white anti-racists or individuals who are committed to actions that both challenge racism and disrupt white supremacy (Atkins et al., 2017; Spanierman et al., 2017; Sue, 2017). Extant research has emphasized the importance of white anti-racists developing awareness of and critically examining their allegiance to whiteness, as well as analyzing how larger systems of power enact whiteness as a means of perpetuating racial oppression and upholding white supremacy (Gzanka et al., 2014).

Still, there is a gap in the research exploring how whites develop an anti-racist identity. Further, scholars have a limited understanding of the experiences or characteristics whites possess that contribute to the development and maintenance of activism associated with an anti-racist identity (Sue, 2017; Watts et al., 2011). As such, researchers have expressed a need for further exploration into the underlying mechanisms motivating whites to move toward an awareness of their whiteness and the impact of white supremacy, as well as how this awareness promotes whites to engage in anti-racist actions (Diemer et al., 2015; Roberts & Rizzo, 2021; Sue, 2017; Watts et al., 2011).

Theoretical Approaches

The present study uses two theoretical frameworks to assist the exploration of white individuals’ critical consciousness development and anti-racism activism engagement. The primary theory is Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS; Applebaum, 2016; Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Leonardo, 2002, 2009, 2013). The mid-level theory for the present study is Critical Consciousness (CC; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Diemer et al., 2015;
Rapa et al., 2020). CWS and CC align well for the purpose of the present study as both are focused on raising racial awareness and consciousness and encompass a key objective of deconstructing and dismantling whiteness, white supremacy, and systems of oppression.

**Critical Whiteness Studies**

The theorization of whiteness is owed to the many scholars, educators, and activists of color like Malcolm X, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Stacy Lee, Irene Yoon, Mari Matsuda, and Zeus Leonardo who gave root to whiteness studies. CWS scholarship adopts the understanding that racism is linked to whiteness and white supremacy (Applebaum, 2016; Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019). CWS aims to examine and challenge systems of power, dominance, and privilege (Corces-Zimmerman, 2019) and “reveal invisible structures that produce and reproduce white supremacy…” (Applebaum, 2016, p. 1).

Prominent CWS scholars have insisted it is crucial for white people to develop both the awareness of racial oppression and the ability to acknowledge their role in maintaining and reproducing systems of power to effectively dismantle white supremacy (Applebaum, 2016; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenberg, 1993, 2001; Rasmussen et al., 2001). A CWS theoretical framework places whiteness under a microscope to uncover, deconstruct, and dismantle it (Leonardo, 2013). Thus, CWS provides a basic structure for conceptual inquiry into how whites develop an understanding of their whiteness and how an increased awareness of their whiteness supports the deconstruction of white supremacy through transformative activism.

**Critical Consciousness**

CWS supports this study’s focus on systematically exploring participants’ critical consciousness (CC) development. CC stems from Brazilian educator-activist Paulo Freire’s (1973) early work in critical praxis and is rooted in sociopolitical development and social
learning theory (Watts et al., 2003). Critical consciousness development is defined as the “intentional cultivation of self-awareness in a context that attends to the dynamics of power in relationships and the structural environment invoking action toward social justice” (O’Neill, 2015, p. 626). For the purposes of the present study, CC is characterized by the process of critically reflecting on, analyzing, and challenging systems of power and oppression (Chronister et al., 2020; Diemer & Rapa, 2016).

CC was used to inform the research process and to examine the development of white critical consciousness as a means of motivating white individuals to engage in political actions that challenge systems of power and oppression. Extant research has indicated that the sociopolitical insights acquired during the critical reflection and analysis phases of critical consciousness development can generate motivation to engage in transformative action (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Diemer et al., 2015; Freire, 1968/2000, 1973; Rapa et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2003, 2011). As such, critical consciousness development is seen as a means of fostering an anti-racist orientation. Increased self-awareness and enhanced ability to identify structural inequities facilitate subsequent engagement in anti-racism activism efforts (Diemer, 2015; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Green & Burton, 2021; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). The present study aims to improve our understanding of the individual processes (e.g., social context and significant life experiences) within a critical consciousness framework that cultivate white college students’ anti-racist identity development and inspire their engagement in racial justice activism efforts.

College presents students with opportunities for personal growth through enhancing self-knowledge (Taylor & Magolda, 2015). Current literature on college students’ cognitive and moral development provides extensive empirical evidence that participation in higher education courses fosters critical thinking and moral reasoning skills (Kohlberg, 1991; Mentkowski &
Straight, 1983; Rest, 1988; Whiteley, 1982). In particular, integrating pedagogical strategies (e.g., experiential learning components) in college and university course curricula has promoted specific developmental outcomes, such as cognitive complexity, awareness of self and others, and critical analysis of sociopolitical systems (King & Mayhew, 2004).

**Purpose Statement**

There is scant research examining the process by which CC – in any population – is fostered. Most CC research has focused on methods of enhancing the CC of Black/African American adolescents (Diemer et al., 2015, 2017, 2020; Watts et al., 2011) with little to no research investigating CC development in young adults. Furthermore, there is a dearth of knowledge regarding white CC development at any age.

This constructivist grounded theory study explored how young white adults who are currently attending college acquire an understanding of their whiteness, increase their awareness of racial oppression and inequities, and how this awareness motivates young white adults to engage in anti-racism activism. A better understanding of these processes can provide a fundamental understanding of the intricacies associated with white critical consciousness development in social science scholarship. In addition, a deeper understanding can better equip our field to assist in fostering anti-racist identities and increasing transformative action focused on deconstructing and dismantling whiteness, white supremacy, and systems of oppression.

**Research Questions**

The study addresses the following research questions:

1: What life experiences do white college students consider influential in cultivating their critical self-reflection and analysis of racial inequalities?
2: What life experiences do white college students perceive have motivated their commitment to engage in anti-racism activism behaviors/efforts?

3: What helped white college students maintain their commitment to transformative action?

4: What challenges did white college students face in their transformation to anti-racism (and if they faced some, how did they react to them)?

**Method**

**Participants and Procedure**

After obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the present study, participants were recruited from a list of interested individuals who had participated in a previous anti-racism quantitative study I conducted. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a commonly used qualitative research sampling method characterized by the deliberate selection of participants based on specific criteria (Yin, 2015). Criteria consistent with the present study’s research questions included the following screening and inclusion criteria: 1) endorse holding anti-racist attitudes and active engagement in anti-racism activism activities, 2) racially identify as white, 3) currently enrolled at the primary researcher’s university, and 4) between the ages of 18 and 26 years old, although this final criterion was altered as described below.

Potential participants were emailed the recruitment statement, which referenced their expressed interest in participating in follow-up anti-racism research. Emails included a link to an electronic informed consent and a Qualtrics screening survey. The Qualtrics survey included demographic questions and items adapted from the Short Critical Consciousness Scale (ShoCCS) and Anti-Racist Behavioral Inventory (ARBI) that were used to screen participants for inclusion. Participants who endorsed holding anti-racist attitudes and active engagement in individual and
systemic level activism (within the past calendar year) were informed of the possibility of being contacted to schedule a 60- to 90-minute interview.

Out of a total of 56 potential participants, 12 completed the screening survey. Two endorsed anti-racist attitudes but did not endorse engagement in anti-racism activism within the past year and were excluded from consideration for an interview. Of the remaining interested participants, six met all inclusion criteria and four individuals met all but the age range requirement for inclusion. All ten endorsed anti-racist attitudes and engagement in anti-racism activism activities within the past year. I prioritized contacting and conducting interviews with the six participants who met all inclusion criteria; however, three of the six individuals did not respond to multiple attempts to schedule an interview. Due to a need for additional participants, I contacted the remaining four individuals who met all but the age range inclusion criteria and scheduled an interview with three additional participants, who endorsed being over the age of 26 but under 35. Table 1 provides information about the six participants.

**Table 1**

*Sample Description*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant ID</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>ShoCCS Total Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Dolly</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Cisgender Woman</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Rapunzel</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Cisgender Woman</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Avo</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Frankie</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Cisgender Woman</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Harley</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Non-Binary</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Cisgender Woman</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* ShoCCS = Short Critical Consciousness Scale with a possible range of 6 to 36.
Data Collection from a Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach

A constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2020) was chosen for this study because it assumes a naturalistic, interactive, flexible, and open-ended interpretive stance that analyzes why and how individuals construct meaning from social experiences. Charmaz (2020) asserted conducting critical social inquiry using a constructivist approach to grounded theory analysis is uniquely situated to consider how larger systems and structures influence and alter the data. A constructivist grounded theory methodology seeks to explore the complex motivations behind white young adults’ engagement in anti-racism activism, examining how critical self-reflection and scrutiny of systems of power and oppression can lead to involvement in transformative action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This approach aims to uncover the underlying philosophies and constructions of social and economic factors that maintain power and dominance, ultimately providing a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms that perpetuate and challenge these dynamics (Charmaz, 2014, 2020).

