Transformative Learning and Ideological Shifts:

Implications for Pedagogy for the Privileged

by

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ABSTRACT

The pace of segregation of races continues to increase as the gap between wealthy people, and the rest of the human race, increases. Technological advances in human communication ironically decrease human communication as people choose news and social media sites that feed their ideological frames. Bridging the sociopolitical gap is increasingly difficult. Further, privileged hegemonic forces exert pressure to maintain the status quo at the expense of greater humanity. Despite this grave account, some members of the privileged hegemony have moved away from their previous adherence to it and emerged as activists for marginalized populations.

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Pedagogy for the Privileged, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Transformative Learning Theory and Critical White Studies, this study asks the question: what factors lead to an ideological shift?

Fifteen participants agreed to an in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interview. There were four main themes that emerged. Most participants experienced significant childhood challenges as well as segregated environments. Additionally, they possessed personality traits of curiosity and critical thinking which left them at odds with their family members; and finally, each experienced exposure to new environments and new people. Most notably, in an attempt to satisfy their curiosity and to remedy the disconnect between the imposed family values and their own internal inclinations, most actively sought out disorienting dilemmas that would facilitate an ideological shift. This journey typically included copious reading, critically analyzing information and, mostly importantly, immersion in new environments.

The goal of this study was to understand which factors precipitate an ideological shift in the hope of using the data to create effective interventions that bridge ideological gaps. It was revealed that some of the initiative for this shift is innate, and therefore unreachable. However, exposure to disorienting dilemmas successfully caused an ideological shift. Critically, this research revealed that it is important to identify those individuals who possess this innate characteristic of curiosity and dissatisfaction with the status quo and create opportunities for them to be exposed to new people, information and environments. This will likely lead to a shift from White hegemonic adherent to an emerging advocate for social justice.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my husband, Todd, who has always supported me in

whatever crazy endeavor I undertake.

I dedicate this project to my children, Cyan, Kate and Jake, who have taught me that

social justice awareness and practice can start in childhood.

I dedicate this project to my father, my original justice seeker,

and my mother who modeled how to fight for it.

I dedicate this project to Willow, who introduced me

to the magical world of feminism at the tender age of twelve and

unlocked my passion for equality. And to Pam, who knew

I was happiest when learning and encouraged me continue to do so.

Finally, I dedicate this project to the all the people who are waiting for justice.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Racism and its deleterious effects plague American society. White people's complicity with systemic racism is central to the persistence of racial injustice. The historical election of Barack Obama in 2008, the first African American president of the United States, signaled to some the ushering in of a post-racial America. Surely if a Black man could be elected president, America had finally broken the shackles of racism. A CNN 2009 post-election survey found that 69% of Black respondents believed that Martin Luther King's vision had been realized.[1] However, euphoria waned as Obama navigated the inevitable treacherous waters of a Black man in power within a White hegemonic society. Compromise is always part of the political game, but when one must unequivocally represent all the people amongst a majority populace that is suspicious of your motives and competence, the waters become nearly unnavigable regardless of the skill of the guide. Under Obama's watch, police brutality increased in African American communities[2], prison populations declined only marginally[3], school efficacy continued its descent into disarray[4] [5] [6], and Obama showed deference to racial profiling policies such as New York City's Stop and Frisk, by endorsing one of its leaders as Homeland Security Director[7].

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[1] http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/01/19/king.poll/
[2] http://mappingpoliceviolence.org/nationaltrends
[3] http:www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/05/federal-prison-population-fell-during-obamas-term-reversing-recent-trend/
[4] www.blackagendareport.com/obama_legacy_lll_privatization_schools
[5] https://isreview.org/issue/71/obamas-neoliberal-agenda-education
[6] http://www.npr/sections/ed/2017.01/13/500421608/obamas-impact-on-americas-schools
[7] https://www.colorlines.com/articles/obama-poised-create-stop-and-frisk-nation

The despair and disappointment of many Black Americans with the performance of Barack Obama in the White House to meaningfully impact the lives of Black Americans was only exceeded by the level of despair and disappointment in White supremacists who witnessed the epitome of power usurped from the clutches of White men who have always occupied the White House. Once Donald Trump took occupancy of the White House, he appointed Steve Bannon as his Chief Strategist. Steve Bannon left his position as Executive Chairman of Breitbart News, known for its nationalist ideas,[8] in order to accept the advisory position. Hate crimes rose immediately and sharply, with the largest spike immediately following Trump's election.[9] For many, the election of Donald Trump dashed hopes of racial equality, and a new era of an unprecedented level of racism and polarization characterized American politics.[10]

How did we go from an America that would vote in a two-term Harvard educated African American president to one who appoints a White nationalist as his closest advisor? Why do so many Americans cling to White hegemonic ideas? Some would argue it goes back to the birth of America and the genocidal legacy of colonial conquest and slavery (Ringrose, 2002; Omi and Winant, 2014; Tanner, 2018; Spade, 2013).

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[8] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/09/us/politics/steve-bannon-breitbart-trump.html

[9] https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2019/08/14/trump-and-racism-what-do-the-data-say/?utm_campaign=Brookings%20Brief&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=75705562

[10] https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/04/far-more-americans-see-very-strong-partisan-conflicts-now-than-in-the-last-two-presidential-election-years/

As Jessica Ringrose (2002) stated:

The complexities of whiteness are explicable when analyzed in a historically nuanced framework that recognizes the classed, gendered, and sexualized dimensions of racialization…I find antiracist pedagogy is best conceived as one aspect of postcolonial struggle because this frame links us forcefully to the imperial past of which contemporary racism is a legacy.

Omi and Winant (2014, p. 107) agree that the "genocidal politics" toward indigenous people and the enslaving of African people "combined to form a template, a master frame, that has perniciously shaped the treatment and experiences of other subordinated groups as well." The othering of non-White races is necessary to create a hegemonic state, and it is also evidently contemporaneously necessary in maintaining a hegemonic state.

In addition to our nation's founding history, which is steeped in genocidal and racist tendencies, the precedents of the legal system were also morphed and wielded as a tool of White hegemonic intent. Ian Haney Lopez (2006) wrote *White by Law* which outlines the amorphic nature of American law as it pertained to maintaining racial dominance for Whites based on precarious and mutating claims of superiority. From the moment in 1790 when it was proclaimed that only Whites could be naturalized citizens, until 1952 when the ruling was overturned, the laws enacted and nullified repeatedly "reveal the imprecisions and contradictions inherent in the establishment of racial lines between White and non-Whites" (Lopez, 2006, p. 2). Lopez outlined how the courts initially posited that race could be delineated utilizing science and the study of

naturalistic studies of humankind. Eventually, however, instances of confusion abounded when judges and lawyers seemed unable to establish grey areas of Whiteness when confronted with Syrians and Asian Indians. Syrians and Asians had been classified by anthropologists as White, but "common knowledge" (when viewed by a White gaze, Syrians and Asians have non-White skin) dictated otherwise. By ultimately relying on common knowledge as the arbiter of race, the courts illustrated that "race is something which must be measured in terms of what people believe...and law constructs race" (Lopez, 2006, p. 9). This consigned race forever as a socially constructed and legal phenomenon, rather than a biological or scientific one. The prerequisite laws went on to shape White America in "physical reality" by denying citizenship to socially constructed non-Whites, denying marriage between Whites and non-Whites (thereby keeping the race "pure") and, ironically, "as laws and legal decision-makers transform racial ideas into a lived reality of material inequality, the ensuing reality becomes a further justification for the ideas of race" (Lopez, 2006, p. 17). In sum: "The legal system influences what we look like, the meanings ascribed to our looks, and the material reality that confirms the meanings of our appearance. Law constructs race" (Lopez, 2006, p. 19). The (arguably) intended legacy of pre-requisite laws has resulted in "the idea of a White country (and) provided the basis for contemporary claims regarding the European nature of the United States, where 'European' serves as a not-so-subtle synonym for White" (Lopez, 2006, p. 12). This romance with the notion of a White country is clearly illustrated by President Trump's supporters. Their fear of the browning of America and the loss of its hegemonic

White European heritage is palpable. What was so beautifully rendered and protected by the trifecta of genocide, slavery and White by law, is increasingly in jeopardy.

In addition to the "common knowledge" approach of identifying who belonged (White-looking people) and who did not (not-White looking people), prerequisite laws marginalized people of color to another extent as it constructed Whiteness as opposite *and* superior (Lopez, 2006). Race became defined in terms of development: Whites were more civilized, more developed, more normal, while Blacks less civilized, arrested, and deviant. Carbado (2013, p. 818) succinctly stated this sentiment: "The conduct of a white heterosexual man is normative not just because of *what* they are doing but because it is *he* who is doing it." There was a normalizing of Whiteness to which everyone else compared (McWhorter, 2005). Lopez concurs and states "the content of White identity, we might conclude, is largely a compilation of positive myths that celebrate imagined virtues and conceal failings" (Lopez, 2006, p. 167).

Current manifestations of the persistence of White supremacy have been examined by Flagg (1997); Allen (2004); Kinloch and Lensmire (2019); and McWhorter (2005). Specifically, the notion of White transparency is paramount and persistent in everyday acts of innocent White supremacy. Barbara Flagg defined it this way (Flagg, 1997, p. 629):

> The most striking characteristic of whites' consciousness of whiteness is that most of the time we don't have any. I call this the *transparency* phenomenon: the tendency of whites not to think about whiteness, or about norms, behaviors, experiences, or perspectives that are white-specific. Transparency often is the

mechanism through which white decisionmakers who disavow white supremacy impose white norms on blacks…(it) operates to require black assimilation even when pluralism is the articulated goal.

The persistence of transparency that Flagg defines endures in everyday conversations, in political musings and eventually makes its way into public policy. Ignoring the reality of economic inequality, educational inequality, health access inequality and other forms of inequality, neoliberal talking points of bootstrap mentality are applied alongside practices of transparency to undermine the on-the-ground reality of the challenges faced by oppressed populations.

As stated by Carbado (2013) and McWhorter (2005), Whiteness is the presumed norm to which all other races are differentiated, defined and to be strived for. This innocence (or ignorance?) of White people's imbued superiority permits White people to experience life without critically examining the effects of their Whiteness on others, nor the benefits bestowed to them. While innocence is most often a trait viewed as enduring, in the case of White innocence, the consequence of transparency is devastating to the opaque populations it pretends not to see. Lorde (2007) describes Whiteness as a "mythical norm" where the power in society is held and where we all aspire to be. Merle Woo (in Moraga and Anzaldua, 1983, p. 144) states "most of the time when 'universal' is used, it is a euphemism for 'White' – White themes, White significance, White culture." College campuses are not exempt from transparency. Reason and Evans (2007) contend that college policies promote a colorblind philosophy that ignores the realities of systemic

racism, reducing prejudice to individual acts of meanness, and White as unseeable. Peggy McIntosh (1997, p. 292 - 293) explained her experience of colorblindness this way:

> (I was) taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will…whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others this is seen as work that will allow 'them' to be like 'us'…I did not see myself as racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

McIntosh's experiences are typical of many White people who view themselves as average and normal. Educational systems reinforce this notion when we learn a white-washed version of history. Literature is seen largely from a White European lens, and science through a White male achievement timeline. Religious institutions often strive to convert people to a Christianity that favors a western logic of faith adherence, regardless of the background of those to whom they proselytize. An inkling there might be an alternative way of knowing rarely enters the consciousness of people who are constantly sent the message their way is the pinnacle of civilization's attainment.

A relatively new field of study, Critical White Theory, endeavors to fill the imperative need of examining the pervasive and presumed "normal" nature of White identity and how to dismantle it. Privileged pedagogies' concurrent aim is to develop curriculum to specifically address the oppressors' role in White hegemonic preservation and offer tools to help dismantle it. As privileged pedagogies have been developed and

Critical White Studies have expanded as a field of research, critical analysis and suggestions for best practices have developed. For example, Tanner (2019) challenges Whites to look to themselves and the construction of Whiteness, rather than expecting only people of color to be implicated in the issues of race. He feels that Whites have failed in their responsibility to understand the history and impact Whiteness has had on communities of color. Without an understanding of the history and impact, it becomes impossible to have meaningful contributions towards racial justice in the future. Further, to many White people, talking about race issues means talking about people of color. In fact, when talking about race issues, the focus ought to be on how White people learn to be White.

Some scholars suggest that affinity groups might help accomplish this task (Tanner 2019; Michael and Conger 2009; Curry-Steven 2007). By permitting people of the same race to engage in conversations about Whiteness and its construction, for example, they may speak more freely. This openness may be conducive to frank conversations that open up space for understanding Whiteness in a way that may be difficult when people of both races are present. Interestingly, and somewhat conversely, Daloz et al. (1996); Raible (2007); Garner (2017); McWhorter (2005); and Young (1990) found that constructive engagement with others was critical in building bridges between different people. Direct engagement may reduce misunderstanding and serve to dismantle preconceptions of one another. More and more commonly, communities are divided by race, religion, class and ideology in current society. Therefore, intentional and direct engagement becomes even more critical. It seems to me that perhaps both strategies may

be called for at different times. Affinity groups may be required for frank and open conversation, and, at other times, an opportunity for people of different backgrounds to engage in meaningful conversation may be needed.

Crenshaw (1991); Hancock (2016); and Chun, Lipsitz and Shin (2013) remind us that intersectional analysis is critically important in building effective alliances of oppositional resistance. Intersectional analysis requires that people consider how different and multiple forms of oppression present challenges beyond singular forms of oppression. For example, a White woman experiencing challenges as a domestic abuse victim will be different than the challenges that a Black woman will experience as a domestic abuse victim, and different still from the challenges a Black transgender woman will experience. Without taking into account the intersectional impact of compounded oppressions, any services or remedies will likely be insufficient.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Polarization of left and right-wing politics has been a phenomenon that has existed in American politics for decades. However, the election of Barack Obama and then his antithesis, Donald Trump, has intensified that polarization. The Pew Research Council released a report in June 2014 which found in the last twenty years, the percentage of Republicans who stated they held a very negative opinion of Democrats jumped from 17% to 43%.[11] Similarly, Democrats' very negative opinion of Republicans

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[11] https://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/

jumped from 16% to 38%.[12] Pew also reported that people are becoming more

ideologically siloed, spending time mostly with those who share their political opinions.

A Pew 2016 research poll found even further divisiveness and reported that 70% of

regular Democratic voters were afraid of the other party, and 62% of Republicans

expressed similar sentiments towards their rivals.[13] We view our rivals as more extreme

in their opinions than reality suggests, and this perception gap exacerbates the divide.[14]

Zaid Jilani and Jeremy Adam Smith (2019) of University of California Berkeley

contend that polarization goes beyond politics to all facets of our lives: neighborhoods,

schools, workplaces, families and religious organizations. There has been a trend across

America of greater geographic polarization as people are moving to parts of the country

where their ideologies are embraced (Johnson, Manley and Jones, 2016). Developments

of polarization have also led to segregation. Racial segregation has been shaped by

historic pressures to limit opportunities for interracial interaction in neighborhoods,

schools and workplaces (Lichter, 2013). Dana Thompson Dorsey (2013) describes a

phenomenon of re-segregation where some areas of the country that had been de-

segregated are regressing to being more segregated again. Dorsey found that Black and

Latino students are more segregated today than before the Civil Rights Movement.