Constructivist grounded theory can be a useful approach in exploring justice and human rights topics because it 1) connects micro, meso, and macro levels within analyses of power, inequality, and oppression; 2) demonstrates the established ways systemic inequities and oppressive practices are carried out; 3) determines the processes leading to individuals’ sociopolitical development necessary for acting against and resisting oppressive systems of power; and 4) recognizes and addresses the inherent inequities enacted within the research process (Charmaz, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Given that, this approach is fitting for the present study’s focus on how white young adults construct their critical consciousness and develop an anti-racist identity.
The most appropriate forms of data collection for constructivist grounded theory are interviews, observations, researcher journals, and/or fieldnotes (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) maintains that research questions inform data collection methods, not vice versa, and researchers aim to employ data collection methods that have the potential to further emerging ideas. The hallmark of a grounded theory methodology is simultaneously collecting and analyzing data (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). The iterative process of data collection and analysis requires the researcher to stay close to the data and prioritize synthetization, explication, and construction of new concepts (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Data obtained during the research process helps to modify subsequent interview protocols, allowing researchers to enhance data collection procedures and advance ideas and concepts in relation to potential theory (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, the primary method of data collection for the present study was semi-structured interviews.

Data Sources

*Short Critical Consciousness Scale (ShoCCS)*

Participants responded to six questions taken from the Short Critical Consciousness Scale, a 13-item self-report measure adapted from the Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS; Diemer et al., 2015, 2022). Items included in the present study were taken from the Critical Reflection and Critical Motivation subscales of the ShoCCS. All items from the ShoCCS were answered on a six-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 6 = *Strongly Agree*) with possible scores ranging from six to 36. The Critical Reflection subscale measured participants’ critical analysis of socioeconomic and racial/ethnic constraints on educational and occupational opportunity with higher scores reflecting greater levels of critical analysis. The Critical Motivation subscale measured participants’ perceived ability and responsibility to enact social
change with higher scores reflecting higher levels of participants’ motivation. Participants were screened on their level of critical reflection and critical motivation in order to ensure they had a developed awareness and understanding of the impacts of systems of power and oppression on people of color and perceive themselves as able to and responsible for enacting social change. Participants had to endorse mild or stronger agreement on all six items (total scores had to fall within the range of 24 to 36) to be considered for an interview.

**Anti-Racist Behavioral Inventory (ARBI)**

An adapted version of the Anti-Racism Behavioral Inventory (ARBI; Pieterse et al., 2016, 2022) was used to measure participant’s active engagement in activism efforts. Items included in the present study were taken from the Individual and Systemic Activism subscales of the ARBI. The four items included in the screening survey measured participants’ efforts to educate themselves and others about the issues of racism and to ensure participants actively challenge acts of racism at work, school, and/or in their family. Participants had to endorse agreement with actively seeking to educate themselves on experiences of racism, actively and often speaking with friends about the problem of racism in the U.S. and what they can do about it, and actively challenging acts of racism at work and school or usually interrupting racist conversations and jokes when they hear them in their family to be considered for an interview. Participants also had to indicate engagement in systemic activism efforts (e.g., donating, protesting, contacting public officials, signing petitions, volunteering with racial justice organizations, etc.) within the past year to be considered for an interview.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interview questions were developed in adherence with suggestions from theoretical and methodological experts (Charmaz, 2014; Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019).
Interviews provided the flexibility necessary to adhere to the key tenets of the theoretical framework (e.g., CWS) while promoting deep exploration of participants’ critical consciousness development. The interview protocol attended to the research questions while intentionally centering the harmful effects of whiteness on people of color and the ways in which white people maintain whiteness and perpetuate racism and oppression. Interview questions explored participants’ social contexts and life experiences influential to the development of their self-reflective skills and ability to analyze systems of power and oppression, as well as motivations for their active engagement in anti-racism activism. Challenges and barriers to the development of an anti-racist identity and/or engagement in anti-racism activism as well as subsequent reactions were also addressed in the interview.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via a HIPPA-compliant version of Zoom. Each interview was audio recorded with participants’ consent and transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher. Six participants were interviewed once for approximately 75 minutes each with the shortest interview lasting 74-minutes and the longest interview lasting 79-minutes. Participant-selected pseudonyms were used in place of names to safeguard privacy and confidentiality.

**Reflexivity and Positionality During Data Collection and Analysis**

Constructivist grounded theory reinforces qualitative critical inquiry by adopting a skeptical stance that maintains methodological doubt and vigilant self-reflexivity about both participant and researcher beliefs (Charmaz, 2020), an approach Charmaz (2016) referred to as “methodological self-consciousness” (p. 3). Methodological self-consciousness employs rigorous and routine reflexivity and assumes that researcher bias is inherently part of the research process (Charmaz, 2009, 2014, 2020; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). In
addition, White researchers pursuing critical whiteness research have a distinct ethical and moral responsibility to uphold methodological self-consciousness and attend to the inherent risk of re-centering whiteness in whiteness research by locating, examining, and scrutinizing ourselves within the research process (Applebaum, 2016; Charmaz, 2020; Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019; Leonardo, 2013).

Several methods of maintaining reflexivity were followed throughout the research process, including creating a positionality statement, keeping a researcher journal, and using member checks (Birt et al., 2016; Doyle, 2007; Harvey, 2015) as each interview was transcribed. Throughout conducting, transcribing, and analyzing interviews, I kept a researcher journal to record decision-making processes, methodological dilemmas, pre- and post-interview observations, and my introspections and ideas throughout the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Spradley, 1979). Tracy’s (2010) criteria for qualitative research incorporate rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, and ethical considerations among other standards. Keeping a researcher journal aligns with the characteristics necessary for conducting sound qualitative research (Tracey, 2010) and allowed me to maintain vigorous self-reflection and critical self-reflexivity (Applebaum, 2016; Charmaz, 2016; Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019; Nayak, 2007; Rasmussen et al., 2001). My researcher journal allowed me to engage in reflexivity by identifying and minimizing my preconceptions of the data based on my subjectivities and assumptions (Charmaz, 2014). I used my researcher journal to log, define, and operationalize emerging codes, to describe emergent patterns showing up in the data, and to reflect on the intersections and links of codes, categories, and themes. I also used my journal to develop additional questions to include during the interview process and to inform tentative categories for individual codes.
I identify as a white, cisgender, pansexual, neurodivergent, and non-disabled woman. At the time of this study, I am a first-generation student and doctoral candidate in counseling psychology. My lived experiences and subjectivities are complexly and reflexively intertwined in the process of researching whiteness, which includes this manuscript. I was raised in the southern United States around mostly white individuals. Through experiences outside of my upbringing and afforded to me by my privilege, I developed the skills and ability to engage in introspection and self-reflection; skills that have expanded my awareness of racial injustice and increased my motivation to engage in activism efforts that challenge systems of power and oppression.

Being a white, privileged, and educated woman engaged in anti-racism activism and research is inherently contradictory. I have grappled with my role in maintaining and perpetuating whiteness, particularly through conducting this research. In my efforts to critically examine my power, privilege, and position, I have come to understand that I cannot escape the privilege and power afforded to me as a white person. While I firmly reject and condemn white supremacist ideologies and whiteness, I recognize I hold several privileged identities and positions rooted in the very ideologies and systems I aim to dismantle. Still, my awareness of racial injustice and the insidious, harmful impacts of white supremacy on people of color have been a driving force in my efforts to dismantle whiteness.

As such, I end my positionality statement by returning, as I have many times before, to the words of Malcolm X:

Where the really sincere white people have got to do their “proving” of themselves is not among the black victims, but out on the battle lines of where America’s racism really is — and that’s in their own home communities; America’s racism is among their fellow whites. That’s where sincere whites who really mean to accomplish something have got
to work…And in our mutual sincerity, we might be able to show a road to the salvation of America’s very soul. (X & Haley, 1965, p. 433)

**Results**

During the analysis process, I reviewed each verbatim transcript and associated audio recording several times to familiarize myself with and immerse myself in the data. I used my researcher journal to log methodological decisions, reflect on interview experiences, and attend to my preconceptions and subjectivities. I also engaged in memo writing throughout the analysis process as new concepts and analytical questions emerged (Charmaz, 2014). I compared segments of data (e.g., incidents; Charmaz, 2014) within the same interview and with other interviews and modified the interview protocol slightly when indicated by the data to promote exploration of emergent conceptual ideas (Charmaz, 2014).