Further, Reboul (2013) found that White students attend schools where 80% of the

student body is also White. Self-segregation is occurring throughout the United States

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[12] https://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/
[13] https://www.people-press.org/2016/06/22/6-how-do-the-political-parties-make-you-feel/
[14] perceptiongap.us

leaving students of color behind. Separate and not equal seems to be the rule of the day in many of today's schools.[15]

Although the United States' population continues to diversify, the opportunity for cohesion in the face of polarization and segregation seems to be waning. Along with the decline of cohesion comes distrust, upheaval, fear and revolution. History is replete with examples of bloody revolt in the face of injustice. A cursory review of revolutions and rebellions on Wikipedia exposes a list of sixty-six uprisings worldwide since just 2010, of which most (if not all) stem from some form of injustice.[16] Contemporary and regional examples include the recent uprisings in cities across the United States in response to police brutality. Notably, Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland, have been the site of civil disturbances and riots in reaction to the exoneration of police officers in the murders of unarmed Black men. The seeds of discontent are plentiful in contemporary America.

However, despite the seemingly unpreventable descent into societal chaos, there are also seeds of hope. There are numerous social justice organizations in the United States working towards equal participation for all groups in society to help shape a future that is equitable. Additionally, there are a myriad of individuals and organizations diligently working to create spaces hospitable to community cohesion across differences. There is a dearth, however, of assessment of these efforts and their efficacy. This is likely partially due to the challenges of creating meaningful and accurate methods of measurement of effectiveness, but also due to financial priorities that understandably

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[15] https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/05/segregation-now/359813/
[16] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_revolutions_and_rebellions

prioritize programming over evaluation. However, without an understanding of the efficacy of programs that aim to teach White people about the importance of diversity and the challenges faced by communities of color, it becomes difficult to capture the essence of what motivates people to make a significant ideological shift towards actively fighting for racial justice. Without an understanding of what motivates White people to change their ideological framework, I suggest it is difficult to create effective interventions.

When considering the most hopeful possibilities of disrupting the hegemony in pursuit of social justice, Transformative Learning theory as envisioned by Jack Mezirow provides the framework for this research. Mezirow (1994) believed that people's learning was constructivist in nature and that their frames of reference were shaped by perspectives rooted in sociolinguistic, psychological and epistemic codes created largely from family and friends. These perspectives formed a schema of beliefs which functioned to shape how our world was viewed and tended to act as a filter through which anything not quite fitting in the frame was distorted until it would. In the event a person encountered a situation that could not fit within the frame (an event Mezirow called a disorienting dilemma), critical reflexivity would allow the person to consider why they had attached the meaning they had (Mezirow, 1981). It is during this critical moment where new ways of thinking and novel ideological frameworks might be created. Typically, ideological frameworks are not dramatically shifted after a single disorienting event, but rather a series of occurrences that undermine one's original framework culminating in a dramatic shift. Understanding which sorts of disorienting dilemmas

contribute to privileged White people's gradual rejecting of White supremacy and subsequently working towards racial justice seems crucial to changing the hearts and minds of more privileged folks.

## THE GAP IN THE RESEARCH STUDY ADDRESSES

Critical White Studies requires White people to look at ways to dismantle Whiteness. However, what appears to be missing in Critical White Theory is an understanding of how to best initiate engagement with White people and keep them motivated to do the hard work of dismantling the hegemony that likely benefits them. In other words, what is the most effective way to convince White people it is imperative they understand how their privilege is destructive and then help to dismantle it? People who are already doing the work of dismantling Whiteness have a keen understanding of systemic racism and reject the notion of White supremacy. Some were raised in an environment that instilled these values daily. However, more typically, White people tend to ascribe to the notion of White transparency and practice (often unintentionally) White supremacy that is passed to them through their White legacy. Critically, some White people make the important change from seeing Whiteness as the desired norm, to seeing Whiteness as problematic and requiring dismantling. Where once they were content with the comfort naturally and automatically provided to them by the color of their skin, at some point they began to understand the inherent injustice of privilege. In this study I explore two main questions:

a) Why did those particular White people make that change?

b) What led them to their change of heart?

Understanding the factors that affect peoples' shifts in their ideological thinking could be helpful in designing future educational programs that address cultural diversity, racial equality and social justice.

## INTENT AND POTENTIAL PITFALLS OF STUDY

In order to understand why some White people change their way of thinking about racial injustice, this study interviewed White privileged people who have experienced a shift in their ideology from a White hegemonic adherent to an emerging advocate for justice. Interviewing privileged and historically advantaged people is fraught with troubling issues. Typically, privileged folks' opinions and ruminations are inherently lifted in a hegemonic White society that values those voices most. White people are usually at the center, and if they are not, they will try to make themselves the center. Having White people talk about White identity is the centering of White people in the discourse (Tanner, 2018). Curry-Stevens (2010) wonders if centering the privileged is an act of complicity with White supremacy that is an "overly patient indulgence of the defense of privileged learners" (62). David and Steyn (2012) are also concerned about the overabundance of White voices which rarely hear what others might have to say and state "the question is not whether the subaltern can speak, but rather whether privileged white groups are willing to listen…white students enter the classroom poorly equipped to listen" (p. 32, 35).

White and privileged people generally take for granted that what they have to say is something worth listening to and that their ideas will be acted upon. Similar to the boorish male executive who speaks over women colleagues and takes credit for their ideas; and similar to the childless adult offering a plethora of parenting advice to parents, White people expect to be centered and heard in the conversation regardless of their expertise.

This research project adds to the cacophony of utterances most amplified and to the notion that their understanding of the issue is paramount. However, I was willing to take this risk. In the face of humanitarian crises occurring throughout the world, it would seem to be vital that consideration of just action by those of privilege be demanded, no matter how difficult the waters are to navigate.

Bourdieu (1990) argued that social capital is an integral part of power, and that power is required for change. Privileged people generally have more social capital and therefore more power. Both Crossley (2003) and Duffy et al. (2010) echo Bourdieu when they discuss the notion of social structures and how they are established through social norms and expectations. The norms and expectations favor those whose interests and actions are currently normalized and valued in society. Subsequently, these norms and expectations are passed on.

Critical for this study, however, is the notion that "innovative actions by embodied agents can both modify existing structures and generate new ones, breaking the 'circle' of reproduction" (Crossley, 2003, p. 44). Attitudinal changes occur when issues matter to a person and "the educated middle classes are more disposed towards and better

resourced for engagement in the public sphere than the other classes, particularly the

working class" (Crossely, 2003, p. 46). Although I agree that engaging the educated

middle class is necessary, to imply that the middle class is somehow more effective in

working towards social justice issues ignores the record of working-class movements led

by people of color. Bourdieu and Crossely seem to be rewriting history and white

washing it in a very problematic way. Although I think privileged White people have an

important role to play in advancing social justice movements, positioning Whites as more

culturally disposed ignores this history. Jenkins (1983) concurs that the success of social

movements in the 1960's was *partly* due to the mobilization of the "conscious

constituency" of the middle class and wealthy bourgeois who subsequently rallied around

the causes.  Jenkins keeps in mind that the causes were already being led by oppressed

people. Crossley (65) further states:

> Many studies within the resource-mobilization tradition seem to suggest that
>
> powerless groups only become capable of effective protest, and perhaps of any
>
> form of protest, when they are 'adopted' by middle class liberals who invest a
>
> variety of resources in their cause, and perhaps even adopt it for themselves.
>
> Crossley, again, seems to be reaching in his assessment of the importance of

White middle class folks in a problematic way. However, to ignore the potential in

creating a larger contingency of a "conscious constituency" seems counterproductive in

the fight for social justice. Rather than a claim to a culture more primed to enact change,

it is the power the middle class holds that could be harnessed. And certainly, with power

comes money and time. Harnessing that power towards helping to dismantle White

hegemony may be the most important exploitation of its potency, and one utilization that has been only slightly deployed.

Complicating the matter is the precarious position of a White ally. As I read through my Facebook newsfeed (an interesting mix of soccer moms, marginalized individuals and social justice allies) one constant theme repeats: anguish of how progressive thoughts and actions may best assist in the current daunting climate of White supremacy. White supremacy is the legacy of the founding of America, and it finds new validity propped up by a United States president sympathetic to White nationalist logic. My Facebook friends are torn about the best way to make America great again (to borrow a term from President Donald Trump). Some are only recently awakening to the inequality that has always existed but seemed to simmer under the surface when a progressive Black president led the nation. Others have been living with the consequences of an unjust America their whole lives and are justifiably annoyed by the sudden weekend activist warriors. A (mostly) White feminist, middle class group of women who dress as handmaids at political events in order to draw attention to waning access to reproductive health care finds themselves add odds with women of color. Charging that the handmaid crusade is tone deaf to the distinct challenges that women of color face in the reproductive justice movement, the non-White sisters feel left out of the conversation and advocacy. The handmaids' focus on access to abortion and the ignoring of the myriad of other reproductive injustices and intersectional challenges faced by minorities causes intense Facebook debates. Handmaids who have marched in Phoenix summer heat until they are sunburnt and weary bristle at the condemnation. Concurrently,

women of color bristle at the apparent blind spot of their counterparts. The inevitable power differential existing between Whites (who hold it institutionally and culturally) and oppressed populations, remains a constant din of injustice below the surface of all interactions.

A recent email I received from a friend exemplifies the thorny issue around how allies are most effective in their partnership in the face of disparity of power. She expressed an interest in understanding how to be a better ally. I pondered her question. Am I the right person to help her find an answer? Allen (2004) contends that "a plan for humanization that is led by Whites will always be fraught with problems due to the limited consciousness of Whites…people of color must provide the major source of knowledge" (p. 124). Wouldn't this question be best answered by a person of color? However, in my experience, I have found many oppressed people are exhausted from explaining the problem to well-meaning White folks. "Do your own work" is a common and understandable refrain. Lorde (2007, p. 114) admonishes that "whenever the need for some pretense of communication arises, those who profit from our oppression call upon us to share our knowledge with them. In other words, Whites believe it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes." Further, Wing (as quoted in Michael and Conger 2009, p. 59) wrote: "White allies can be the biggest barrier to racial justice because of their belief in their own superiority and their tendency to dominate the agenda." Advocates find themselves between the proverbial rock and a hard place: should one do their own work, or should they ask the people who have lived it for advice? The answers are not easy.

Merely having the time and space to consider such matters is a privilege. How do you carve out time to ponder and navel gaze about injustice while working two (or three) jobs to make ends meet while wondering how to pay for a needed root canal as your head throbs in unremitting pain? Privilege makes space for such contemplation not easily found for those just trying to get by. McCarthy and Zald (1977) contend that activism increases during periods of affluence because the middle class has the surplus resources of time and money to support causes they find compelling.

Despite the shaky ground people of privilege find themselves on when sorting out their place in alliance with the oppressed, I believe it is ground worth treading. Outside of bloody revolution, progress towards a more just society may require alliance with the elite who holds institutional and societal power. Jenkins (1983, p. 547) states:

(Access to political impact) is regulated by broad shifts in public opinion and the mobilization of electoral coalitions that bring about changes in governing coalitions. If a favorable governing coalition is in power, reform movements with a large organized membership can offer electoral support in exchange for entry into the polity.

The question is: how is it possible to coalesce a governing coalition of power that represents people who care about social justice? I believe this is of paramount importance and I think it must include White allies.

It is with these tenets of necessary allegiance that I suggest employing the power and influence of White middle class and elite populations in the fight for justice. How does one change the power structure if you do not study those who hold it? Allen and

Rossatto (2009) agree that "in order for critical pedagogy to bring about wide-scale transformation of social inequalities in the U.S., it must be re-envisioned, at least in part, around inquiries into the identity formations of those in oppressor groups" (p. 165).

This study sits in tension with the competing philosophies of decentering voices of power versus listening critically to (and thereby centering) voices of power with the intention of harnessing that power in the pursuit of justice. If critical White pedagogy asks one to center White people, it seems counterproductive and counterintuitive to the process of dismantling White hegemony. Garner (2017) criticized the first two waves of Critical White Studies for centering on White people's experiences and opinions thereby ascribing to the very supremacy-type thinking the study hoped to dissemble: centering Whites and marginalizing people of color.

While academics debate whose voice needs to be heard, who should lead the charge, and who has had a more meaningful impact on social movements efficacy, the world burns. There are thoughtful, well-connected, well-intentioned people of different races and classes who each possess their own special abilities that, in concert with other thoughtful, well-connected, well-intentioned people, could create a force to be reckoned with. If we could dispense with the competition and comparisons in pursuit of a common goal of social justice, this power might be harnessed and utilized for the common good.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to attempt to document the factors which help induce a person to dramatically shift their ideological framework from one of accepting White hegemony as the putative way of the world, to actively fighting for justice for oppressed populations. It asks White activists currently working towards racial justice in their community, whose background suggests a previous adherence to protecting the hegemony, which factors influenced their shift and informed their new way of seeing the injustice in the world and their place in it.

There have been many different interventions to remedy this complicity to White hegemony ranging from diversity workshops, to artistic interventions, to civil dialogue forums, to name just a few. However, the insidious and mutable nature of racism prevails. I argue that racial justice, exclusive of revolt, cannot occur without the assistance of those who currently hold a disproportionate amount of the power. The question becomes: how does one convince significant sectors of the White population to use their power in pursuit of racial justice? I believe that in the problem of how to understand the motivation to divest in one's oppressor status, part of the answer lies with those who have had a dramatic ideological shift from a narrow world view steeped in hegemony, to a keen understanding of the impacts of structural racism that has moved them to act on behalf of racial justice. Examining the factors which influenced those transformations may inform educators and social justice advocates on best practices when creating future effective transformational interventions.

There have been insightful studies that examine the dynamic of oppressor power in the service of the oppressed. Specifically, Ann Curry-Stevens, in her research on Pedagogy of the Privileged, interviewed educators involved in diversity training. Curry-Stevens wished to find, from an educator's perspective, best practices for effective diversity training. Another inquiry (Daloz et al, 1996), centered around White social justice activists who have always been involved with advocacy work. They asked what was unique about their upbringing and familial environment that helped shaped their social justice views. Both studies are critically important in understanding people's alliance with justice action but differ from this study's inquiry in one significant way: this study specifically targeted individuals who experienced a significant shift in their ideological framework. In previous studies, the participants were already attuned to, and working towards, a more socially just world. Either they were raised in an environment that embraced notions of social justice or, somehow, they made a shift to embracing the notion of advancing social justice issues. However, the question has not been posed to those who have made the shift: how did you arrive at this new social justice framework? This study targeted individuals whose earlier life was marked by lack of awareness of marginalized people's experience of injustice or dismissal of its reality, but who have come to understand the societal and institutional barriers to inequality and actively fight against it. I believe that understanding how and why privileged people have made a significant ideological shift is crucially important to be effective educators, and in creating effective pedagogy, for future generations of potential allies.

To summarize, the study explored two questions:

1. What factors precipitated one's ideological shift from a narrow, conservative and post-racial view of the world, to a view that is more socially aware of current and historical factors that negatively affect marginalized populations?

2. Which factors appear to be consistent in participants' responses that may be identified and utilized to create more effective diversity programs and other justice-related interventions?

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study makes the following assumptions:

1. Racism and racial injustice continue to prevail in the United States and in many parts of the world (However, this study will focus on the United States).

2. Creating a more racially just world is a worthwhile goal.

3. The world is becoming more polarized and segregated and therefore intentional educational interventions of social justice are required.

4. Understanding how White people have changed their ideological orientation is one way to understand how to create effective future interventions.

The literature abounds with suggestions that if you wish to help a population, you ought to ask the affected population how to assist them, rather than impose unwanted help upon them (Freire, 2018; Hall, 2009; Julia and Kondrat, 2005; Greenwood and

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Levin, 2004; Mekou and Tiani, 2013; Brown and Reitsma-Street, 2003; Gaventa, 2004).

The people of a particular group best know what the challenges are and what resources

are available. To design interventions without their input, good intentions are bound to

fail. This is the basis of esteemed educator Pablo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed

philosophy: trust the people you are helping to know what they need to do to improve

their situation. Freire believed that this philosophy could be applied to oppressors as well,

and many current critical White theorists agree (Freire, 2018; Curry-Stevens, 2005;

Allen, 2002; Allen et al, 2009; Breault, 2003; Crossley, 2003; Daloz, 1996; Flagg, 1997;

Howard, 1993; Levine-Rasky, 2000; McIntosh, 1997; Mezirow, 1981; Nicholls, 2011;

Reason et al, 2007; Taylor, 2008).

Understandably this may seem a somewhat perverted twist on Freire's notion

since Freire's purpose was to assist oppressed people to effectively resist the hegemony.

However, if one agrees with the premise that societal transformation requires complicity

from those who currently hold the power, I argue we must enlist this specific population

who have made that transformation to understand the best strategy for engaging those

who lag behind in their understanding of structural and historic racism. Crossley (2003)

agrees that an alliance with the elite is necessary for social change. Duffy, Binder and

Skrentny (2010) add that social change is governed by normative values which require

those in power to assist in change. Jenkins (1988) further argued that it takes a conscious

constituent of elite to join in the fight for social justice change.

Freire (1970) believed that oppressors were limited in their worldview and

therefore oppressed themselves, and Curry-Stevens (2005) contended that borrowing

from Freire in service of privileged learners is permitted when "the concept of awareness building and critical thinking is linked to conscientization – as long as it is explicitly political and linked to outcomes that include social action" ( p. 98 – 99). Conscientization is a term that Freire popularized to describe the awakening to factors that contribute to oppression. Curry-Stevens advocates for conscientization to be utilized by the elite and cites its use in workshops across North America to teach dominant groups to reject allegiance to its unjust class. Breault (2003) agrees that if we only look to the oppressed to create effective pedagogies to teach the privileged about oppression then "we see the oppressed trying to bring about change through the same tactics for which they criticize the oppressors – imposition, slogans, myths and images" (p. 3). Although Breault's assessment may oversimplify and generalize current pedagogies originating from oppressed populations in a problematic way, offering no nuance of its efficacy, I believe the underlying point salient. If we turn to former adherents to the status quo who have come to recognize and actively fight against White hegemony, educators and activists may be better equipped to help create effective interventions for others. Not necessarily in place of current pedagogy, but rather alongside it. With additional effective interventions, guided by those who have experienced a dramatic ideological shift, more socially just-minded people may help shape public perception and policy. This research aimed to uncover the factors that cause a shift in one's ideology which then may facilitate movement towards a more just society.

RESEARCHER'S INVESTMENT AND BACKGROUND

What draws me to this research? As I review the literature on Transformative Education and Critical White Studies, it is clear that there are many White academics drawn to the field. Is it White guilt that draws us? Is it atonement for past sins? Is it a desire to forge peace between races and cultures? I suppose there are nearly as many reasons for interest in the field of Critical White Studies as there are researchers involved in this work. However, what draws me into this inquiry is hope. I find myself vacillating between cynicism that White people will never be willing to examine the history and current structural apparatus that upholds their power and be willing to dismantle it, and the optimism that the human spirit is capable of incredible feats of transformation when faced with undeniable truths. I have witnessed the humanity and kindness of the White community, and I have faith their hearts can be changed. The quotidian acts of decency I observe between everyday Americans of many cultures reminds me that the politically divisive rhetoric spewing from politicians does not represent the average person's views. Further, I think there are a great number of decent White people whose potential has not been tapped to help in the fight for racial justice simply because they have not had exposure outside their familial schemas of belief.

I view White supremacist thinking as a cancer in society. Sometimes I think it would be better if it were more like a massive heart attack of which its symptoms were impossible to ignore. Instead, it is a disease whose tendrils flourish and proliferate below the surface of ignorance and fear. Ignorance of history and fear of loss feed the disease. However, like cancer, if detected, the disorder may be treated. And though the treatment

is difficult, painful and time consuming, the ultimate result is a healthier body. In the case of eradicating racism, it is a healthier body politic.

I was raised in a mostly White, upper middle-class neighborhood. My father worked for the government and my mother was a stay-at-home mom. Money was tight, but we never went without essentials. Clothes from the local thrift store were the norm in my family, dining out was rare, and vacations consisted of camping rather than lounging on a white sand beach. People who depended on government subsidies were looked down upon. Asking for a handout was admitting failure as a member of society. Self-sufficiency and independence were valued above all else.

We were not religious, and in fact my mother was anti-religious, having been raised in the Baptist Church where she perceived hypocrisy in the parishioners who colored her view of religion in a negative tone. Interestingly, I remember being taught the Lord's Prayer as a child. Looking back this seems disingenuous with the negative messages I received about religion. Perhaps it was my parent's way of inoculating my brother and me with just enough Christianity to fit in.

Since my dad worked outside the home, my mother wielded the most influence on how I perceived the world. Mirroring the dichotomy of my religious experience, my exposure to race was equally puzzling. I remember hearing platitudes such as "Don't judge a book by its cover" and "Beauty is only skin deep," while at the same time listening to my mother admonish immigrants for not speaking English in public and being unkind if other cultural manifestations were in public view. The rhetoric in my

family was: "if you are going to move to Canada, then become Canadian!" (whatever that means)

The most vilified minority in my community were people of Asian descent, easily identifiable by their brown skin and occasional donning of Sikh garb. East Indian people were derided as "Pakkies" and other Asians as "Chinks." Many were doctors, lawyers, engineers and members of other esteemed professions. In the American south, Hispanic people are derided for their perceived lack of economic success. In Canada, immigrants were derided for the perceived apparent economic success. It is almost as though it doesn't matter. Just being identifiably different is enough to garner disdain.

In the city I grew up in (Calgary, Alberta, Canada) there were several Indigenous Indian communities that bordered the city. I was raised to believe they were less than me: alcoholic, poor, dirty, uneducated. I remember my brother's hockey team going to the Indian reservation to play the Indigenous youth hockey team, and I would accompany my family. I remember a sense of unease as we entered the reservation and the hockey arena. It was as if it were unsafe and unclean, and I better not touch anything. The unspoken word to describe Indigenous people was savages. The message seemed to be that if they would just let go of the past and embrace White European culture, their lives could be as good as ours. No value could be found in their way of life, and yet no curiosity existed as to what their way of life entailed.

African Americans had a small presence in my hometown. However, that did not stop racist behavior towards their community. The nursery rhyme: eenie, meenie, minie, moe catch a "N" by the toe was used when choosing who went first in a game. Although

I did not consciously realize the ramifications of the "N" word, nor was I steeped in its historical connotation, the fact that we used it without thought or correction is mindboggling and deeply problematic. The constant din of White supremacist thinking saturated my upbringing.

My father, whose parents immigrated from Ukraine early in the 20th century, only spoke the Ukrainian language until he began public school. In the 1930's, it wasn't Asians who were routinely derided and unwelcomed in the community. Rather, it was Ukrainian immigrants who were not readily accepted and often demonized. I remember, even as late as the 1980's, hearing "Ukie" jokes that characterized Ukrainians as ignorant boat people. My uncle would tell me stories of pay rates in the coal mines he worked in which set salaries based on ethnicity. Ukrainians were placed at the bottom of the pay scale. My father learned very early in life that to escape ridicule, he needed to blend in. Blending in meant learning English with no detectable accent, adapting to current Canadian norms, and eschewing all Ukrainian cultural attributes. Although not malicious in his ideology, my father felt strongly that people needed to fit in, assimilate, and become "Canadian." This strategy was what allowed him to be successful and escape ridicule in his home country. In my father's view (and my mother's), White, cisgender, thin, European, English-speaking, Christian (like), middle to upper-class patriarchal familial formation was the ultimate achievement for all humans to aspire. Any culture, or other way of knowing that deviated from this ideal was simply not fully evolved to its greatest potential. I do not recall there was much interest in understanding, nor embracing, other cultural traditions or non-traditional ways of living. If a minority person

was in our midst, they were judged by how well they blended in as a Canadian (as defined by my parents) and by how successfully they had ascended to accepted cultural norms. Did they speak English without an accent? Did they dress "normal"? Did they drink beer and enjoy watching Hockey Night in Canada? If you shut your eyes and had a conversation with them, would you assume you were talking to a White European? If so, then you were accepted. However, if any of your cultural roots showed through, you immediately were looked at askew and considered less than. This way of thinking went beyond race and extended to any ways of knowing beyond our way of knowing. Any deviance from the White, cisgender, western European, capitalist, nuclear family norm was viewed with reticence, and often rejected and derided. Although open and vitriolic racist attacks were vehemently shunned by my parents, concomitantly, under one's breath, condemnations of perceived lack of assimilation compliance were commonplace. I remember a sense of unease with the tone of intolerance. It struck me as ugly and mean. However, I surely absorbed it.

Significantly, at age twelve, I met a girl who thought quite differently from the way I was raised. She was a self-proclaimed feminist in 7th grade, and I was in awe of her. I didn't even know what a feminist was, but I began to learn the language of equality. Although my early feminist understanding lacked intersectionality, its emphasis on equality spoke to my deep-seated unease with my hegemonic upbringing.

Eventually, I left the bubble in which I grew up and began my own life. I carried with me the attitudes I was steeped in, but also a deep-rooted restiveness that something wasn't quite right with the way I was taught to view difference. As I became exposed to

different cultures and ways of life, I drifted further and further from my prior adherence to White hegemonic thinking and more towards the feminist sensibility instilled by my childhood friend. The more I viewed difference through the lens of feminism, the more I realized how distorted my previous lens had been.

Despite my allegiance to feminist thinking, the culture of my upbringing influenced my behavior as an adult. I married young, had three children, and chose to support my husband's career over developing my own. We began to run an entertainment business together, and owning a business afforded me the opportunity to work and spend time with my children as they grew up. I would like to say it was a choice I don't regret, as we have three wonderful children and a strong family. However, I fell comfortably into the archetypal family that I was steeped in as "The Model." Looking back, I realize I presented myself with a false choice of either raising a functionally and happy family or pursuing my own career interests. This false choice is a tenet of patriarchy that I followed without question. If I had insisted upon an equal sharing of childrearing responsibilities, emotional labor and family demands, I now realize I could have achieved both: a wonderful family and a career path that was my own.

Eventually I began to question my career path. One day as I was sitting in traffic listening to National Public Radio, I heard an advertisement for a master's program in Social Justice and Human Rights. I had graduated from college at the age of twenty and had not been in school since then. I was forty-five years old. Was it too late?

I met with the director and he encouraged me to apply. I was accepted into the program and almost immediately I knew I had found a place I belonged. Suddenly I was

surrounded by people who cared about the same things I cared for (and many more things that I would learn about). At forty-five, my transition was late but intense. Every day I learned something new, and I was energized by the information I was exposed to. Although I had always had a heart for justice, I did not understand its history, nor the systemic and societal apparatus which prevented it from prevailing. I did not understand my complicity in its perpetuation, and I did not have the vocabulary to adequately describe it.

Since the time I entered the program, I have shifted my professional focus from running a small business to trying to help dismantle Whiteness and its inherent privileges. It is a continuous process of learning, but I feel my former professional life provided me with some useful tools I may not have gleaned without the years of practice in the business world. Typical tools, such as budgeting, short- and long-term planning, hiring (and letting go), and project management, I performed daily over a decade of co-owning a business. In my master's program, when my colleagues realized I had experience with logistical and business planning, those skills were appreciated and put to use. However, beyond the hard skills I attained running a business, more importantly I learned to move between understandings of two worlds: a social justice world and a capitalistic enterprise world. I believe this insight and experience in both spheres uniquely positions me to bridge the gap between the two. Further, my White privilege and professional background combined with my new understanding of justice issues positions me to possibly make a difference. I continue to endeavor to do what I can do support the fight towards a more just world.

I was not an unredeemable and bad person. My parents were not unredeemable and bad people. The White people in my neighborhood who reject the local public high school down the street in favor of the Whiter and wealthier high school across the community for their children, are not unredeemable and bad people. What they are, in my opinion, is unreached.

The reason I have changed is exposure. I believe decent and redeemable people are the majority (despite my fits of pessimism that steer my thinking occasionally). White, patriarchal thinking is strong and pervasive, but it can be overcome. The question is: how? How are these decent, but culturally conceited people, reached? This is where I hope my research can help. Let's ask those like me who once misunderstood the value of diversity and the incredible structural impediments erected before those who do not comply with the ideal cisgender, European, White, wealthy, Christian, thin normative ideal: what opened your eyes? How were you reached? Armed with these factors, is it possible to enlist them in pursuit of transforming others?

Centering the experiences and voices of White people is problematic. White people claim space, claim expertise, claim authority. This research offers space, grants expertise and recognizes White authority. However, I believe this might be one of the few times where it is tolerable. How can anyone attempt to reach a group without understanding how some of the group was reached in the first place? Space, expertise and authority must be granted to oppressors in the service of the oppressed. I believe that tapping into potential factions of White allies who may be steered to join the fight to end oppression is a laudable goal worth reaching.

What has drawn me, and perhaps other White critical scholars to this research, is hope for understanding and justice in the face of great despair and injustice. We have been the adversary. We live amongst the adversary. We understand the adversary. But underlying it all is the belief that White people who act unredeemable, are indeed transformable. This research strives to be a catalyst in that transformation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## OVERVIEW

I begin the literature review with a historical recap of America's struggle with racial injustice and then turn to its current iteration of White hegemony. Outlining the shift from overt acts of racial hostility to more socially palpable expressions of dominance, I detail how White people in contemporary America maintain a White hegemonic stronghold. It is this hegemonic stronghold that informs generation after generation of White people into believing in the natural and assumed dominance of White culture. Understanding how some people have broken free of this overwhelming historical and structural stronghold is critical in breaking the cycle for future generations. Finally, a review of current understandings of Critical White Studies and the development of Pedagogies for the Privileged, multicultural education and the hope of Transformative Learning is considered. These theoretical frameworks underlie my research.