Two formal modifications to the interview protocol were made after interview two (Rapunzel) and interview four (Frankie) as new initial codes emerged. These modifications consisted of including an additional prompt, “[Prompt for/explore emotional experiences],” under interview question 14 and 15 (see Appendix C: Interview Protocol). These modifications were made in an effort to further explore emergent analytical questions regarding the influence of inhibiting and motivating emotional experiences.

Open coding methods were conducted in the initial phase of analysis (Charmaz, 2014). I began by coding segments of data using gerunds (Charmaz, 2016; Cunningham & Carmichael, 2017). Charmaz (2014) contends that “in vivo codes help to preserve participants’ meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself…[and] are characteristic of social worlds…” (pp. 199-201). I implemented the use of in vivo codes while coding segments of data to ensure my interpretation of participants’ language and meaning was accurate. The use of gerunds and in
vivo codes enhanced my understanding of the processes showing up in the data (Charmaz, 2016). The initial phase of analysis resulted in a total of 92 codes.

Next, I conducted focused coding procedures to begin synthesizing, scrutinizing, and conceptualizing the data. I reviewed initial codes to identify and develop the most salient codes, which were characterized by the codes with “greater analytic power” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 210). To define codes and determine which ones are most representative of the data and therefore better serve as focused codes, Charmaz (2014) recommends comparing codes with codes and considering the following questions: “What do you find when you compare your initial codes with data?, In which ways might your initial codes reveal patterns?, Which of these codes best account for the data?, Have you raised these codes to focused codes?, What do your comparisons between codes indicate?, [and] Do your focused codes reveal gaps in the data?” (p. 210). I used clustering, “a non-linear, visual, and flexible technique” (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 274) and memo writing (Charmaz, 2016) in this phase of analysis to bring in raw segments of data and compare, analyze, and refine the conceptual strength of potential codes. The use of clustering and memo writing allowed me to stay engaged with the data, analyze codes and concepts, consider relationships within and between the data, and expand on areas of inquiry (Charmaz, 2014). Consequently, patterns and processes representing larger segments of data emerged, and I was compelled to follow an affective thread in the data. This figurative “affective thread” symbolizes connections and patterns throughout the interview transcripts. Through clustering and exploring relationships between and within the data, emotions such as shame, embarrassment, fear, hope, compassion, etc. emerged as noteworthy influences on participants’ development. I further used memo writing to reflect and expand on emergent affective patterns, which generated a consistent and distinct affective process throughout the data.
The four themes and ten concepts emerged from the analysis are detailed in Figure 1 and are substantiated by verbatim excerpts from participants. In addition, the data suggested a set of personality attributes and shared values as ancillary influences on participants’ development. These factors, though not directly related to life experiences specific to being a white ally or engaging in anti-racism activism, appeared to interconnect, and facilitate participants’ critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development. Ancillary influences have been categorized as **Facilitating Factors** and include *Openness, Justice Sensitivity, Empathy, Curiosity, Critical Thinking,* and *Shared Values.* Interview transcripts were the primary method of identifying these facilitating factors. Participants’ verbatim descriptions of the experiences they perceived as influential on their critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development highlighted these factors. For instance, several participants spoke about having pre-existing characteristics of, “a strong sense of justice,” “being open to new experiences, uncomfortable conversations, stepping outside of my comfort zone,” “having a lot of empathy,” “having the ability to critically think.” Additionally, “shared values” among participants was defined by verbatim statements and consisted of fairness, equity and equality, and personal and social responsibility to engage in social activism efforts.
Facilitating Factors, Themes, and Concepts

Theme One: Disorienting Incidents

All six participants shared a significant initial experience of not only becoming aware of being white and what being white means as related to racial justice and anti-racism but also the impact of powerful emotions on their awareness. Each distinct incident coincided with participants’ *glimpsing into the racial reality* of which they were largely unconscious until a particular point in time. Each participant illustrated these temporal glimpses and co-occurring emotional experiences throughout the interview process.

*Glimpsing Into the Racial Reality.* Some participants reflected on their experiences learning accurate historical knowledge and referenced the prominence of whitewashing in history textbooks for primary and secondary education in the U.S. For instance, Dolly reflected on her experience,
It was this undergrad sociology class, I think that’s when I learned about the actual history and how other groups have been treated and marginalized [in the U.S.]… I remember first learning about redlining… and just that white people have a lot more privilege than other racial groups.

Sally described her experience hearing about the lived experiences of people of color during the 2016 election, “I had a pretty diverse classroom of people… so, just hearing other people's views, perceptions, and lived experiences versus mine… just hearing them communicate how [the current sociopolitical climate] was impacting them and making them feel as people of color.”

Frankie reflected on her time working at a food bank after graduating with her undergraduate degree when she witnessed racial oppression and the inner workings of a white supremacist, capitalist non-profit system first-hand,

…So, having a glimpse into what it really looks like… A lot of the people who worked at the food bank … were recipients of the food that they themselves dropped off three days earlier. I think seeing that system up close and seeing the nonprofit industrial complex up close and seeing these systems- yeah, we're feeding people, but the food that we're putting in these bags isn't food. It’s like every single ill in society can be seen within a lot of non-profits, but in a food bank it’s fucking acute.

Encountering Intense Emotional Discomfort. The defining feature of these incidents seemed to be intersecting emotional discomfort. Harley reflected on how becoming aware of their white privilege coincided with intense emotional discomfort. They described a distinct incident their senior year in high school when Harley received a significantly lighter punishment than their friend, who self-identifies as a Black male, after they skipped a class together, “yeah,
that was really upsetting. It *really* [emphasis added] bothered me and honestly, I’m *still* [emphasis added] bothered by it. Looking back, I can see how clearly racist it was, but at the time I was just pissed and like really confused.”

Participants further detailed how glimpsing into the racial reality and encountering emotional discomfort resulted in varying degrees of increased self-reflection:

I felt a lot of shame in just who I was in high school and where I grew up and things that my family said- says and believes. At the time, I would just say, ‘oh yeah, that’s definitely not cool,’ instead of calling it what it is and what it was, which was absolutely racism. So, I think those types of feelings come up of embarrassment or shame at it taking so long for me to realize. (Sally)

Most participants described their awareness of their white privilege, racial injustice, and white supremacy as happening in phases but attributed significant experiences as an undergraduate to developing their understanding. Dolly reflected on encountering intense emotional discomfort while learning about redlining and Jim Crow Laws, “I think it was *really* [emphasis added] uncomfortable for me because I think it’s easy to neglect that any of that goes on. I think it’s really unfair that people are treated differently just because of their skin color.” Sally explained,

Growing up in a small white town, I think I had the awareness of being white, but it's different than what my awareness of being white is now. Undergrad was a time where I gained a more robust understanding of what [being white] actually means.

For participants, experiencing a disorienting incident appeared to serve as a catalyst for their engagement in self-reflection. However, they seemed to perceive their experiences of deeply uncomfortable emotions as a substantial influence on their development. Overall, these
individual experiences sparked a more immediate consciousness shift and therefore were key influences on participant’s critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development.

**Theme Two: Shifting Consciousness**

All six participants attributed their critical self-reflection, increased awareness, and heightened understanding of racial injustice to experiencing disorienting incidents. Yet subjectively, as participants engaged in more self-reflection, *withstanding uncomfortable emotions* emerged as an essential practice.

**Withstanding Uncomfortable Emotions.** Participants detailed experiences of prolonged and deeply uncomfortable emotions coinciding with their expanding awareness of whiteness, the extent of racial injustice in the U.S., and their own role in perpetuating systems of power and oppression. Dolly recalled an experience of realizing the ways she perpetuated racism in the past by not challenging acts of racism in her family, “I kind of just went along with it, which again is in and of itself shameful that I didn’t say anything. And I just kind of went along with those comments for many years. I would not say anything.”

Harley reflected on withstanding emotional discomfort, “yeah, you know, it’s hard to not [emphasis added] feel ashamed and embarrassed about who I was, like past versions of myself when I absolutely said and believed racist shit.” The ability to withstand uncomfortable emotions seemed to presuppose participants’ on-going engagement in self-reflection and analysis of systems of power and oppression.

Yet, some participants described how they have used uncomfortable emotions as motivation to stay engaged in the work, suggesting facilitating factors may play a significant role in participants’ ability to tolerate discomfort. Harley continued, “…it’s not about the shame or embarrassment or even guilt I feel, it’s not about me or my emotions. It’s about racial justice and
equality, you know, people of color are suffering and dying, so it can’t be about me.” Other participants echoed similar sentiments, “I’ve always had a strong sense of justice for anyone being mistreated. I think my deep need for justice and fairness has shaped me and motivated me to keep fighting for it despite what I’m feeling” (Avo).

Frankie further reflected on how facilitative factors, particularly shared values, and emotional aspects, such as concern for the well-being of others, compassion, love, and kindness have influenced her commitment and engagement anti-racism activism:

Well, first of all, my life feels worthless to me if it is only about me…I think this is just a personality thing. Honestly, I do. This isn’t work that I did myself. It’s just innate to me to give a fuck about people around me in a way that in some people it's really not. There are people it does not come naturally to... It just happens to come naturally to me to care. Also, injustice genuinely just makes me fucking irate.

**Reckoning With the Racial Reality.** The intentionally illusive nature of whiteness makes it so that whiteness and white supremacy are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere and seldom directly named or examined. Participants shared their subjective experience with the process of coming to terms with the reality that racial disparities have lethal consequences for people of color, and specifically black people in the U.S. Reckoning with the racial reality is intended to categorize participants’ reflections on their subjective experiences with unraveling white supremacy and coinciding experiences of facing self and identity questions that illustrate shifting consciousness. Rapunzel reflected on a noteworthy experience of reckoning:

It left an impact on me because I’ve heard people say the same things. I was like, ‘gosh, I think my mom has said something like that before’ and just like the idea that we’re perpetuating the same thing. Here we are 40 years later and it’s the same conversations
that I've heard like my own family and friends have and like nothing has changed and to what extent are we perpetuating that? I think that was probably the most eye opening for me.

Frankie illustrated how she reckoned with her privilege, power, and the benefits of whiteness when she was pulled over by a police officer for speeding and did not have to “[wonder] if I'm going to go home.” She reflected further on the experience:

When I consider that… the *fucking ingrained* [emphasis added] privilege that I knew that I had at the age of 21. That ingrained sense of superiority. That's the thing, it's that right to comfort… you can get away with it. You can get away with it in America… never picking any of it apart. Never considering how your skin plays a factor in your becoming.

Sally encapsulated the coinciding emotional discomfort most participants experienced while reckoning with their own role in perpetuating white supremacist ideologies:

Yeah, I think it's uncomfortable for people to say white people have treated Black people *horribly* [emphasis added] in this country… The group of people that I belong to have treated and continue treating Black people *really really* [emphasis added] badly, so by association me, who I am, who I represent, has and does treat Black people really horribly. We have to admit our own role in it, and that's uncomfortable and just brings up feelings of internal conflict and maybe even just a flood of realizations that we’re not ready to confront.

For participants, withstanding uncomfortable emotions appears to be a necessary precursor to reckoning with racial reality and may be enhanced by facilitating factors, such as shared values, openness, justice sensitivity, and empathy. Participants appeared to be presented with critical opportunities to re-consider their self-concept, their beliefs about who they are, and
how they see others and the world as they attempted to unravel white supremacy. These critical opportunities were accompanied by prolonged emotional discomfort amid participants coming to terms with their own roles in perpetuating systems of power and oppression at varying levels.

**Theme Three: Re-Orienting Self-Concept**

Participants who took advantage of these critical opportunities began re-orienting their self-concept. Some participants seemed to adopt a new sense of purpose that shifted their view of self, others, and the world. As a result, their beliefs and actions appeared to better align with their new self-concept.

**Getting Unstuck.** Participants first described a need for getting unstuck, which is characterized by the efforts they made to withstand uncomfortable emotions and re-orient their self-concept. In addition, facilitative factors appeared to augment participants’ ability to re-orient. Most participants described seeking out novel experiences and stepping out of their comfort zone as their main efforts. For instance, Rapunzel shared, “…having some uncomfortable conversations and really learning from the experiences of others. That was very different for me.” Specifically, efforts toward getting unstuck appeared to be enhanced by facilitative factors, such as openness, curiosity, and shared values. Rapunzel continued, “I just tried to be open to those experiences and even though I remember being really uncomfortable, I really learned a lot.”

Other participants shared similarly, “I think I've always been curious about other people from different backgrounds. I’ve really been able to step outside of my comfort zone and be in different or new environments, around different types of people because of that curiosity” (Dolly). Avo reflected on how their efforts have also resulted in increased self-reflection, “and
now, you know, I think when I notice any discomfort, it’s kind of a sign that I need to reflect more on whatever it is making me uncomfortable.”

**Reconstructing Old Perceptions.** Many participants revisited past experiences during the interview and offered new interpretations of those experiences through their present awareness and understanding. These incidents were categorized as *reconstructing old perceptions* and appeared to be an important part of re-orienting their self-concept. Examining past experiences helped participants gain a deeper understanding of self, others, and the world and supported them in forming new meanings. Sally revisited experiences of witnessing the differential treatment of black students in high school, “…at the time, [I] didn't understand it as a double standard or hypocritical or racist” and reflected on her perception of those experiences with her present awareness of racial injustice, “and now I look back and of course it was racist, it was all racism.”

Harley shared their examination of past experiences through their present awareness and understanding:

You know, we’re [whites] taught that we’re better than other people, better than black people for sure and I really believed it. Looking back, I’m like, ‘what the fuck was I thinking?’ that’s just so racist, it’s just so [emphasis added] racist.

Frankie reflected on being socialized to racialization in early childhood and offered a new understanding of those experiences:

It maybe doesn't even register as race or as class, but it registers as hierarchy when you're a kid, I think. Like, we're allowed to be a certain way with these people because we are of this other group of people. And I think it's all kind of intangible. [It wasn’t] classified in language in my head as a child, but I recognize that throughout my whole life it is this
socialized conceptualizing of who are we in comparison… It's a ranking sort of system, that is never spoken, but it’s known.

**Shifting Ideologies.** Participants illustrated how reconstructing old perceptions shifted their personal ideologies. Sally shared her reconstructed perception of racism and illustrated the influence of this modified perception on how she sees herself, others, and the world:

[Racism] is holding the belief that one racial group is superior to other racial groups. The superiority piece is the important piece for me. Because of the structure, because of white supremacy, we [whites] are inherently racist. We can't escape that. That exists objectively… [it comes] from the depths of our brain because it's what we inherently believe… because of racism.

Participants shared similarly about how their perceptions of their white privilege has shaped their beliefs and self-concept, “I have every advantage, my entire experience, my entire life is privileged in every way” (Avo). Dolly reflected on a similar sentiment, “I can recognize the privilege and the power I’ve had- that again, I haven’t earned, I was just born with it- and really challenging myself to recognize it.” Dolly continued, “I think it’s important that white people talk about these things. It’s important that white people hold each other accountable and acknowledge our privilege.” Dolly’s reflection also represents how her sense of what is important has shifted.

As participants’ perception of self, others, and the world shifted, their past experiences were critical influences on the formation of a new identity. These excerpts illustrate how participants’ previous versions of self have synthesized with a present version, highlighting a potential process that occurs during critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development. Additionally, participants appeared to strengthen and gain confidence in their sense of self as
their deeply felt commitment to racial justice and rejuvenated sense of purpose began to better align. This enhanced alignment seemed to significantly contribute to participants’ engagement in anti-racism activism efforts.

**Theme Four: Expanding Consciousness**

As participants reflected on the perceived influences on their commitment and engagement to anti-racism activism efforts, they appeared to conceptualize their role as an anti-racist as both *acknowledging and giving up privilege and power* and *holding self and other whites accountable*. All six participants acknowledged the on-going lifetime commitment in anti-racism activism, as Frankie illustrated, “…being anti-racist, it's not like you fucking make it and you're done. It's these decisions constantly throughout every single day because we're presented with it all day every day.” For some, persistent engagement in anti-racism activism has engendered existential feelings, such as a sense of purpose and responsibility, a stronger connection to broader humanity, and a sense of hope in a more fulfilling future for all.

**Acknowledging and Giving Up Privilege and Power.** Most participants shared that acknowledging and giving up their own privilege and power is an essential feature of their engagement in anti-racism activism as white people, “and again, I didn’t earn this. The reason that I have this privilege is only because of the way that I look.” (Dolly). Other participants maintained similar assertions, “we [whites] all do have privilege. I've been afforded a lot of opportunities and I recognize that comes from my race… and also what’s been afforded to my family is based on their race” (Rapunzel).

Sally shared about her active efforts to give up her privilege and power while attending protests centered on racial justice:
…putting myself between the cops and Black people who are at the protest. So, using that privilege, like physical privilege in a way to protect Black people from violence or arrest. I think starting to do that was kind of a turning point in activism for me.” She further shared other ways she actively gives up her power and privilege, “I also regularly donate to bail funds because, Black people and people of color are disproportionately arrested and given high bail amounts. So, I think using my financial privilege to donate to bail funds is an important form of anti-racism work.