## HISTORY OF WHITE HEGEMONY

The United States of America was founded and built with White supremacist sensibilities. Europeans colonized America with disregard for the First Nation's people and built a country on the backs of enslaved African Americans. When situating contemporary racism, one must examine our founding history in order to understand current dynamics of oppression. Jessica Ringrose (2002, 304) agrees and contends that our contemporary understanding of racism is best grasped "as one aspect of postcolonial struggle because this frame links us forcefully to the imperial past." Omi and Winant,

2014; Tanner, 2018; Crenshaw, 1991 and Spade, 2013 agree that our genocidal past is echoed in our current treatment of non-White people and the persistence of White supremacist attitudes. Gramsci (in Hodgkinson and Foley, 2003) coined the term "common sense" that describes the phenomenon of the unquestioning acceptance and expected adherence to societal norms dictated by oppressors. These attitudes must be examined and revealed in order to diffuse their enduring power.

In addition to the founding principles of conquest and oppression which have shaped the current racial formation, Ian Haney Lopez (2006) outlined in his book *White by Law,* the details of how the history of American law constructed race. Lopez outlines the amorphic nature of the definition of "race" and "White" throughout the court's history as it struggled to assign definitions which could be legally upheld and that effectively maintained White men in power. This construction by White men in power inevitably lead to the (false) notion of America as a White country where White was held as the standard to which all others were measured (McWhorter, 2005; Flagg, 1997; Kinloch and Lensmire, 2019; Boal, 1979; Winans, 2005; Allen, 2004, Moraga and Anzaldua 1983, Carbado, 2013). Bolstered by the authority of the courts and the unquestioned legitimacy of the colonization of America, the prevailing attitude that America was a European (White) country, and that this characterization was preferred, led to the continued deprivation and disparagement of anything non-White in nature.

Although it would be comforting to think the law has evolved in the last century, sadly these attitudes prevail today. Justice is not colorblind. Although recent Obama era criminal justice reform policy has caused a slight reduction in the percentage of Black incarceration rates[17] compared to White incarceration rates, the ratios are still alarming. Blacks comprise 12% of the US population but account for 33% of the prison population and have an imprisonment rate six times that of their White counterparts.[18] Further, Blacks are far more likely to be executed than Whites in the criminal justice system.[19] City streets are a virtual killing ground where video accounts of police brutality have revealed racial hatred in bloody detail.[20] Alton Sterling, Atatiana Jefferson, Pamila Turner, Eric Garner, Korryn Gaines, Philando Castile, Yvette Smith, Delrawn Small, Rodney King and Walter Scott are just a few of the victims caught on tape being brutalized by police. Surely their video imagery captures only the tip of the iceberg of the reality of the mean streets encountered by people of color at the hands of the police. And as contemporary history has taught us, the police are not held to account for these acts of inhumanity, even when there are videotaped accounts of the brutality.

State violence enshrined by law is deeply problematic, but so are the day-to-day indignities of being not White and the adjunct pleasure of the unearned benefit of Whiteness. School ground policies declare African American girls' cornrows distracting

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[17] https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/barack-obama-criminal-justice-reform-prison-sentencing-police

[18] https://www.pewrearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/30/shrinking-gap-between-number-of-blacks-and-whites-in-prison/

[19] https://captialpunishmentincontext.org/issues/race

[20] https://killedbypolice.net/

and suspend young Black girls for their perceived disobedience. In fact, young Black

girls are six more likely than their White counterparts to be suspended from school,

setting them up for a more likely entrance to the school to prison pipeline.[21] Meanwhile,

generally, African American children find themselves targets of police presence in

schools where school resource officers initiate interaction and mete out punishments

more commonly to Black students.[22]

There is an unspoken expectation that all students ought to look White and aspire

to act White. Flagg (1997) coined the term transparency to describe the tendency of

Whites to not think about Whiteness, but rather to see Whiteness as normal to which all

others be measured against. When White people are asked "What does it mean to you to

be White?", the typical reaction is a glassy stare and the weak reply: "I don't really think

about it." Indeed, to not think about one's color is akin to saying: "I am not a political

person." Only those whose journey through life finds no institutional barriers of

hegemony may make such a claim.

Lorde (2007) describes Whiteness (and its accompanying desired traits of thin and

wealthy) as the mythical norm to which all aspire, as though its very nature conveys some

purity and perfection. Of course, what Lorde (and those who study history) understands is

that Whiteness is dangerous: dangerous to those who don't comply with its hegemonic

demands. Overt violence is prevalent, but so too is the pervasive and equally damaging

nature of the systemic violence that constantly attempts to diminish the participation,

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[21] https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2017/12/08/443972/preschool-prison-criminalization-black-girls
[22] https://www.psmag.com/education/after-parkland-schools-upped-police-presence-has-it-made-students-safer

impact and right of Black Americans to access the hypothetical American Dream. History books are replete with examples of non-White populations being excluded, harassed, incarcerated and murdered. The daily newspapers of today demonstrate that little has changed with reports of police brutality against Black communities, brown children caged at the border and transgender people falling victim to murderous attacks almost daily. The price for not complying with the hegemonic standard of White, male, heterosexual, thin, Christian and wealthy is high.

Gramsci (in Hodgkinson and Foley, 2003) and Apostolidis (2010) iterate how private society and political mechanisms work in concert to uphold the hegemonic dominant culture in the interest of civilization. As Charles Mills (2007) stated:

The wealthy have more power than the poor, and manipulates the rest of the population into accepting sociopolitical arrangements to which they would not actually consent were they aware of their real consequences. So, the human equality of the state of nature becomes the unnatural "political" inequality of a class society ruled by the rich.

Common sense is how Gramsci describes the societal tendency to mandate the prevailing hegemonic mindset where hegemony "refers to the ability of a ruling bloc to exercise leadership and control over subordinated groups (by) reproducing a series of social relations concerning class and capital, gender, race, and nationalism" (Ekers, Loftus and Mann, 2009, p. 289). Therefore, those in power (the oppressors) essentially dictate life's best practices, based on their understanding of what it looks like, and everyone else is forced to comply. From religious and gender expression, to capitalistic

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consumption and skin color, and all other ways of being are scrutinized against the perceived "common sense" best version of humanity. This common sense is so prevalent that those complying (who may or may not be White) are rarely aware of their complicity and promotion of the mythical norm. Burawoy (2008) and Giroux (2003) cite institutions, such as schools, as partners in the maintenance of the hegemonic state at the expense of others. If schools (potential locations for rational and critical thought) are complicit in maintaining the hegemony, disrupting it becomes that much more challenging. Gramsci's notion of common sense, and its attendant difficulties, also begs for leaders of social justice to find another source of disruption besides traditional learning institutions.

In contemporary America, the system of racial dominance has "evolved" from *de jure* segregation to *de facto* segregation (Omi and Winant, 2014, p. 15). Although it may no longer be socially acceptable to verbally denounce people of color as less desirable, it is socially acceptable to claim "colorblindness" as the mode of operandi. It is under this guise of colorblindness that ongoing racial inequality persists and pervades American life. Bailey (1998) contends that unearned privileges are transferred systematically whereby institutions and cultural norms reinforce and maintain who benefits from invisible privileges and who does not. Without understanding the context of how these privileges are gleaned, it is difficult to understand unearned privilege's impact and even its presence. As Omi and Winant (2014, p. 259) succinctly summed:

> To ignore ongoing racial inequality, racial violence, racial disenfranchisement,
> racial profiling, quasi-official resegregation of schools and neighborhoods,
> and anti-immigration racism…under the banner of colorblindness is to indulge

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in a thought process composed in substantial parts of malice, disingenuousness, and wishful thinking.

Without awareness of this context and institutional and cultural influence, people tend to see privileges as individual earned events rather than their existence within the broader historical and social context. It is this type of blindness which leads to willful ignorance and/or apathy in the face of ongoing racial inequality.

George Lipsitz (2006) details in his book *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics,* the pervasive nature of racial hierarchies of society that benefit Whites, and their reluctance to dismantle a system that so generously affords them rights and privileges merely by the luck of skin color at birth. Lipsitz's book suggests that public policy and private prejudice work in concert to maintain the racial hierarchies of society that benefit Whites who have no intention of giving up their advantages in power, resources and opportunity promised to the "allegiances of white supremacy" (p. xvii). He stresses the connection between Whiteness and asset accumulation "to connect attitudes to interests, to demonstrate that White supremacy is usually less a matter of direct, referential and snarling contempt and more a system for protecting the privileges of Whites by denying communities of color opportunities for asset accumulation" (Lipsitz, 2006, p. viii). Carol Pateman (2007, p. 162) takes this notion further and suggests:

> The powerful can ignore or be shielded from anything that might threaten their position and their comforts. Frequently they lie about what is going on…It is easier to be indifferent to the misery of others if those involved are seen as

having brought their own distress upon themselves, or are perceived as very different, as alien, as worth less, as inferior, as barely human or as another "race".

Lipsitz argues that every choice a White person makes (from jobs, to communities, to schools and churches) reflects a conscious consideration of race (their own and others'). Group identity is produced deliberately through social structures which benefit Whites and create what he describes as a race to the bottom that "enables wealthy consumers to pay less" for goods and services "while the majority of the population confronts the stagnation and even the decline of its real wages" (p. xix). It is a "poisonous system of privilege that pits people against each other and prevents the creation of common ground" (p. xix).

Breault (2003) states a consequence of these choices is the socialization of young White wealthy people who believe those with the most money and answers deserve the greatest voice. Educators also experience this arrogance believing that they have a more comprehensive and accurate worldview (Curry-Stevens, 2004). Lipsitz (2006) explains how White advantage was honed by housing discrimination and states that "the suburbs helped turn Euro-Americans into 'whites' who could live near each other and intermarry…but this 'white' unity rested on residential segregation, on shared access to housing and life chances largely unavailable to communities of color" (Lipsitz, 2006, p. 8). Breault (2003) and Curry (2004) concur that socialization of Whites leads to a tacit understanding of their normalized belief of their superiority and preferred worldview. If this only led to White hubris, perhaps this view could be tolerated. However, as Lipsitz so painfully outlines, the history of dispossession of people of color has resulted in a wealth

gap between Whites and people of color which has only grown more disparate over time. The effects are devastating to the Black community as evidenced by economic deprivation which results in school degradation, increased police violence, and an exploding prison population.

## CRITICAL WHITE STUDIES

In response to this horrific legacy of privilege, scholars have suggested it is time for Whites to examine the construction of Whiteness and to accelerate the process of its deconstruction towards racial equality (Tanner, 2019; Bulkin, Pratt and Smith, 1984; McIntosh, 1997; Pease, 2017). Believing it is time for White people to do the work, they suggest it is up to them to be inquisitive, read accounts of the history of oppression and its manifestation in the contemporary world. Further, they suggest Whites must identify and relinquish privileges which are unfairly conveyed to them and other White people in their social circle. They believe that for too long, people of color and other marginalized populations have fought for social justice and that it is time for Whiteness to be examined and dismantled.

Garner (2017) outlines a new area of inquiry that addresses this very topic: Critical White Studies. Its purpose is to explore issues raised in normalizing Whiteness and the dismantling of White supremacy. When the discipline began, it was mostly Black intellectuals and activists. However, as it has grown as a field of inquiry, more White scholars are engaging in the work. The research squarely focuses on the role of White people in achieving social justice and there is not agreement across the discipline on how

to best achieve it. For example, some scholars caution that too often such efforts only go as far as guilt and shaming rather than moving towards activism and societal transformation (Trainor, 2002 and Levine-Rasky, 2000). Admonished as navel-gazing, some activists admonish the Critical White Studies movement as inadequate and ineffective and demand that active dismantling of White supremacy is required (Curry-Stevens, 2010; Levine-Rasky, 2000). Leaning heavily on theory and analysis, White guilt is relieved, but praxis is often lost in the process. What began as an attempt to dismantle White hegemony may instead stall its demise as White academics wax endlessly in reverie. Worse, they argue that it centers White people's voices, yet again. Is it worth the price of elevating White voices in the hopes they might serve in dismantling the hegemony? Is there a way to include White voices without decentering people of color's proper stature as the focus? How do you harness the energy of allies effectively? Garner (2017) criticizes the first two waves of Critical White Studies as centering on White people's lives thereby ascribing to the very supremacy-type thinking the discipline hoped to dissemble: centering Whites and marginalizing people of color. Sheets (2000) agrees and describes three attributes of White supremacy: maintaining White issues at the center of discussion, not addressing issues of intersectionality, and believing that their experiences of oppression (ie: sexism) are equally as damaging as racism. Critical White Studies may be complicit in all three attributes.

Complicating the possibility of partnership between people of color and Whites is that Whites have a learned discomfort with people of color and ascribe one interaction as a definitive understanding of behavior (Daloz et al, 1996; Nash and Miller, 2015; Bailey,

1998 and Pease, 2017). Specifically, Nash and Miller found that White children in their study attributed Blackness to criminals, and they viewed White-as-normal and Black-as-different. Even at a young age, they felt discomfort in a room where they were the only White child.  Further, White people police their own interactions with people of color which results in a lack of authenticity that eventually erodes trust between the groups (Lensmire, 2010 and Bulkin, Pratt and Smith, 1984). Isolation and tribalism contribute to this phenomenon, one that is exacerbated by the current segregation of people by race and class. How is it possible to connect with people with whom you have little or no contact? How do you learn the true nature of issues and problems when your most trusted informant is your highly algorithmically adjusted Facebook page?

Jennifer Trainor (2002) warns against essentializing Whiteness, however. She believes that by doing so we run the risk of not reaching those who are most in need of being reached. If pushed too far or made to feel maligned, learners retreat. Attaching meaning to something relatable, rather than to diversity lingo and theory, may have better results. Trainor urges educators to consider that "politics are not only about abstract reasoning or economic interests, but also about belief, which combines the rational and the irrational" and that "any discourse about self and/or the social world, resonates when these two things come together" (p. 637).

Coston and Kimmel (2017) also remind us that privilege is not monolithic but rather unevenly distributed. Resisting dichotomies of who is oppressed and privileged not only assists in helping people to understand the dynamics at play but is also a more accurate representation of the dynamics as they play out in the world.  Further, Allen and

Rossatto (2009) contend that to address inequalities in the United States, inquiries around identity formations of oppressor groups is essential.

Howard (1993) suggests that for some Europeans the memory of their own marginalization upon entry to America causes them to be uncomfortable with transitioning from a dominant status. After years of fighting to assimilate to a point of invisibility (ethnically), some Europeans are reluctant to celebrate others' uniqueness when theirs was squashed years ago. Finding their place in the hegemony at a time that demanded assimilation renders some resistant to the critical analysis of White privilege and celebration of others' differences because "they feel that their own history of suffering from prejudice and incrimination has not been adequately addressed" (Howard, 1993, p. 37).