*Holding Self and Other Whites Accountable.* By far the most common form of anti-racism activism among participants was holding themselves and other whites accountable through the use of various strategies:

I think the biggest part of this work is holding myself accountable. I regularly seek out BIPOC activists doing anti-racism work through social media, so like following BIPOC anti-racism activists or listening to podcasts, reading books, watching YouTube videos from BIPOC activists, things like that. (Avo)

Frankie shared about more recent personal work in her efforts to hold whites accountable:

I’m trying on for size this new philosophy. I can yell forever. Rage is not hard for me to access. Harder for me to access is conversation with people who are propagated to talking points. So, I’ve thought a lot about how I show up in these spaces that are primarily white spaces… how do I have this conversation with [white] people… in earnest.

Harley reflected on their efforts:

I will absolutely call out my family, especially my parents for their racist behavior. At this point, they know that I just won’t tolerate it because I didn’t speak to my dad for almost a year after he said some racist shit. I gave him a book, told him he needed to
educate himself, and do better and I refused to talk to him until he understood that the things he was saying are racist and harmful. And that was really hard to do...but it had to be done. So yeah, and I’ve lost friends, I’ve stopped going to family things when I know certain racist people will be there. And after not speaking to my dad, he gets it and now he’s making an effort to do better.

**Experiencing Existential Emotions.** As participants embraced new ideologies rooted in racial justice and anti-racism, they appeared more regularly and actively engaged in activism efforts. Still, one participant spoke more directly to their subjective experience with an identity shift, “I mean, it's weird. I have come up against this weird identity crisis for a lot of years now” (Frankie). She continued reflecting on what motivates her through this identity crisis, “but, you know, it’s just hope, I think. It's just hope that there is a possibility that we can live in a world that isn't run by death.”

There also appeared to be a sense of connection to humanity through shared values and commitment to anti-racism work, “we're really all in this together” (Avo). Harley also reflected on their values as they relate to anti-racism activism, “I think, for me, I feel connected to other people and I know we all want the same, so I think that keeps me committed to the work.” Another participant referenced a sense of collectiveness as motivation to maintain their commitment to anti-racism activism, “how do we [whites] tap into that there is freedom for all of us here? For all [emphasis added] of us” (Frankie).

The notion of collective efforts, compassion, inspiration, and hope were highlighted as participants reflected on their motivations for continued engagement in anti-racism activism efforts. These statements demonstrate that existential feelings, such as a sense of hope, compassion, love, and/or connection to broader humanity, may have a powerful positive
influence on consistent motivation and engagement in anti-racism work. Further, participants appeared to develop a sense of social responsibility and a perspective of racial justice as essential to their own humanity and to the well-being of all humans, which guided their continued engagement in anti-racism activism. Overall, participants illustrated a shared sense of purpose and meaning in racial justice efforts.

**Discussion**

This constructivist grounded theory qualitative study explored the life experiences young white adults perceive as influential to their critical consciousness development and how that process augments anti-racist identity development and engagement in anti-racism activism. This study contributes to social science scholarship by expanding our understanding of the intricacies associated with white critical consciousness development in ways that might better equip our field in assisting in fostering anti-racist identities and increasing transformative racial justice efforts. In addition to supporting prior research on critical consciousness (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Diemer et al., 2015, 2020), anti-racist identity development (Atkins et al., 2017; Mosely et al., 2021; Roberts & Rizzo, 2021; Spanierman et al., 2017; Sue, 2017), and white racial identity development (Helms, 1990, 2017; DiAngelo, 2018; Tatum, 1994, 1997), the present findings offer new considerations for critical consciousness research.

Below, I draw from key aspects of participants’ lived experiences, situate the findings in existing literature, and explore potential alternative paths to augment current theoretical models of critical consciousness as an emotional, cognitive, and behavioral phenomenon. I also discuss implications for research and action and limitations.
Summary of Findings

Four themes, 10 concepts, and seven facilitating factors were derived from the analysis of six semi-structured interviews. Emergent themes and concepts highlight a complex process of critical consciousness development among participants wherein phases intersect and are regularly revisited.

The first theme, Disorienting Incidents, addresses the first research question regarding life experiences participants perceived as influential on their ability to critically self-reflect on and analyze racial injustice. Disorienting Incidents is characterized by participants’ recalling at least one disorienting incident whereby a glimpse into the racial reality coincided with intense emotional discomfort. These glimpses and emotional discomfort elicited a shift in their subjective awareness of both their own white racial identity and systems of power and oppression. This theme aligns, in part, with Freire’s (1973) concept of critical awareness. According to Freire (1968/2000, 1973), critical awareness is the cognitive process of overcoming false consciousness by acquiring explicit intellectual knowledge of the reality of social circumstances and systems of oppression.

The second theme, Shifting Consciousness, is applicable to all four research questions. This theme further attends to the first research question by emphasizing the potential influence of emotionally and cognitively disorienting incidents on participants’ ability to critically self-reflect and analyze systems of power and oppression. The theme of Shifting Consciousness also offers some insight into the second and third research questions, particularly in terms of participants’ perceived influences on their motivation not only to initially engage but also to maintain their engagement in anti-racism activism efforts. Findings within this theme also indicate that
participants perceived tolerating emotional discomfort as a generally challenging aspect of their development.

The third theme, Re-Orienting Self-Concept, addresses the third and fourth research questions, specifically regarding perceived influences on maintaining a commitment to anti-racism activism and overcoming challenges and barriers. As participants nurtured their ability to tolerate discomfort, they sought new experiences and pushed themselves out of their comfort zone in ways that promoted a deeper understanding (Freire, 1973) of self, others, and the world. In the process, participants were emboldened to form new meanings of past experiences with their present awareness and understanding (Freire, 1968/2000, 1973). Re-constructing old perceptions appeared to be a significant part of the process for participants, as it allowed them to consider alternative perspectives, such as anti-oppressive ideologies\(^1\) (Kumashiro, 2000), and foster a new sense of purpose oriented toward actualizing racial justice. Findings suggest that facilitative factors, such as openness, curiosity, and shared values (e.g., equity, fairness, and responsibility) significantly contributed to participants’ ideological and identity shifts.

The fourth theme, Expanding Consciousness, further contributes to the third and fourth research questions and highlights a reciprocal pattern between actively engaging in anti-racism activism, self-reflection, and analysis (Freire, 1968/2000, 1973). Additionally, participants’ emerging self-concepts as anti-racist appeared to strengthen as they continued engaging in actions that better aligned with their values and newly embraced ideologies. The duration of time engaged in anti-racism efforts seemed to be a noteworthy influence on participants’ continued commitment and engagement in anti-racism activism. Those with many years of consistent involvement in anti-racism activism seemed to develop more of an existential orientation

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\(^1\) *Anti-Oppression is the strategies, theories, actions and practices that actively challenge systems of oppression on an ongoing basis in one's daily life and in social justice/change work.*
characterized by enhanced self- and other-compassion, a more collective sense of responsibility in their racial justice efforts, and a broad sense of hope for a better future that included the possibility of materializing liberation.

Freire (1992) asserted, “I am hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of an existential, concrete imperative… my hope is necessary, but it is not enough. Alone, it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water” (p. 8). This existential orientation also appeared to encompass a blended motivation wherein the impetus for engagement in activism efforts is both a desire to become “more fully human” (Freire, 1968/2000, pp. 84) and the collective “pursuit of full humanity” (Freire, 1968/2000, pp. 86; Straubhaar, 2015). These findings suggest that an existential orientation may nurture the type of critical consciousness (or “critical hope”) Freire (1968/2000) championed as vital to materializing liberation for all humanity. These findings also align, in part, with Freire’s (1973) conceptualization of critical consciousness as a personal transformation perspective.

Notably, the process of critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development among participants encompassed prolonged and intensified emotional and psychological discomfort (e.g., further feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, fear, anxiety). Most participants illustrated an ability to use uncomfortable emotions as motivators for continued engagement in anti-racism efforts. Some further perceived innate personality characteristics, such as openness, empathy, curiosity, and critical thinking along with shared values (e.g., fairness and responsibility) as facilitating factors for their ability to withstand intense discomfort. Those able to withstand the discomfort, circumvented getting stuck, continued engaging in reflection and analysis, and fostered resilience to emotional distress. Participants also demonstrated higher levels of
motivation to act and a higher likelihood of engaging in anti-racism activism due to their ability to withstand emotional discomfort.

Conversely, some reflected on more inhibiting outcomes of intense emotional discomfort, including generally lower motivation and lower engagement in activism efforts. Those inhibited by emotional discomfort also identified fewer facilitating factors compared to participants who used emotional discomfort as motivation. For instance, when Rapunzel shared about her difficulty withstanding uncomfortable emotions and illustrated how this emotional discomfort inhibited her developmental process, I responded by making increased efforts to inquire about and explore her emotions throughout the interview. By attending to her emotions, she was able to sit with and practice tolerating the discomfort.

The following exchange depicts the importance of exploring emotional components of the developmental process. This excerpt also includes my dialogue during Rapunzel’s reflections on her interview experience to illustrate my attempts to uphold my responsibility and attend to any risks of re-centering whiteness as a white researcher conducting whiteness research. I offer this interchange to demonstrate the seemingly critical need for whites to cultivate the ability to withstanding uncomfortable emotions so as not to continuing centering ourselves and perpetuating harm.

Rapunzel: I think that was definitely different… reflecting on how it makes me feel. I think reflecting on my [emotional] reactions throughout the interview has helped me recognize how much my own emotions have an influence on my actions.

Me: Right and whiteness and white supremacy are systems that benefit us in every way… our existence is one of privilege and power. We can feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, ashamed, or guilty and [emphasis added] not let those feelings stop us from being open to
learning, growing, taking action, and continuing to make efforts to do better. Finding that space where we can tolerate those uncomfortable feelings and overcome any emotional barriers is also a form of anti-racism work and really important work for us specifically. Rapunzel: Yeah… yeah, I like how you said that, yeah that makes a lot of sense.

**Connections to Contemporary Scholarship**

The present findings suggest that participants perceived their critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development to be strongly facilitated and enhanced by their emotional experiences; this emotional component has received varying attention in the literature. The present study is consistent with anti-racism research, which has indicated that emotions significantly influence white anti-racist identity development (Helms, 1990; Neville et al., 2000; Spanierman et al., 2009). In contrast, research examining the role of emotions in critical consciousness development in any population has been relatively limited (Bañales et al., 2021; Heberle et al., 2020; Jemal, 2017; Wallin-Ruschman, 2014; Zembylas, 2007).

**Anti-Racism**

The present findings support and extend prior anti-racism research examining the influence of emotions on white anti-racist identity development (DiAngelo, 2018; Helms, 1990; Spanierman et al., 2009; Sue, 2017). Empirical research has highlighted the need for whites to increase their ability to tolerate emotional discomfort, particularly if reflection and action are inhibited by distressing emotions (Spanierman & Cabrera, 2014; Thomann & Suyemoto, 2018). Findings from the present study indicate that fostering emotional resiliency bolstered critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development among participants, in turn, enhancing their engagement in racial justice and liberatory activism efforts. While participants viewed their subjective experience with developing critical consciousness and an anti-racist identity as
challenging (e.g., emotionally, psychologically, spiritually), they also seemed to express an expanded sense of possibility (Freire, 1968/2000) as a result of being able to withstand emotional discomfort.

Extending prior research on the relationship between moral development and anti-racist behavior (Bañales et al., 2021; Pahlke et al., 2021), participants from the present study also perceived personal aspects, such as justice sensitivity and shared values of fairness, equity, and responsibility as facilitating factors in their critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development. Further, the present findings indicated that participants who perceived their personal morals and values as incompatible with racism experienced higher levels of motivation to act and higher levels of engagement in anti-racism activism. As participants lived in ways that better aligned with their values and morals, they correspondingly cultivated the emotional, psychological, and social resiliency that anti-racism work necessitates. As such, it appears that personal morals (e.g., fairness, responsibility, equity, etc.) fostered higher levels of motivation and engagement in anti-racism activism among participants (Smith et al., 2019; Woolverton & Marks, 2022).

Also consistent with previous research, findings from this study suggest that young white adults who have engaged in anti-racism activism for longer periods of time experience decreased feelings of guilt and shame and increased feelings of compassion and joy and a higher sense of connection to humanity (Smith & Redington, 2010). The fourth theme in the present study, Expanding Consciousness, illustrates how persistent engagement in anti-racist activism can foster a higher sense of purpose and responsibility and a stronger connection to humanity among young white adults. Taking both previous research and findings from the present study into
account, it appears that critical consciousness facilitates anti-racist identity development in white young adults (Mosely et al., 2021; Ngai & Koehn, 2011).

**Critical Consciousness**

The processes identified in this study partially align with existing critical consciousness scholarship (Diemer et al., 2017; Rapa et al., 2020) and Freirean pedagogy (1968/2000). For instance, regular engagement in critical self-reflection and critical analysis appeared to inspire and maintain critical action efforts among participants in the present study (Diemer et al., 2015, 2020). However, conceptual limitations and inconsistencies persist in critical consciousness scholarship (Carlson et al., 2006; Heberle et al., 2020; Jemal, 2017; Pinedo et al., 2024; Wray-Lake et al., 2022). These discrepancies present unique issues in our ability to comprehensively understand and operationalize developmental components of critical consciousness (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Watts et al., 2011).

In alignment with Freirean pedagogy (1968/2000, 1973), a few studies suggested that “critical curiosity” (Clark & Seider, 2020) and critical thinking skills aid the developmental process of critical consciousness (Garcia et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2014; Watts et al., 2011). Correspondingly, participants in the present study also perceived their curiosity and critical thinking skills as significant influences on their critical consciousness development. Although findings from the current study illustrated how personal morals and values fostered critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development, research exploring the connections between critical consciousness and identity development among whites and young adults remains limited (Fullam, 2017; Ginwright, 2010; Heberle et al., 2020).

Some conceptualizations of critical consciousness have proposed a two-fold sequential developmental process wherein initial critical reflection might lead to critical motivation, which
then might lead to critical action. Following this initial developmental sequence, these components shift to reciprocally influencing one another (Baker & Brookins 2014; Heberle et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2011). Other conceptualizations of critical consciousness have proposed that critical reflection, motivation, and action develop and influence each other reciprocally (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Diemer et al., 2020; Watts & Delgado, 2015). That is, engaging in critical action might lead to critical motivation, which might lead to critical self-reflection and additional action. The process among participants in the present study was dynamic and fluid initially and throughout development, which aligns with the latter conceptualizations.

Current models of development have conceptualized critical consciousness as a cognitive and behavioral phenomenon (e.g., critical thinking, self-reflection, analysis, understanding, critical action; Diemer et al., 2015; Watts et al., 2011). While a few studies have highlighted the potential influence of emotional components on critical consciousness development, these studies did not offer any related theoretical implications (Carlson et al., 2006; Olle & Fouad, 2015; Sonn & Montero, 2009). Gaps in these conceptualizations (Jemal et al., 2017; Heberle et al., 2020; Pillen et al., 2020; Silva, 2012) suggest that conceptual frameworks of critical consciousness are incomplete.

Further, the relationship between critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action is not well understood. For instance, heightened levels of critical consciousness have been linked to more perceived barriers to social transformation, lower levels of motivation, and less likelihood to engage in activism (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Diemer et al., 2015; Godfrey et al., 2019; Olle & Fouad, 2014; Watts et al., 2011). The link between higher levels of critical consciousness development and lower levels of motivation and action directly conflicts with
other empirical evidence suggesting critical motivation results from engagement in critical reflection and/or critical action (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Watts & Delgado, 2015).

The present study offers important contributions to current critical consciousness scholarship by suggesting that emotions played a crucial role in participants’ level of motivation, which bolstered their overall critical consciousness development. Participants in the present study highlighted their embodied emotional experiences throughout the process of critical consciousness. In fact, emotional experiences were emphasized by participants as a more substantial influence than cognitive or behavioral factors on their motivation to engage in activism efforts.

The study findings meaningfully contribute to critical consciousness literature and suggest two important considerations: 1) learning to tolerate intense emotional distress, including ambiguity, appears to be an essential component of white critical consciousness development among participants (Boyd, 2020; Heberle et al., 2020) and 2) emotional aspects of learning may be a more essential influence on critical consciousness development among participants than current scholarship suggests (Carlson et al., 2006; Herbele et al., 2020; Jemal, 2017; Olle & Fouad, 2015; Pillen et al., 2020). Perhaps, looking to affect studies for a better understanding of the relationship between emotion, cognition, and behavior would augment critical theorists’ current conceptualizations of critical consciousness development.

**Affect Studies**

Theory already exists linking cognitive and emotional components of critical consciousness. The longstanding notion that emotion and learning are fundamentally and intricately intertwined is reflected in embodiment (Maiese, 2017; Colombetti, 2014; Thompson, 2007) and affect studies (Ahmed, 2004; Boler, 1999, 2014, 2020). For the purposes of the
In the present study, Ahmed’s (2004) rationale for primarily using ‘emotion’ in her work is worthwhile as she looks to its etymology, which indicates the word generated from moveō, a Latin verb meaning “move, stir, affect” (Neta & Haas, 2019). Ahmed (2004) draws from feminist and queer theory to explore how emotions connect to cognitive and behavioral dimensions of personal and social change (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014). She also draws from the work of Audre Lorde (1984) to further conceptualize emotion as it relates to race and racism (Ahmed, 2004).