America's complicated history of overt racism, covert racism, colorblindness and other forms of racial hegemony is daunting. With each passing decade it seems in some ways we take a step forward, only to find that White hegemonic common sense has created a new and acceptable form of dominance and oppressive technique that drags us backward again. Critical White Studies demands the examination of current manifestations of White hegemony and its desire to maintain the status quo. Critical White Studies attempts to remain one step ahead of hegemony's amorphous ability to evolve (devolve?) and challenge its stronghold on America's commons sense notions. Constant vigilance by those members of society who dream, theorize and work towards a more just society must come together and exert their collective ambition in pursuit of justice.

Ann Curry-Stevens (2005) recognized this current of tribalism which pulsates throughout American society and its deleterious effects. She understood that without purposeful interaction and intervention, societal issues of oppression would be exacerbated. Curry and Allen (et al, 2009) also recognized that privileged folks have access to resources that could be critical in affecting positive change and therefore transforming their ways of thinking was vitally important. "As people from privileged groups join the struggle, it increases the critical mass needed to effect change" (Curry-Stevens, 2005, p. 32). Curry-Stevens and I concur that disrupting tribalism through contact and education, as well as utilizing the unearned power of White privilege, is central to creating a more must world. Even though the ground is littered with potential landmines that White allies may detonate, her hope (and mine) is that they can be navigated successfully with a safety map created together.

Curry-Stevens' research and praxis centered around destabilizing tribalism by attempting to create Pedagogy for the Privileged. To this end, Curry-Stevens interviewed twenty multicultural educators to find out which practices seemed to be effective, and which did not. Curry-Stevens (2005) defined Pedagogy for the Privileged as an "explicit embrace of social justice goals, abundant connections to social movement practices and an emerging recognition of the needs of the privileged learners" (p. 359) that "offers the possibility to remedy an identity premised upon superiority, recognizing how fully this identity might damage, at a deep level, one's integrity and values" (p. 360). Curry-Stevens outlined four phases of her pedagogy: a preparation phase, an analysis-building

phase, a self-exploration phase and finally, an action-planning phase. Curry-Stevens

(2005) goals included an analysis of power relations, supporting work for the common

good, and increasing opportunity for interaction between the privileged and the

oppressed. She strongly believed that much of the misunderstandings and oppression

stemmed from a lack of connection between people of different economic, class and

racial backgrounds, and that "friendships across difference serve an essential function to

break down the barriers between people" (p. 219).

Although criticism of Curry-Stevens' work included its focus on White people

and the decentering of minority voices, her effort pioneered the notion of teaching White

people about the hegemonic advantages they enjoy and how to help dismantle them in

service of justice. Tanner (2018) opines that it may not be demanding enough in its self-

examination of White identity formation and, rather than disrupting the hegemony, it may

inadvertently lead to maintaining the status quo. David Nurenberg (2011) finds

"narratives that promote white guilt counterproductive" and that "we may be missing an

opportunity for authentic engagement" (p. 56). Nurenberg suggests that the curriculum

must be made relevant and authentic to the learner by connecting it to the reality in their

own lives. For example, he suggested linking racial struggles to struggles realized by

women and LGBTQ classmates. Rather than guilt, he suggests linkage to their everyday

life to avoid rejection or indifference to the curriculum.

Dhamoon (2010) has expressed concern about the lack of historical context in

pedagogical attempts, where discussion of colonialism, racism and White privilege are

lacking. Without historical context, Fortier (2010) finds community cohesion attempts at

multicultural education wanting as it tends to rely on neoliberal notions that center on

individual agency, while ignoring structural impediments to equality and opportunity.

She found that much of the community cohesion work relied on "strategies of governance

that seek to design particular kinds of human behaviors" and the work tends to be a form

of "governing through affect that draws on and targets affective subject for certain

strategies and regulations" that aim to regulate behavior towards the hegemonic standard

(p. 17). She is concerned with how problems of cohesion are described and how "feelings

are favoured over considering the economic, social and historical forces that structure

inequality" (p. 22). Her important work pioneered the notion of teaching White people

about the hegemonic advantages they enjoy and help to dismantle it in service of justice.

Without this type of work, community cohesion activity may simply become a vehicle for

reinforcing White supremacy and false neoliberal notions of efficacy of individual

agency overcoming structural racism. It may also require that migrants reject their culture

and roots in the service of fitting in and belonging. Impressions that human behaviors

may be regulated to be acceptable and non-threatening if coerced into more closely

examining the "norm" (as defined by hegemonic standards) may prevail in community

cohesion attempts without employing Fortier's important analysis.

　　　Although this criticism is well founded, one cannot achieve success without

trying. Curry-Stevens' work, though not perfect, pioneered the notion of teaching White

people about the hegemonic advantages they enjoy and helping to dismantle it in service

of justice. It gave us the building blocks with which to begin to ask these very important

questions: how do we harness the power of White people in the pursuit of justice? It is a

question, I believe, that is worth continuing to ask and I do in this study: what factors cause a dramatic ideological shift in social justice perspectives?

Freire (2018) was an educator who believed that through a process of conscientizacao, the oppressed would understand the dynamics of oppression and commit themselves to transforming it. In the process of liberation, the pedagogy would belong to all of the people. I believe that extending Freire's conceptualization of conscientizacao to the oppressors is vital. Freire did not exclude oppressors from the need to transform, and in fact believed it was necessary as they were constrained (and oppressed) by their lack of understanding. He believed freedom was not available to oppressors without education and struggle. Nicholls (2011) concurs that the socially and educationally privileged academics must act in solidarity with the oppressed to learn how to advocate for them effectively. Nicholls believed that cultural synthesis is required to meet the goals of solidarity. She viewed cultural synthesis as a melding of the wants and needs of both the oppressed and the oppressors where neither group's desires overshadow the others – a "negotiation of viewpoints which critically examines the specific conditions of injustice a population faces and collaboratively constructs a path to justice for the whole community" (p. 18). Critical to cultural synthesis, in Nicholls' view, is cultural and strategic identification with others' which may only be achieved through interaction serving to undermine stereotypes and false narratives of one another. Echoing Nicholls' views, Mezirow (1991) charged educators with a vital role.

> (An educator's role is) fostering critical awareness and insights into the history
> and consequences of accepted social norms, cultural codes, ideologies, and

institutionalized practices that oppress learners; to helping learners discover

options for action and to anticipate the consequences of these options by

becoming familiar with previous efforts to bring about change (p. 210).

Mezirow is alluding to the notion that educators may provide disorienting dilemmas in

the form of interaction and historical contextual reviews in order to disrupt hegemonic

assumptions of superiority. Further, he suggests beyond awareness of hegemonic

assumptions, educators must encourage a review of social movements and their efficacy.

Here he is encouraging praxis, to move the merely socially aware towards the socially

active. This, perhaps, is the most critical piece of emancipatory social justice education.

Nurenberg (2011) further asks how we might apply Freirean logic to the

oppressors. He suggests studying touchpoints of potential empathy and identification

with those who suffer race and class-based oppression (p. 42). For example, most

privileged people might relate to oppression as experienced by women in America.

Another possible touchpoint that Nurenberg proposes is conditions endured by sweatshop

workers. This is a particularly salient example as most Americans benefit from the work

of factory employees. Allen et al (2009) agree that it is very important for critical

pedagogy to be developed specifically for privileged spaces in order to bring about

societal transformation and it must include a critical review of identity analysis of

oppressor groups. This type of pedagogy demands that the oppressor move from a

comfortable space of awareness to a transformed space of active engagement and alliance

with the oppressed. Allen states "an oppressor student is different from and oppressed

student. And any pedagogy which fails to account for this difference is unlikely to

contribute to meaningful social change" (p. 179). In order to accomplish this, Allen et all (2009) suggest that "inquiries into the identity formations of those in oppressor groups" is necessary (p. 164) and that "more explicit theorization of the oppressor student that includes the construction of their specific group identity and the reconstruction of it towards a more positive counterhegemonic sense of individual-self, group-self, and Other is needed" (p. 171).

Stotsky (2000) points out the importance of considering the role of oppressors: "the premise underlying much progressive politics is that only the oppressed can address oppression. Many writers have portrayed the oppressor as being incapable of either personal change or activism in relation to social change" (p. 326). However, Stotsky believes that work from the bottom-up is paramount. He cautioned that it should be in conjunction with a top-down approach for the best effect. If interventions could be created to facilitate conscientizacao in White people, this would be a tremendous step towards racial justice. And as Freire believed, the very people we wish to educate are the ones who hold the key to reaching that population we are trying to edify. I believe we are compelled to ask justice-oriented White people: what influenced their decision to abandon White hegemonic notions and fight for social justice once their consciousness was aroused. This approach to Critical White Studies is not intended to replace other pedagogical tools that employ oppressed points of view at its center, but rather is an additional tool in the arsenal against injustice born of White hegemony.

Jack Mezirow developed a theory of Transformative Learning which offers hope in the conscientizacao of oppressors. Mezirow was an educator who focused his research and praxis on adult learners and believed that people's learning was constructivist in nature. He suggested that a person's frame of reference was shaped by perspectives rooted in sociolinguistic, psychological and epistemic codes created largely from our family, friends and from cultural assimilation (1994). These perspectives formed a schema of beliefs which functioned to shape how their world was viewed and tended to act as a filter through which anything that did not quite fit in the frame was distorted until it would.

Mezirow describes Transformative Learning as a significant worldview shift resulting in developmental growth and the underlying structures changing in order to adapt the new schema. Mezirow (1981) called this Emancipatory Theory of Praxis. In the event a person encountered a situation that could not fit within their existing frame of reference (an event Mezirow called a disorienting dilemma), critical reflexivity would allow the person to reconsider why they have attached a particular meaning to something, and a perspective transformation might occur. Mezirow (1991, p. 168-169) outlined ten steps in a perspective transformation which are summarized here:

1. Disorienting dilemma

2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame

3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions

4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change

5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions

6. Planning of a course of action

7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's planes

8. Provisional trying of new roles

9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

Mezirow's theory of Transformative Learning has been applied in many settings of adult learning including multicultural training, employee training and natural resource protection.[23] Applying the principles of perspective transformation serves to create new ways of viewing the world outside of pre-conceived notions developed through childhood. Although there is come criticism of Mezirow's theories (explored below), I believe that it is a central concept to help understand how to develop methods of re-educating White people who have been immersed in privilege they may not even recognize. Without necessarily naming the practice as perspective transformation, essentially this is the goal of most cultural diversity training seminars. Readings, discussions, movies, presentations and other tools are used in the hope of triggering a disorienting dilemma in the student which may precipitate a new perspective. Curry-Stevens (2011) describes the utilization of Transformative Learning practices with

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[23] https://joe.org/joe/2013december/a1.php

policymakers as the result of the perspective transformation which tends to be more durable than other learning approaches and thus may lead to resiliency in policy change as the participants are allied with it. This stronger commitment to change is vitally important since this type of change can be uncomfortable and arduous. Without true understanding and commitment, the will to make change may wane. Other professional applications of the theory have been applied. For example, Lytle (1989) applied Transformative Learning theory to assess nurses' perspective transformations when returning to PhD training after years as technical practitioners. Having a better understanding of the process of adult change may result in more effective training programs.

However, Transformative Learning may take place outside of formal classroom and training sessions. Any interaction with a life event or experience which challenges one's previously held understanding may act as a disorienting dilemma which precipitates a shift in one's perspective. For example, Taylor (2008) describes a student's perspective transformation when she moved from the United States to Switzerland to live. She described the experience of understanding how people in Switzerland lived their day to day lives in ways that were not immediately comfortable for her, but she came to realize that in many ways it was better for her. Letting go of her assumptions of America doing things the "right way" and learning the way of others was transformative for her. Taylor goes on to explain that transformations may happen during "acute personal or social crisis, for example, a natural disaster, the death of a significant other, divorce, a debilitating accident, war, job loss, or retirement." (p. 6)

Mezirow had his detractors. For example, Mike Newman (1994, quoted in Mezirow, 1997) believes that Transformative Learning may result in new ways of thinking, however, it may not lead to any action. Newman described it as only a personal act and merely a starting point for social action. In part, Newman contends, this is due to the individual focus on transformation, rather than the necessary societal focus for meaningful change. In fact, at times, knowledge can be paralyzing for some who find the pain of learning the truth overwhelming. Any action seems inadequate, so no action is taken.

Lensmire et al (2013) concur, charging that often, learning about racism becomes a stand in for actual anti-racist work and that the "ritual teaches participants that the crucial action they need to take as white people is to confess their privilege rather than take antiracist action" (p. 411) and conceptualizes privilege as individual equating "individual white people coming to understand their white privilege with overcoming systems of racial oppression" (p. 413). The focus is on the individual rather than the systemic nature of racism which may ignore "issues of social class and geography" (p. 412) and "obscures the social, economic, and political constructions of Whiteness…does not address historic, economic, political, social, and cultural roots of the racial system" (p. 421). A transformation of understanding may occur, but that may seem sufficient in the mind of the learner and "demands for confession end up undermining rich conversations about race and racism, as well as forestalling antiracist action" (p. 426). Without action, we have circled back around to the problematic exercise of navel-gazing by Whites while the world burns.

In another critique of Mezirow's work, Mark Tenant opined that Mezirow conflated Transformative Learning with social expectations when one matures in life. In other words, what Mezirow describes as transformative, Tenant describes as maturing. Rather than a separate phenomenon of learning with the potential for social justice praxis, the shift is no more than typical learning occurring as one grows up. It seems that Tenant ignores, however, how Transformative Learning may be manipulated or varied for effect. In other words, the natural maturing of an adult may be enhanced with experiences rich in diversity (for example, traveling abroad, interacting with people of different backgrounds, attending seminars). Certainly, an undeniable degree of maturing occurs in every adult, however, with intentional immersion in new experiences, the potential for encountering a disorienting dilemma escalates and the possibility of a Transformative Learning moment increases.

Perhaps what these critiques of Transformative Learning call for is a more critical response to learning. Critical Transformative Learning heeds this call. Critical Transformative Learning requires both critical pedagogy and transformative practices combined (Shah, 2017). Shah contends that "transformational learning without critical pedagogy focuses mostly on self, without regard to social action" (p. 30). This type of transformational learning requires the student to examine the resultant "thoughts, actions, and dispositions around power, access, and language...in order to create change in society" (p. 31). Therefore, this pedagogy seems to address the trepidations of critics of Transformative Learning by addressing concerns of broader societal and historical contexts as well as power imbalances. It also demands political action.

In their study of the process of critical transformational learning among archaeologists who endeavor to practice their profession in a more environmentally and culturally sensitive way, Sandlin and Bey (2006) found that the transformation was challenged by a social dimension. In other words, even when confronted with a disorienting dilemma, a desire to transform their perspective may be bound by systems and structures within which they enact. This has important implications beyond the study of archaeologists, since everyone is bound by some forms of social constraints. A critical transformative approach permits "students and teachers' engagement with complex theoretical material [which] grows as they discover that the concepts provide them with new ways of conceptualizing issues of power, causality and identity" (p. 756). Without attention to these challenges, transformative learning may be romanticized into a simplistic remedy for messy social challenges.