Ahmed (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014) problematizes the mind-body dichotomy and argues that cognitive-focused models of personal transformation are insufficient in creating lasting social transformation. She characterizes emotional reactions as embodied and visceral sensations or what she refers to as “surfacing” (i.e., intensification of an emotional experience; Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014). She maintains that surfacing is often believed to be “consciousness” due to the physical manifestations of intensified emotion, when in fact these encounters are more experiential (i.e., visceral sensations; Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014). Along with other affect theorists (Anwaruddin, 2016; Boler, 1999, 2014, 2020; Mendelowitz, 2024), Ahmed (2004) argues that it is emotion that directs our attention to the type of reflection and analysis present in the developmental process of critical consciousness and emotion that motivates and directs our behavior, such as engaging in anti-racism activism efforts (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014).

We can also understand emotional components of critical consciousness through the framings of affect theory in Megan Boler’s (1999; 2015) work that draws from feminist and cultural studies to explore the complexities of emotion and cognition. Boler (1999) asserted that “emotions define how and what one chooses to see” (p. 177) and argued that emotions play an essential role in moral judgments and ethical reasoning. Boler’s (1999) argument regarding the role of emotions in moral judgments clearly connects to the present studies focus on college
students’ moral development (Kohlberg, 1991; Mentkowski & Straight, 1983; Rest, 1988; Whiteley, 1982). Further, the present findings illustrate that morals and values significantly influence developmental aspects of critical consciousness and anti-racism, which offers important considerations for critical praxis in higher education.

In her “pedagogy of discomfort,” Boler (1999) and later in her work on critical hope (2014), she offers “an invitation to inquiry” (p. 176) wherein emotional discomfort presents opportunities to self-interrogate our morals, values, and ideologies. From this perspective, tolerating ambiguity is a necessary means of not only engaging in forms of critical self-reflection and analysis but also facilitating lasting social transformation (Ahmed, 2004; Boler, 1999, 2014). The present findings are consistent with prior research, providing additional support for whites fostering the ability to tolerate uncomfortable emotions, such as ambiguity. The study findings also indicate that a core component of the process of personal transformation in critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development is critical reflection and analysis of values, morals, and beliefs.

Ahmed’s (2004) and Boler’s (1999, 2014) work parallels critical consciousness scholarship in many ways while prioritizing consideration for the role of emotions. The present findings and empirical evidence confirm that emotion, cognition, and behavior are dynamically intertwined, and emotions are not only central to cognition and behavior but also strengthen cognitive and behavioral dimensions of learning (Ahmed, 2004; Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014; Anwaruddin, 2016; Morgan et al., 2021). Findings also bolster these notions by demonstrating how emotions can enable or impede participants motivation and engagement in self-reflection, analysis, and anti-racism activism.
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While the present study advances our understanding of critical consciousness development among white young adults, there are several limitations. First, this study relied on self-reported data, which is difficult to independently verify and given the topic, some participants might have altered their responses in an effort to present themselves in a more positive or socially desirable manner. Due to some external constraints, the current study includes data from only six white young adults. Additionally, none of the participants in the present study self-identified as male. Given that the aim of Freirean pedagogy (1968/2000, 1973) is social change and liberation of all humanity, collective efforts must include the most privileged and powerful. Future qualitative research would benefit from including a greater number of participants and participants who self-identify as white and male. Future research may also benefit from expanding the age range of participants to include whites from middle- and late-adulthood populations. Doing so would help the field better understand how this process occurs across whites from various demographic populations and how development shifts over time.

Although recruitment efforts focused only on white participants with an already heightened level of critical consciousness and who have established active engagement in anti-racism activism efforts, participants held many intersecting identities (e.g., gender identity and sexual orientation). Future qualitative research grounded in intersectionality theory could investigate the processes by which whites who also hold marginalized identities develop critical consciousness. Such research would expand our understanding of the intricacies of critical consciousness development among those who hold identities at the intersection of privilege and
marginalization (Diemer et al., 2022; Godfrey & Burson, 2018; Heberle et al., 2020; Jemal, 2017).

This study used semi-structured interviews as the sole method of data collection. Future qualitative research on critical consciousness development could consider incorporating alternative data collection methods. Including methods such as observation, case studies, and focus groups could help us gain deeper insight into the emotional components highlighted in the present findings and enhance our understanding of the process by which critical consciousness develops for whites.

**Implications for Research and Action**

The present study offers unique contributions to critical consciousness scholarship and expands our understanding of the process by which critical consciousness develops among white young adults. Emotional influences on participants’ critical consciousness development are noteworthy findings with important implications for critical consciousness scholarship. These findings suggest a need for current models of critical consciousness to consider how the developmental process is facilitated and strengthened by emotion. Future qualitative research could address this gap by integrating affect theory frameworks into current models of critical consciousness development. For instance, researchers could use semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups to further investigate the extent to which emotions facilitate, impede, and intersect with cognitive (e.g., critical awareness, self-reflection, and analysis) and behavioral (e.g., critical action) components of critical consciousness development. Research exploring how and when emotions motivate whites to engage in anti-racism activism may be particularly important in resolving conceptual inconsistencies.
These findings may also extend to potential action-based implications, particularly strategies aimed at fostering anti-racist identities among whites through critical consciousness development, which in turn increases transformative action efforts toward achieving racial justice. Because whites are not directly adversely impacted by racial discrimination and oppression, it may be more beneficial to develop targeted programming that challenges them to reflect on and analyze the many benefits they receive for being white and their own roles in perpetuating systems of power and oppression. These findings call attention to the need for more novel pedagogical approaches that emphasize emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components of critical consciousness development (Mustakova-Possardt, 2004). Moving away from Westernized approaches that reinforce a mind-body dichotomy and focusing on holistic approaches that foster qualities in both heart and mind supports conceptual frameworks within affect studies (Ahmed, 2004; Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014) and may aid the transformation process.

These findings also suggest that action-based interventions for whites focused on enhancing abilities to withstand uncomfortable emotions may be particularly necessary. Efforts to increase whites’ tolerance of emotional distress could mitigate the occurrence of inhibiting emotional experiences in early phases of their critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development when whites may be more likely to return to a state of denial about their racial identity, privilege, and role in maintaining systems of power and oppression (Helms, 1990). An extensive body of psychological research has shown that distress tolerance skills can be taught (Chapman et al., 2011; Linehan, 2014; McKay et al., 2019). The use of mindfulness-based interventions would also increase emotional regulation and distress tolerance skills (Lotan et al., 2013; Nila et al., 2016; Woolverton & Marks, 2022). Additionally, drawing from affect studies, assisting whites in building tolerance and resiliency to emotional and psychological distress by
encouraging them to sit with their discomfort (Boler, 1999) may increase the potential for critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development. By increasing tolerance and resiliency to discomfort, whites may be more apt to use their emotions as motivation to engage in racial justice activism.

Considering that present findings showcase features of personal transformation and identity shifts as part of critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development, it might be beneficial to draw upon current adult transformative learning literature (Edwards & Cranton, 2013; Barrett, 2017) in developing effective interventions. Transformative learning is rooted in humanistic approaches and social constructivist theory (Perry, 2021). Mezirow’s (1978, 1990) transformative learning theory has many similarities to Freirean pedagogy (1968/2000, 1973). Mezirow’s (1978, 1990) and Freire’s pedagogies are both indigenous theories of adult education and learning that draw on critical theory and focus on actualizing social change (Fleming, 2022). While traditional theories have emphasized cognitive aspects of learning, more recent adult learning scholarship has shifted to exploring emotional dimensions of transformative learning (Carter & Nicolaides, 2023; Singer-Brodowski, 2023). Mälkki’s (2019) and Barrett’s (2017) work have garnered interest for their particular attention to the neurobiological connection between emotion and cognition and the integration of embodiment and emotion into existing adult transformative learning theory and praxis (Carter & Nicolaides, 2023).

There is empirical evidence suggesting embodied learning, expressive interventions, and the use of creativity, such as art, drawing, dance, music, or storytelling may function as a type of emotional exposure providing a catalyst to critical consciousness development (Boyd, 2020; Maiese, 2017; Neile, 2009; Slaten et al., 2016). Maiese (2017) examined the neurobiological dynamics of emotions as it relates to personal transformation. She asserted that dance is a way to
“establish empathic connections and contribute to shared understanding” (p. 13). She further asserted that, “moving in synchrony or coordinating movements with others can foster a feeling of togetherness by building positive rapport and trust among participants” (p. 13). Music also may foster critical consciousness development by harnessing emotional and motivational components of the process that offer new ways of seeing self, others, and the world (Maiese, 2017). Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015) suggested the use of role-playing to provide a glimpse into alternative perspectives. For whites, role-playing interventions may also need to include follow-up questions prompting reflection on and analysis of their privilege and power and the ways in which they uphold systems of oppression. Additionally, implementing interventions for whites exploring anti-oppressive ideologies and considering the collective benefits of anti-oppressive actions may also assist in fostering the type of sustainable motivation necessary for critical consciousness development and social transformation (Edwards, 2007).

Future research could also further explore the effectiveness of holistic approaches on fostering white critical consciousness and anti-racist identity development by exploring and identifying specific expressive interventions. This research would further assist our field in fostering anti-racist identity development and increasing racial justice activism efforts. Whites implementing action-based interventions to assist in these efforts would benefit from drawing from the work of and/or partnering with activists of color. Doing so would foster connection and community, prevent whites from re-centering whiteness in their activism work, and uphold Freire’s (1968/2000, 1973) conceptual aim of critical consciousness development.

**Conclusion**

The present study suggests that our current conceptual frameworks of critical consciousness development are incomplete. Findings reveal that emotions are present within and
between all phases of the developmental process of critical consciousness and play a fundamental role in shaping cognition, motivation, and action for white young adults. Expanding our conceptualization of critical consciousness development to incorporate the role of emotional components can also further our understanding of how critical consciousness can help foster anti-racist identity development and enhance engagement in anti-racism activism efforts. The present study advocates for critical consciousness scholars to look to affect studies to address the theoretical limitations and inconsistencies in critical consciousness literature. Findings also indicate a need for novel pedagogical approaches that adopt a holistic perspective and emphasize emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components of critical consciousness development.
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Appendix A:

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Are you currently enrolled in classes at The University of Memphis?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Choose the response that best describes the race you consider yourself to be.
   ☐ White or Caucasian
   ☐ Black or African American
   ☐ American Indian/Native American or Alaska Native
   ☐ Asian/Asian American
   ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   ☐ Biracial or Multiracial
   ☐ Other: ____________

3. Please select your age in years.
   ☐ Younger than 18 years old
   ☐ Between 18 and 26 years old
   ☐ Older than 26 years old

4. Gender Identity
   ☐ Agender
   ☐ Cisgender Man
   ☐ Cisgender Woman
   ☐ Genderqueer
   ☐ Gender Non-Conforming
   ☐ Transgender Man
   ☐ Transgender Woman
   ☐ Prefer To Self-Describe: ________________
   ☐ Prefer Not To Answer

5. Sexual Orientation
   ☐ Heterosexual
   ☐ Bisexual
   ☐ Lesbian
   ☐ Gay
   ☐ Asexual
   ☐ Pansexual
   ☐ Queer
   ☐ Prefer To Self-Describe: ________________
   ☐ Prefer Not To Answer
Appendix B:

Screening Survey

Short Critical Consciousness Scale (Adapted)

Instructions: Please respond to each of the following statements by circling how much you agree or disagree with each statement. For each statement, choose “Strongly Disagree,” “Mostly,” “Slightly Disagree,” “Slightly Agree,” “Mostly Agree,” or “Strongly Agree.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get good jobs
2. Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get ahead
3. It is important for young people to know what is going on in the world
4. It is important to correct social and economic inequality
5. It is my responsibility to get involved and make things better for society
6. Because of racism in the US, Blacks do not have the same educational opportunities as compared to Whites.

Anti-Racist Behavioral Inventory: Individual Activism Efforts (Adapted)

Instructions: Please indicate if each of the following statements describe you by choosing “Yes” or “No.”

☐ Yes ☐ No

1. I actively seek to understand how I participate in both intentional and unintentional racism.
2. I often speak to my friends about the problem of racism in the US, and what we can do about it.
3. I have challenged acts of racism that I have witnessed in my workplace or at school.
4. I usually interrupt racist conversations and jokes when I hear them in my family.

Anti-Racist Behavioral Inventory: Systemic Activism Efforts (Adapted)

Instructions: Please check the box(es) to indicate which of the following activities you have participated in within the last year.

☐ Gave money to organizations working against racism and discrimination.
☐ Joined in a protest march, political demonstration, or political meeting focused on racial justice.
☐ Exposed companies that uphold exclusionary and racist practices.
☐ Contacted a public official by phone, mail, or email to tell them how you felt about a particular racial justice issue.
☐ Volunteer with anti-racist or racial justice organizations.

**Systemic Activism Efforts**
Instructions: Please indicate if the following statement describes you.

I regularly participate in other forms of anti-racism or racial justice advocacy efforts.
- ☐ No.
- ☐ Yes. If yes, please include what forms of anti-racism advocacy you participate in.
  [narrative text box]

**Interview Invitation**
You may be selected to participate in a follow-up interview. Providing your contact information does not guarantee you will be contacted. If selected, you will be contacted via your indicated preferred contact method.

First Name: __________________
Pronouns: ___________________
Please select your most preferred method of contact.
- ☐ Email: __________________
- ☐ Phone: ________________
Appendix C:

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. What, if any, stories have you heard/been told about the origin of your family ancestry?
   a. What reactions did you have to this experience/information?
2. Was there a specific point in your life that you remember becoming aware of being white?
   a. What stands out to you about this experience/memory?
   b. Prompt for reactions
3. What, if anything, can you recall about your first experiences with people from other racial backgrounds?
   a. What stands out to you about this experience/memory?
   b. Prompt for reactions
4. How do you define racism?
   a. Racism is defined as a form of prejudice that assumes that the members of racial categories have distinctive characteristics and that these differences result in some racial groups being inferior to others. Racism generally includes negative emotional reactions to members of the group, acceptance of negative stereotypes, and racial discrimination against individuals; in some cases, it leads to violence. (APA Dictionary of Psychology)
5. What do you think it means to be racist?
6. What, if anything, do you think has influenced your understanding of racism and issues of racism?
   a. Prompt for reactions
7. How has your awareness of racism changed you or impacted your behavior?
8. How do you define systemic racism?
   a. Institutionalized (systemic) racism is defined as the differential treatment of individuals on the basis of their racial group by religious organizations, governments, businesses, the media, educational institutions, and other large social entities. (APA Dictionary of Psychology)
9. How do you think systemic racism has impacted People of Color?
10. What, if anything, has influenced your awareness of systemic racism?
    a. Prompt for reactions
11. What, if anything, do you know about the term white privilege?
    a. Unearned power that is afforded to White people on the basis of status rather than earned merit and protects White people from the consequences of being racist and benefitting from systemic racism; such power may come in the form of rights, benefits, social comforts, opportunities, or the ability to define what is normative or valued (APA, 2019; Neville et al., 2013)
12. What, if anything, do you know about the term whiteness?
    a. The ideological belief that biological and cultural Whiteness is superior, as well as normal and healthy—is a pervasive ideology that continues to polarize our nation and undergird racism (Helms, 2017; Liu et al., 2017; Liu, 2019)
13. What sorts of advantages do you think you have as a white person in the U.S.?
14. Can you tell me about a time when you were acutely aware of your white privilege?  
   a. How did the experience(s) impact/influence you?  
   b. Look for self-reflection and analysis of privilege, whiteness, systems of power, racial inequities  
   c. Prompt for reactions  
   d. Prompt for/explore behavioral impact specifically  
   e. Prompt for/explore emotional influences  
15. What, if anything, has motivated you to engage in social justice and activism?  
   a. Prompt for/explore emotional experiences  
16. What does being anti-racist mean to you?  
17. What does anti-racism activism mean to you?  
18. What, if anything, has influenced your interest in engaging in anti-racism work?  
   a. Look for self-reflection, analysis, and motivation to act  
19. How have you engaged in anti-racism activism efforts?  
20. How do you see the activities you are currently engaged in contributing to racial justice efforts?  
21. How do you plan to continue engaging in anti-racism activism efforts?  
22. What, if any, challenges have you faced in your development of an anti-racist identity or in your engagement in anti-racism activism efforts?  
23. Is there anything you think we should have talked about but didn’t?

**Review Member Check Process**
I will be transcribing our interview verbatim. Once I’ve completed the transcriptions, I will return the verbatim transcript to you via email to review and provide feedback about the accuracy of the transcription. The opportunity to review and provide feedback is completely optional and there are no consequences to you if you choose not to provide feedback.