Although there is merit in the critique of Mezirow's theory, I think (just like with Curry-Stevens' work), Mezirow's notions of Transformative Learning pioneered a new possibility for harvesting the potential for emancipatory learning. This type of learning may be employed for good that could lead to a more socially just world. Although not perfected in its infancy, the seeds of Mezirow's work may be employed for the pursuit of social transformation.

Echoing Mezirow's notions of disorienting dilemmas, Keating (2013) recalls Anzaldua's concept of nepantla, a passage between worlds that causes chaos where one's belief systems are questioned and reformulated in light of new information. It is this critical process of reflexivity and "woven linkage" that one is offered "another entry into

coalition-building and transformation" (p. 43). Keating advances the notion of "invitational pedagogies" that "facilitate movement through and beyond these oppositional modes" (p. 183) where former adherents to the hegemony may find new understandings. As a White woman, I find myself reluctant to appropriate the concept of nepantla. However, I am compelled by the notion of moving between worlds and understanding what causes discomfort. There may be learning in the discomfort, but without it, how does one move forward? Navigating the best role for me in helping to create a more just world, I find the road can be uncomfortable. The notion of nepantla gives me hope. It reminds me the discomfort I am experiencing means I am growing. It reminds me when I meet resistance in the world to the work I am doing, I might be doing something right. It reminds me that both worlds I straddle have strengths, and that both worlds have weaknesses. But together, both worlds are stronger.

Of course, there is peril in the strategy of empowering (and centering) White people in the fight for social justice. If privileged pedagogy asks to center White people, it seems counterproductive and counterintuitive to the process of dismantling White hegemony. Bailey (1998 quoted in Pease, 2013) sums up the no-win nature of centering White people in social justice work stating;

> While the structural relations that advantage the privileged remain, they will always gain unearned benefit from them. This leaves (them) in the difficult position of knowing that they cannot rid themselves of their privilege and that they cannot use it without perpetuating the dominant-subordinate relations they are opposed to.

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Lopez (2006) laments that self-consciously examining White identity may lead to reinforcing its supremacy yet failing to examine it has a similar result. Audre Lorde (2007) agrees: The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house (p. 110).

Lorde's and Curry-Stevens' concerns haunt me with every step I take towards finding my most useful space in anti-hegemonic work. However, staying frozen in fear and retreating to the safety of White privilege does not appeal to me. Allen and Rossatto (2009, p. 165) insist that White educators take a central role in social transformation:

Who will challenge their ideological formations? Who will teach them about the need for social justice? If members of oppressor groups do not take up this cause in the classroom, we argue that changing the role that schooling plays in reproducing the social order will be that much more difficult.

It is not my intention to replace pedagogies which currently exist that center marginalized voices. In fact, I would argue that those pedagogies should remain at the heart of the social justice conversation. However, I believe that understanding the forces that shaped a new understanding of justice in former White hegemonic adherents is a critical, and largely overlooked ancillary body of knowledge which will help facilitate social justice change. It is imperative in an ideologically siloed world to create disorienting dilemmas in the pursuit of justice. A brief cross referencing of Critical White Studies literature with Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning shows no overlap in theoretical consideration. It seems that it is imperative that Critical White scholars employ Transformative Learning and its accompanying phenomenon of a disorienting dilemma to shift long held (and often inaccurate) meaning perspectives. Certainly,

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Mezirow encourages adult educators to embrace the role of facilitating meaning perspective shifts by providing "educational experiences which challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions about relationships in order to call them into critical consciousness" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 19). But what is the most effective disorienting dilemma? Mezirow (1994) offers insight here as well suggesting that changes in accepted social norms may come from a variety of sources: television, movies, books, popular press and other cultural opportunities. In fact, he argues that often these sources of disorienting dilemmas may be most effective in producing new social norms. It is the purpose of this research to try and reveal what an effective disorienting dilemma might look like from the perspective of White people who have had a significant ideological shift in their lifetime.

Therefore, at the risk of centering White voices (again), and perhaps stepping on some racial landmines, I agree with Allen and Rossatto's assessment that oppressor groups must take up the cause of challenging ideological formations. The alternative is to ignore the potential living in human beings who have the ability to change, grow and utilize their power for the betterment of others.

Several theories consider the conditions which best prescribe positive interactions amongst disparate individuals. For example, Contact Theory contends that interaction is necessary to build allegiances amongst differences but that certain conditions must be met in order for interaction between different cultures to have a positive outcome: a chance for participants to get to know one another, status that is similar amongst participants, a situation that fosters cooperation, support by those in authority, and friendship (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Allport's work is essential in that

he explains that simple proximity of different types of people is not enough to foster positive interactions and relationships. Instead, thoughtful consideration must be given to creating space that will encourage positive group interaction in order to foster favorable results. Dovidio, Gaertner and Kamakami (2003) found additional factors which affect the successful outcome of contact: the opportunity for groups to make personal acquaintance first with people who defy ingrained stereotypes, and also the chance to forge friendships initially. Finally, they observed that cooperation in some task elevated chances for a positive interaction.

Pettigrew's work (1998) complicates the dynamic set forth by Allport suggesting there are interrelated processes which affect perspective change: learning about the other, changing behavior, creating ties and ingroup reappraisal. Perhaps most discouraging is Pettigrew's finding that "prejudiced people avoid intergroup contact, so the causal link between contact and prejudice is two-way" (p. 80). This finding comports with my anecdotal experience creating civil dialogue space for diverse ideologies which seems to draw disproportionately left-leaning perspectives. Optimistically, Dovidio, Baertner and Kamakami (2003) note that greater knowledge of others may mitigate this dynamic.

Multicultural Ideology (MCI) promotes the notion that a rich fabric of cultural diversity enriches a society and that positive contact with different ethnic groups fosters this belief (Musso et al, 2016). Particularly, Musso found that emerging adulthood is a critical time in which young adults are more open to accepting difference and other cultures. He opines that this is due to new cognitive abilities which shape moral reasoning at the young adult stages of development. Gerson and Neilson (2014) add that

moral reasoning, the development of one's identity, and empathy are critical to embracing diversity. Additionally, previous adherence to tolerance will be a mitigating factor (Musso et al, 2016). "Practitioners should promote MCI, tolerance and positive PCI [perceived consequences of immigration], for instance, by providing EAs [emerging adults] with opportunities of intercultural contacts in a collaborative environment that may support EAs to be appreciative of other culturally different people" (Musso et al, 2016, p. 76).

Gerson and Neilson (2104) add to the research that predicts successful group interaction. They have found that feeling secure in one's own self-concept is a necessary precursor to open and fruitful contact, pointing again to the critical stage of emerging adulthood for developing tolerance. They outline two possible frameworks for moral reasoning: Maintaining Norms schema which upholds existing practices, and Postconventional schema that questions existing practices. Further, they found empathy was the strongest factor in being open to diversity and that if there was ego confusion, it might lead to rejection of difference as a defense mechanism.

Once a fruitful group interactive space has been established, the opportunity for a transformative learning experience may follow. Echoing adult educator Jack Mezirow's Theory of Social Transformation precipitated by a disorienting dilemma, psychologists formulated The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. This theory was developed by Leon Festinger in 1957. Elliot Aronson (1969) defines it as "a negative drive state which occurs whenever an individual simultaneously holds two cognitions (ideas, beliefs, opinions) which are psychologically inconsistent" (p. 2). Aronson outlined four types of

cognitive dissonance: logical, cultural mores, inconsistency between cognition and a more encompassing cognition, and past experience. Each dissonance leads a person to reconsider their original understanding of an occurrence and decide if they wish to "emphasize the positive aspects or deemphasize the negative aspects" in order to relieve the dissonance (p. 4). If the dissonance is too great, an ideological shift may occur. Francois Facchini (2016, p. 589) outlines a theoretical approach to this shift:

> If a person prefers ideology A to B it is because the costs of justifying A are less than the costs of justifying B. An event generates a change because it makes an ideology problematic and places the individual in a situation of cognitive dissonance – the event that generates change makes an ideology problematic when it increases its justification costs and rationale costs increase with the quality of the alternate ideology.

Facchini (2016) developed a feedback model which permits challenges to one's ideology and rationalizations when faced with a crisis that challenges those notions to the point that justifying it is too high. He suggests there are three general reasons someone may shift their ideology: large numbers of people conflict with their view, scientific or religious authorities resist their notions, and "it fails to acknowledge all of the assertions deemed non-problematic by the majority" (Facchini, 2016, p. 592). Simply put, the cost becomes too high for the person to continue their adherence to the ideology.

Borrowing from Freire's notion of empowering those who wish to learn and transform, this research aims to understand how a radical transformation of ideology from White hegemonic adherent to social justice advocate has occurred in a sample of

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White interviewees and then to use that research to inform future interventions of White oppressors. Despite the racist history, despite notions of transparency, colorblindness and White hegemony, despite tribalism and segregation, some White people have managed a substantial ideological shift. Responding to Critical White Studies' demand of examining and dismantling Whiteness, this research hopes to add to the body of research that attempts to accomplish this daunting task. At the risk of centering White voices, my hope is that this research adds to the chorus of justice, not drown it out. Longing to avoid the theoretical cul-de-sac trap of spurring contemplation with no action, the findings of this research may make possible the creation of curriculum or strategy that will motivate White hegemony to dismantle itself. Pedagogy of the privileged should be designed to destabilized tribalism and catalyze conscientizacao, as envisioned by Freire. It is through cultural and strategic identification with people who are different from us (as Nicholls' contends) and through bottom up, as well as top down learning (as Stotsky suggests) that we might meet in the middle for a deeper understanding based on common humanity. By understanding the impetuses behind the transformations, perhaps educational and artistic interventions could be created which capitalize on those impulses. Perhaps there is a possibility of helping to bridge the current siloed polarization and work towards catalyzing hegemonic dismemberment, not in place of the current work by a myriad of social justice movements, but rather in concert. I am hoping this research might be an ingredient in that catalyst.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The research conducted for this study employed a qualitative approach. Qualitative research aims to reveal how people interpret experiences that occur in their lives and also to understand how those experiences are interpreted (Merriam and Ntseane, 2008). Therefore, qualitative research seems a good fit for understanding the experiences of the participants in this study. Qualitative research also assumes knowledge is socially constructed, which is central to this inquiry of understanding how the participants experienced a significant ideological shift in perspective. It also dovetails nicely into Mezirow's concurrent belief that knowledge is socially constructed and this informs his theory of Transformative Learning which undergirds this research.

Specifically, this research was a critical qualitative study. This type of inquiry hopes to "critique, challenge, to transform and empower" (Merriam, 2009, p. 34). Not just to understand, but "also to critique the way things are in the hopes of bringing about a more just society" (p. 35). Creswell (1994) suggests that critical inquiry requires an "attempt to aid emancipatory goals, negate repressive influences, raise consciousness, and invoke a call to action that potentially will lead to social change" (p. 12). As outlined in the introduction, the aim of this study is to not just understand how the participants in the study changed their perspective, but also to use this information to create more opportunity to catalyze transformations in other people in the hope of bringing about a more just society. This may facilitate a shift in power from the White hegemonic and dominant social group to the currently marginalized social group and ultimately serve as a call to action in support of social justice pursuits.

Grounded theory was applied. Merriam (2009) describes the researcher as the primary data collector for grounded theory. The researcher acts not only as a data collector, but also an interpreter of the meaning of the data utilizing inductive reasoning. From the data, I attempted to build theory of what precipitates ideological shifts in thinking thereby employing a grounded theory approach to inquiry. Unique to grounded theory is the notion of building theory that is specific in its inquiry and may produce practical application in the future (Glaser, 2012). It differs from traditional empirical research in that no preconceptions are allowed – in other words, no hypothesis. "The rule is let these areas emerge. Discover them" Glaser (2012, para. 6). Charmaz (2017) contends that a constructivist version of grounded theory interrogates the "taken-for-granted methodological individualism" and permits a "deeply reflective stance" allowing researchers to examine their assumptions (p. 34). Importantly, Charmaz states that constructivist grounded theory also "locates the research process and product in historical, social, and situational conditions" (p. 34). This addresses the concern of much research that tends to focus on the individual rather than on the societal forces that shape the actions of an individual. Merriam (2009) believes this approach is especially helpful if one is attempting to understand how a process changes over time. The interviews with the participants specifically inquired about the process of ideological shift over their lifetime with the intent of building theory around best practices for transformational possibilities in others. Therefore, grounded theory dovetails suitably with the goal of this study. Critical inquiry demands the study addresses issues of power, inequality, and injustice (Charmaz, 2017). Issues of power difference between oppressed populations and

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oppressor populations must be interrogated and constantly visited when asking the questions, collecting data, and interpreting the data. Charmaz (2017) concurs that considering emancipation and transformation in a critical inquiry before and during the research project is vital.

Departing slightly from classic and pure grounded theory, however, this study employed theoretical frameworks to consider when constructing, implementing and interpreting the results of the study. The theoretical frameworks through which the study was viewed included theories visited in the literature review: Critical White Studies, Transformative Learning and Pedagogy of the Privileged. This has been described by Noble and Mitchell (2016) as a "quasi-deductive approach" (p. 1) and by Charmaz (2017) as a "constructivist grounded theory study" in that it "locates the research process and product in historical, social and situational conditions" (p. 34). Charmaz and Mitchell dispense with the notion that the researcher comes to the study free of bias and rather embraces the fact that she be self-reflective of her privileges as she navigates through the research and data analysis. In fact, constructivist grounded theory demands the researcher engage in "methodological self-consciousness" whereby she constantly considers how her own worldview may be impacting what she is asking and how she is interpreting the answers (Charmaz, 2019, p. 36). By acknowledging researchers bias and the reality that the researcher cannot be an independent entity from the participants, Mitchell argues the results may be more reliable.

In order to conduct interviews with participants who may provide insight into the factors that precipitated an ideological shift resulting in actively working towards a more

socially just world, purposeful sampling was used. Selection criteria included identifying

people who began their lives steeped in a White patriarchal family and friend structure

and whose understanding of the challenges marginalized communities face was limited or

non-existent. However, due to certain life events and disorienting dilemmas, the

participants now have an understanding of historical and structural oppression. Snowball

sampling was also employed to identity further potential participants.  Fifteen interviews

were conducted and thirteen were used. The two interviews which were not utilized did

not fit into the description of having experienced a significant ideological shift. Rather,

they had become more politically active in the last several years, but their ideology had

remained fairly consistent over the lifetime.

Once participants were identified, each contributor then engaged in a semi-

structured interview to attain data specific to the research question. Life history accounts,

as it related to their particular ideological shifts, was the focus of the interview.

Interviews were recorded, and verbatim transcriptions were produced for data

collection.  From the transcripts, the data was analyzed and coded in an on-going process

typically used in grounded theory. In perusing the transcripts of the interviews, I was

informed by the theoretical perspectives outlined in the literature review to create coding.

Specifically, I was looking for instances of power, privilege and class that inform the

data. I also was prepared to look for voices and ideas from the interviewees  I had not

already been prepared for from my theoretical framings.  There were two phases of

coding: initial and focused coding. Initial data collection is a quick but careful

comparison of the data looking for themes while asking questions about what is emerging

from the data as it relates to the research question (Charmaz, 2013). A constant comparative method was used whereby data was compared to data, data was compared to code, and code compared to code, while searching for commonalities and differences (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2013). This initial coding resulted in four over-arching themes: childhood challenges, personality traits, transformational factors and transformation intervention strategies. Once the initial coding was complete, a second round of focused coding was utilized to reveal significant or frequent codes which are most practical for the study. These focused codes were then used to categorize the data into subcategories under the main four themes. Themes that emerge from the focused codes lead to theoretical coding whereby a hypothesis was drawn leading to a theory (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2013).

It is necessary to acknowledge biases and positionality as a researcher in qualitative research. Rather than trying to assume and present as an independent observer, I acknowledge that my training is from a feminist, critical White theoretical and social justice standpoint. My experience has been one of a transformative change of a narrow world view of justice issues to a more robust understanding of critical race issues which also includes activism and research. My views include a belief that structural and institutional racism exists today and that our country's birth and history has led us to the present moment of precarious race relations.

As I asked questions, gathered data and analyzed the results, it was through a reflective lens that focused on " How does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect data collection and analysis" (Pillow, 2003, p. 176). In fact, these

very questions informed my interest in this research. Reflection produces knowledge on the social world, but also reveals how the knowledge is produced (Pillow, 2003).

Researchers ask: who can we research? Whose representation ought to be believed and disseminated? White gaze upon issues of racial disparity is particularly fraught with concern about who voice is elevated. This research involves a White researcher asking White people: how did you come to your current ideological view of racial disparity when your history points to adherence with White hegemony. Although potentially problematic in its centering of White experience, the data gleaned may be utilized to create more cognizant interventions in pursuit of social justice. Also, it removes the unfortunate and often problematic issue of White gaze upon Black lives. However, Pillow (2003) argues that studying ones' own community does not completely eliminate issues of power difference nor alleviate the need for reflexivity. The power dynamic between a university researcher and her subject remains. Further, no two experiences are ever conceived from the same vantage point, even if the cultures are more aligned.

This sort of reflexivity has its detractors who are concerned that some researchers alleviate their discomfort (and possible responsibility) by simply waxing on about their positionality, as if simply recognizing and talking about the power dynamic renders the research viable. As an alternative, Pillow (2003) speaks of moving from a comfortable place of reflexivity to "reflexivities of discomfort" (p. 175). Here she suggests that reflexivity ought to be an uncomfortable practice of confounding disruption, rather than an exercise in clarity or humility. This disruption reveals the fact that much research is

situated in a place where "there is real work to be done even in the face of the impossibility of such a task" (p. 192). As a White woman engaged in Critical White Studies, I submit discomfort should be felt. Arguably it is a necessary emotion to be experienced in initial steps towards penance.

CHAPTER 4: LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The participants in the study were largely chosen based on their association to me, the researcher. This was somewhat ameliorated by the subsequent snowball sampling that produced participants beyond my social circle.

The questions presented in the interview were initially formulated by me and then finalized in consultation with my dissertation committee. The questions were limited by the biases present in the group and reflected their understanding of how to elicit responses that might best address the research questions. The committee did have some range in academic and ethnic background; however, all were informed by a social justice framework. Although a social justice framework is a natural fit for a study examining ideological shifts, it is possible that if other disciplines were represented in the selection of questions, the results may have differed.

Although I recognized my bias and attempted to keep it at the forefront as I interpreted the results, certainly my unique background informs which data points I give import to and the manner in which I categorized those data points was assuredly affected. For example, I expected to find that religion would play an important role in informing the participant's ideas about race. As I interviewed each person, I was looking for that connection. Although I did find connections between religion and perceptions of race, it was quite different than what I expected. Most of the learning about race in churches was done covertly, rather than overtly. I attempted to keep my bias in check, and I think to

this end I was able to do that. However, one's bias affects the questions they ask and the answers they hear.

   With a background in biological science that typically demands a larger sample size and a so-called "impartial view" of the results, I found myself wishing I had interviewed fifty people rather than fifteen. However, this impulse has been tamped down by the depth of the data I was able to achieve by spending significant time with each interviewee. Also, I believe the quality of the information outweighs any benefit from quantity of information.

CHAPTER 5: OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

Fifteen interviews were conducted and thirteen of those fit within the parameters of the study which required the participant to have experienced a significant ideological shift from a conservative worldview with little knowledge or understanding of systemic race issues, to a progressive liberal view which included an understanding of systemic race issues.

The participants were mostly female (9). There were three men and one transgender woman who were interviewed as well. Most of the interviewees (9) were over 40 years old. Five of the nine participants ranged in age from 50 to 59 and four between 40 and 49. Additionally, two were between 30 and 39 and one each between 20 and 29 and 70 and 79.

All thirteen participants described their race as White or Caucasian and from a western European heritage. Most participants hesitated when asked to describe their ethnicity and four participants defined their race and gender with the same terminology (utilizing either "White" or "Caucasian" for both.) Two participants expressed sentiments such as "you don't really know the difference when you are White" or they didn't know their ethnicity until they took an ancestry test. The rest of the participants described a European ethnic background.

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[24] Please note that the names and places have been changed to protect the identity of all of the participants except Christian and Derek. Christian and Derek are both public figures who have books written about their lives and lecture publicly about their experiences. Therefore, they agreed to use their real names for the project.

Six participants described their current socio-economic level as upper middle class and five described it as middle class. One described their economic situation as stable, and a current student described socioeconomic status as below poverty.

With regard to academic level, five people held bachelor's degrees, five held a master's degree, two held a law degree, and one person had a PhD degree.

EMERGENT THEMES OF RESULTS

An overview of the results from the interviews reveals four major themes which will comprise the next four chapters of this dissertation. The first theme involves the interviewees' childhood challenges and experiences and may be divided into five sub-themes consisting of: troubling events, financial struggle, religious dogma/authoritarianism, segregation and role models' influence. The fifth subtheme includes racist role models they later rejected, and progressive role models they later embraced.

The second theme involves particular personality traits which emerged and may be divided into three subthemes of: curiosity, conflict with family (fish out of water), and religious questioning.

Third, factors that precipitated the participant's transformations will be considered. There are five subthemes discussed: college, new environments, new people/partners, job experiences and reading/learning.

The final section of results will be an overview of the suggestions offered by the participants to help instigate transformations in other people. Four main subthemes are considered: storytelling, unlearning, exposure and marketing.

CHAPTER 6: CHILDHOOD CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES

TROUBLING EVENTS

A few of those interviewed described their childhood in positive terms: they experienced a stable and loving family environment. For example, John described a very traditional family in a safe neighborhood with loving parents:

My childhood was great. We would travel every summer as a family and do those kind of bonding trips. I didn't work until my senior year in high school, so I was able to play sports and lollygag around and enjoy life. There were never any significant challenges that I remember. I would consider it a middle class, two-parent upbringing with a smaller subset of kids – just the two of us – but a lot of other neighborhood kids that we would play with. I remember the joys of childhood. I don't remember any angst or difficulties. I am sure there were some. I think that time kind of washed some of that away and it also depends on your general disposition. I think how you approach life and optimism and things like that affect your memory. We were middle class back then when this country had a broader middle class. My parents worked very hard. Very fortunate. In a bubble to a certain extent.

Similarly, Laura describes an idyllic childhood, though wanting for more time with her father:

I remember it being a very happy childhood and I thought everybody else's was the same. I never wanted for anything. We had everything we could possibly need. My father was a doctor, so he didn't take much time off for vacation. That

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is the only thing that I would change. More vacations because we had him all to

ourselves.

And finally, Barb succinctly described a comfortable childhood: "We were upper middle

class. My dad did well I was very lucky. I had a lot of love and resources."

However, these three examples varied from most of those interviewed who tended

to describe troubling childhood dynamics. A larger proportion of the interviews began by

expressing "typical" or "normal" childhoods, however, once we delved deeper,

significant challenges emerged in their stories. For example, Linda stated: "I had a

normal childhood. I was a girl scout; family vacations were usually camping because

there were eight of us."  However, later in the interview she expressed that her parents

had very different political tendencies that she indicated caused a lot of tension in the

family. "My mother was a FOX News Republican and my dad an NPR Democrat. My

mother is very fear-based. My mother was raised privileged and my father was not."

These stark ideological differences, along with their widely different ways of

viewing the world, resulted in challenges within the marriage and family. Linda

eventually left home at a young age and struggled with finding healthy footing

financially, mentally and physically as a result.

Another participant who experienced significant challenges in her family growing

up was Pam. She began by describing her childhood in a benign way:

It was pretty typical. We just did what families did. We were fairly

typical kids. I don't have a lot of quibbles with the way that we

were raised.

However, once we began to explore more deeply, she began to remember details that revealed family challenges. Pam became visibly agitated as she recalled the frustration she felt with the lack of communication in her family about serious issues that they were experiencing:

> We didn't share our problems, we didn't talk about things, we didn't go to the doctor. Some of that may have been socioeconomic as well. But anyway, there was a lot of things it would have been good if we had talked about it. We didn't talk about politics; we didn't talk about religion really. We didn't talk about that there were other people in the world, and we didn't talk about sex, we didn't. We didn't talk about her two-pack-a-day habit, and why the three of us were growing up in a house of secondhand smoke. We didn't talk about those things.

In fact, the two-pack-a-day habit described by Pam in the previous paragraph resulted in the early death of her mother at the age of forty-eight when Pam was in her mid-twenties. Perhaps most revealing, Pam explained: "I didn't talk to my mom much about things growing up because I was terrified of her because she was so erratic." Conversations about politics often devolved into arguments. Pam describes one such incident:

> I remember one night my mom intervened in an argument we were having when I was home from school. I said: "Dad, if you were a bird, you would only be able to fly in a clockwise circle because you would only have one right wing." My mom said "okay, we are done here. That is enough."

Looking back, Pam regrets her family's limited engagement in the community: There was no activism in my family, no one did volunteer work, there was no discussion of

making your community better, or helping people less fortunate, we didn't do that. I really wish we had.

Tina described a close and loving relationship with her father. However, her mother had tremendous mental health challenges as well as addiction issues. Her mother was not involved in raising her nor did her mother live anywhere near here during her childhood. Additionally, her father lost his good paying job when she was young, and they were financially unstable most of her life.

Kate remembered that she had "a good loving family, a good childhood. No money, but happy. We watched good marriages." However, Kate also recalled that her father lived with a serious heart condition that threated his life the entire time she was growing up and precluded his ability to work and support the family. Additionally, although Kate presents White, her father was Mexican, and her mother was White. Growing up poor in an affluent area of Phoenix with racially mixed parents exposed the children to discrimination:

> Because my father was Hispanic, and my mom was White… we were the only racially mixed couple in the neighborhood and when I was very young people put explicit sexual pictures of people from a book and they wrote "leave Spic" or something like that. I knew other children couldn't come over. I knew part of that was because we were lower income, and then I realized as I got older, I found out more reasons why: my friends told me they couldn't come to my house because my dad was Mexican. My mom wanted to be the girl scout leader and they said no. They had no one else, but they said absolutely not. So, now that I look back, I

could probably come up with many, many acts of discrimination against us as a family because of that socioeconomic lack of status and then my dad being Hispanic. But I didn't know that at the time.

Overall, the themes expressed in the childhood explorations of the participants revealed challenges that ranged from relatively minor (such as ideological differences) to quite unsettling (flagrant acts of discrimination and addiction issues).

## FINANCIAL STRUGGLES

Financial insecurity was expressed by most of the interviewees. Although eleven of the twelve currently describe themselves as middle class or upper middle class, growing up nearly all experienced economic challenges.  Several described their childhood socioeconomic status as poor, some as struggling, and most remembered being the most economically challenged within their community. Tina explained "we never thought we were anything but middle class, but we were financially probably lower class." Beth recalled being poor growing up because her father left the family when she was just two years old, leaving her mother to raise four daughters on her own. She had to switch high schools from a high achieving academic institute to an alternative school so she could work to help with household expenses.

It wasn't feasible to continue to go to Bryant School because it was very upper-class. They would do things like, on football game nights, they wouldn't give homework. But if you said you had to work a double shift, they would say: that's not an excuse. And they didn't have any kind of work program. At other schools you could get out of school an hour early for a work program for credit. So, I

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transferred to Little Rock to Central High. I did that because you could go to school three hours in the morning and then work the rest of the day and get school credit.

Another interviewee, Linda, described a dire financial situation. Her father, who had enjoyed a well-paying job in the defense industry was laid off. Work for her father was intermittent after that job loss. Her mother, who had little education or specific skill supported the large family:

My dad started off in the defense industry. Then lost his job in the recession of the 70's. So, then my mom, who was a waitress, did most of the financial support consistently as he tried to find a job and he wound up being a salesman in San Francisco for a few decades. Too many kids and not enough money. Yes, it was tough.

Kate recalls how her lower class standing in the community informed how she strived to fit in the best she could. She always felt like she wasn't quite good enough and compared herself to her more well-off neighbors:

I came from what you would consider a blue-collar family. We were definitely lower income. We were on food stamps at times. We were in a nice neighborhood, but we were by far the lower income family in the neighborhood so although we had a home in the neighborhood, many times the water wouldn't be running, or the lights wouldn't be on. I was always fighting to be average. To be more what people would consider to be "normal". Because we didn't have the

nicest clothes, you know, we didn't have the nicest house. I wanted to be normal,

to be average, whatever that meant to people at the time.

Kate expressed how these experiences of trying to fit in as a child, and being

labelled an outcast, due to the mixed racial heritage of her parents, influenced her justice-

oriented activism as an adult. This was also true for Rachel whose father, once he left the

military, struggled to find regular work as a salesman. Rachel's experience of her family

striving to maintain a middle-class lifestyle on a lower-class salary was another theme

that resonated with several participants. The lower class standing positioned several

interviewees to be victims of teasing by wealthier children. Rachel describes how this

experience informed her adult activism.

> I remember finally getting my mom to buy us one real IZOD shirt, this white polo
>
> shirt with a blue alligator. I was so excited and would wear it to school and it was
>
> the only one that I had so I wore it to school so then the kids just made fun of me
>
> for wearing the same one over and over and I was like: I can't fucking win with
>
> these children. It was awful and those kids were just mean. I think in some ways
>
> this is where my class warriorness came from. Because I just fucking hated those
>
> kids.

The constant theme in many of the interviewees' stories of being the less

financially advantaged family in their neighborhood weaved its way through the

interviews. It also seemed to awaken a sense of justice at a young age. Perhaps some

people who experience this type of marginalization reject their humble beginnings,

however, each of these participants seemed to internalize their experience in a way that created a sense of duty and empathy for marginalized people throughout their life.

## RELIGIOUS DOGMA AND AUTHORITARIANISM

Segueing into a review of the participant's religious experiences, I would like to start with Maura who began by describing their childhood in positive terms. Maura portrayed her childhood this way:

> I really had a wonderful childhood. I had two very loving and caring parents who were doing everything they possibly could, thinking they were making the right decisions for us. We were poor, but we were always happy and mostly well fed. My dad nearly broke his back while at work…so we came down to a single income family. My mom was a special education elementary specialist. I realized then that things were getting really bad…they would hide the fact that the electricity was going to be turned off.

Certainly, Maura ascribed many wonderful attributes to her parents and her childhood, however, deep wounds were inflicted at the church they attended. Described as "very fire and brimstone", the church informed a household where Harry Potter and Pokeman were prohibited. This is the way she described the power dynamic of her childhood church:

> They believed in a literal interpretation of The Bible. There was a strong belief that the pastor was always right, and we were not allowed to question the pulpit. I

think if I had a quarter for every time I heard that, I would not be poor now. There

was a strong sense of: "what I say is true because it comes from God via me."

Maura explained that the non-denominational evangelical church that she

attended three times a week throughout her formative years, largely defines who she is

today. Her eventual rejection of the teachings led her to her master's research project

about her experience, and her questioning of organized religious practices.

> I experienced some sort of religious oppression through gender oppression. I was
>
> forced to go through some purity stuff in middle school…we had to read
>
> evangelical books that map out evangelical Biblical stories on purity… we also
>
> had to bring our clothes into church one day and have everything measured to
>
> make sure nothing was too short or didn't reveal too much underneath the armpit.
>
> You are also taught that you are responsible for the soul of men because men
>
> can't control themselves sexually, so it is your responsibility to help them get
>
> to heaven and stay pure – no pressure there! We still have a little bit of
>
> trauma we are still unlearning. Since then I have struggled with religion
>
> as a practice itself which is why it is hard for me to identify with anything.

Similarly, Rachel described her religious experience as predominant, weaved through

nearly aspect of her daily life. It was also very rigid, judgmental and fear-based:

> Very southern Baptist. Lots of church. We went to church three times a week.
>
> Cornwall is very…um…my life revolved around church basically. Church
>
> community. Lots of church. Very much church. It was very fire and brimstone

and you are going to hell – constant fear of everyone going to hell. A lot of homosexuality is bad, even dancing with a boy is bad, sex is bad.

The church dominated Rachel's familial and social experience with most activities she was involved in revolving around the church. Interestingly, and this was true for all of the interviewees, the church was racially segregated with nearly all parishioners being White. In Rachel's church, the only exception to this was a "model" African family who was brought in and celebrated. Rachel described it this way:

I don't remember much preaching about race, but I do remember that almost our whole church was White except we would sponsor missionaries that would go to various places in Africa and then we would host southern Baptist preachers who would come from Africa. They would always have these names like Precious and Grace, and they were always very sweet, and they were very much revered. (But) we didn't socialize with the Black people in our community through our church.

Although not purposefully and explicitly racist in its intent, the church taught lessons of Black inferiority through its sermons, actions and exclusions. Here Rachel describes the missionary work of her church which illustrates this point:

A lot of that stuff around missionary work and Africa, it was unstated, or maybe stated, this idea that other people needed us. African people needed...I don't know exactly…they weren't smart enough or they weren't Christian enough, or something, so that White religion needed to move through the darkest part of Africa to save people. So, there was that colonialist model of thinking. It was this message that Western culture and religion, we need to help African countries

otherwise they will just kill themselves like animals. That idea of Black people

being like animals was fomented through religious teachings.

Beth, who eventually rejected her Christian upbringing to embrace Islam, found herself

constantly questioning the lessons heard at church:

One of the stories in this religious magazine was Sodom and Gomorrah, and

Luke's lot was having sex with his daughters, and I remember being like: what?

Where did that come from, and why did God condone that? How can this be?

How can you be a prophet of God and do this? I recognized a lot of sexism, which

I didn't like.

Pam also found her religious experience growing up attending different Christian

denominations less than satisfactory. At one point her father refused to go when a pastor

suggested that it would be best for the community if everyone in the pews simply handed

over their entire paycheck to him to distribute as he saw fit. Her father left in the middle

of the sermon (and Pam found herself doing this later in her life – described below.) Pam

continued to attend church with her mother out of respect for her wishes, but found it

lacking in depth and meaning. As an adult raising her children as a single mom, she

found the message about divorce at her Catholic church deeply offensive as she strived to

survive with her children. Her disgust culminated at this heartbreaking moment described

below. After this experience, she left the church, never to return:

My husband and I had separated, and I knew we were going to get divorced and

the diocese of Phoenix made all the parishes show this video; they were

promoting their new marriage preparation program because they had decided that

the problems within the family could be traced back to the high rate of divorce. I

was trying to keep everything together and set up my own life and, you know, it

was a scary time for me. This was after all the sexual abuse stuff had blown up

and there was another wave of it that was happening after the Boston Globe

had exposed it. They played this video and I sat there with tears streaming

down my face. They were talking about if you are divorced you can't receive

the sacraments. I was already having some struggle with the idea that my

daughter was never going to have the same rights and privileges in the

Catholic Church as my son and I thought: now you are telling me that I am

a second-class citizen? Fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you. And I got up in the

middle of mass and I picked up my stuff, I picked up my music – I was in the

middle of the choir – and I told my kids: "come on we are going." I am not going

to listen to the Catholic Church lecturing on the moral high ground on

ANYTHING. NOT interested.

Leslie's experience with the evangelical Pentecostal church she attended was

deeply traumatizing as well. The church demanded of its parishioners complete

adherence to the pulpit's teachings, without question and wielded its power through fear.

Both of her parents were deeply religious, and the authoritative nature of the church

bolstered her father's desire to be the head of the family with the same unquestioned

adherence. Here Leslie describes the extent of the fear and rigidity:

In fundamentalism, people are either for God or they are against God. And there

is a scripture about Jesus supposedly saying because you were lukewarm, I

spewed you out of my mouth and I can't accept you and you are going to burn in

hell. I was also raised in a family where everything was black and white. There

was no middle ground, the word "reasonable" was rarely ever used. It wasn't

suitable for our vocabulary because it allowed wiggle room for people to get away

with something. I was taught that if you had any unusual thoughts that come into

your mind it is due to one of two things: it is either mental illness – and you don't

want that! – or it's a demon or a devil trying to persuade you to go down a path

that you do not want to go.

The church's rigidity and her father's mirrored approach meant a childhood filled with

angst and difficulty. Leslie told me:

I spent my childhood being told that I was useless and wasn't going to amount to

anything. I felt compelled to dispossess my family members of that belief and so I

buckled down, conformed, drank the Kool-Aid, became an ultra-conservative

right-wing Republican, and went off to college pursuing the same career path my

military father had pursued.

As Leslie matured, she found herself more and more at odds with the messages

that her church taught her about God and love. As she recalled her transition to a new

relationship with God she forged independent of her family and evangelical past, her eyes

continually welled with tears recalling the pain her transition precipitated.

I felt so torn in so many ways and all the while I continued to have serious

questions about God which began early in childhood. Simply because I found it

hard to believe that a God that is all-knowing and ever-present, who loves us so

much, but for some reason seems intent to punish us and send us to eternity in hell

and that his only solution, despite all his power and knowledge and ever presence,

for solving this problem, is to slaughter his only son on the cross. Which I just

thought: how is there any love in any of this?

While all the interviewees were raised in religious households, not all were

traumatized by their experience. However, several have established a different

relationship with God that is unlike their parents'. Kate's mother, who she described as a

hardcore Catholic, held negative views about gay people. Kate's mother died when Kate

and her siblings were in their twenties, about the time that the family was realizing one of

the daughters was gay.

My mom was dying, and my sister didn't tell her. There is a reason she didn't tell

her. I remember you didn't talk about gay people, because of the religious aspect.

I know that when my mom died, she basically asked us to save our sister, who

was gay. I think she knew it, but they never talked about it.

Similarly, Tina's experience in an evangelical Pentecostal church left her with

negative feelings about organized religion. While not overtly political, she found the

church to be judgmental about certain social topics (such as gay marriage) and its silence

on other subjects complicit in oppression:

There was this whole program about earning badges and being God-like and

trying to form women in Christ's image. I don't remember hearing anything

political in church at all, except abortion, which was obviously a big thing. And I

think gay marriage, but I don't think that they were specifically promoting a

specific agenda on any class or race issues. Other than ignoring it, which is obviously a position.

Barb, who grew up regularly attending Presbyterian churches, found the experience underwhelming and unfulfilling. For a while she left the church all together. Eventually she was able to rebuild her relationship with God on her own terms:

> For me, church was extremely hypocritical and just an excuse to get dressed up and look good and feel good about yourself. It didn't speak to me at all. I went because my mother made me go. I appreciated some of the moral lessons, but it wasn't speaking to me about the goals of my life. What to value. It didn't make me feel like a better person. My hatred of the church took away my foundation and I had to rebuild it.

Linda, who grew up in a very strict Catholic family, joked that she was taught God and Jesus were White. However, similar to Barb, she was able to cobble together lessons that her beloved father taught her about his foundations of faith to create her own understanding of God and love.

> I just want my actions to reflect my Christianity. I think it just comes down to respecting one another's differences. I think the foundation of my father's brand of Christianity laid the groundwork for me to implement that. Love your neighbor, there is no stipulation that your neighbor has to look like you.
> You love your neighbor regardless of what color their skin is, or what religion they are, or no matter their sexual orientation. You love your neighbor. There is no caveat to that.

Only John and Laura found their religious experience growing up useful into their adulthood. Laura stated that: "we were taught to care about people and to help people that needed help. I just thought was the way you were supposed to be." John describes how the teachings he learned in his Catholic Church were those of charity, kindness and love. Loving thy neighbor is a tenet he practiced growing up and continues today in his chosen profession where he works with oppressed populations.

> Probably the religious upbringing has some aspects to how I live now in terms of equity from the perspective to have a lens for how you look at how you treat others. The teachings of the religion and the faith and the belief system, you know: do unto others and love your neighbors. I believe this had an impact on how I viewed the world and others going forward.

Intertwined throughout the stories of strict religious adherence was a tendency towards authoritarian style parenting. Some of the comments reflected a milder version of authoritarianism, using words such as strict and controlling. Here is a sampling of some comments from different interviewees:

- My parents were definitely of the belief that parents are not friends. (Maura)
- My mom was probably, in trying to protect us, she was also very controlling. (Beth)
- It was a pretty strict upbringing. You did not deliberately defy things. (Pam)
- My religion and my dad were both a very confining force. (Tina)

Disturbingly, two of the interviewees' portrayed their parents (particularly their fathers) as abusive. Rachel described her parents this way:

My parents were super strict, SUPER strict. My parents were disciplinarian, authoritarian, it was just hard to live in my household. It was verging on verbal and emotional abuse.

Leslie's childhood experience with her parents was extremely difficult and confining. As she described her experiences growing up in a very conservative religious family, she did so in a very matter of fact way. However, later in the conversation, tears welled up in her eyes as she described the angst she felt regarding her father and her religious upbringing. Here Leslie describes her anguish:

I grew up in a very conservative military family. We were expected to be ultra-conservative, right wing, Republican, fundamentalist Christian on the intolerant side, and my father was very hardline disciplinarian, authoritarian. I was taught there are the rules, you follow them, this is the way that it is. You are either right or you are wrong. These people are wrong, stay away from them. And it was fair game to insult them, to demean them if they disagreed with you. That was to be taken as a personal insult. That was the way my father tended to view everything. Everything was black and white. Someone will tell you how it is supposed to be, and you simply accept that and then you go out and perfect the application of that knowledge and you impose that to the extent that you can. Any time that I questioned, I was met with hostile resistance and told that it was a lack of faith and that I obviously needed to spend more time on my knees praying or reading the Bible.

All of the participants described themselves as coming from a religious background. All except one have rejected the teachings of the church they were exposed to as children and have forged a new relationship with God. Some have embraced a completely different faith, and some have left the church all together.

SEGREGATION

Segregation took form in various ways. It could have been the community in which the person grew up was mostly White, the schools they attended were mostly White, and/or the places of worship were mostly White.

Nearly all of the interviewees described their churches as segregated. Here are some of the statements used to describe their religious experience:

- There was no racial mixing in any of the churches that I went to. (Beth)

- Everyone was White. (Maura)

- I don't think I saw a Black person in the pews until I moved to Phoenix. (Pam)

- Lots of Black people, lots of White people, and they all went to school together, but they did not go to churches together. (Rachel)

This theme of segregation frequently played out within their schools and communities as well. Oftentimes, the interviewees were raised in very "White" communities. Here is a sampling of some of the comments from the interviewees:

- I grew up in a little White poor bubble. (Maura)

- I think about when I was a kid, all the books were White characters. I don't remember a lot of diversity. (Tina)

- I was raised in a very White small town in the Bay area. (Linda)

- It was a heavily White neighborhood. There wasn't a ton of ethnic diversity, but there were people of color who were sprinkled around. (Pam)

- My background was very White, very homogenized. (Linda)

- The demographics, from what I remember, was pretty segregated at that time. The inner city is where African Americans populations were and the suburbs was clearly more White. (John)

- One Black family moved in and it was hell to pay: "now the neighborhood is going down, down, down". It was very middle class White for sure. (Kate)

- My hometown I would consider to be starkly segregated. I can't imagine an African American in that town. My town was segregated. We didn't have integration until 1965. (Laura)

Even if the participant grew up in a larger city, they were often living in a segregated part of the town where their exposure to difference was limited. Tina stated: "It was a very small community even though it was not a small town." Barb captures the sentiment of several of the interviewees with this account:

I grew up in Augusta, Ga. It is a city, not a town, about 300,000 people. I would consider it to be, while it was city of 300,000 people, it might as well have been a city of 30,000 people because our family was connected to a group of friends and community that was very small. It has a smaller town feel than the actual town size partly because of racism, partly because of fears, partly because of not wanting to associate with people who were different from them.

Interestingly, oftentimes sentiments of feeling safe or not having to think about race accompanied the interviewees descriptions of their segregated childhood. Here are a few excerpts:

- No one talked about race. (Kate)

- I don't think we talked about race!! I mean it wasn't a thing. (Pam)

- I did not think about race that much. I don't remember anyone talking about race. (Tina)

- I still always felt safe until high school. We never worried about people coming to get us or breaking in. (Laura)

- We stayed in one area. It was safe. It was White. We knew everyone on the street. I could knock on any door. I babysat for the neighbors. We rode our bicycles and rode to school. (Barb)

- I lived in an area where my body was safe enough. I was neutral. I was natural. (Maura)

- Where I was from, races don't mix. (Beth)

Although John described his childhood as idyllic, when pressed about racial issues growing up, he recalled:

Milwaukee would have been going through various racial issues when I was very young, demonstrations and things like that. I have a very vague recollection of that as a child but nothing that really struck me as: this is really wrong.

In some cases, this segregation encouraged (or at least permitted) racist attitudes to flourish. For example, Tina stated: "I do remember little jokes or observations that I

had no business making, but I didn't understand that." And Rachel remembered how she

was immersed in a racist culture that influenced her behavior:

> My childhood and up through 16 and 17, I was very clearly trying to figure things
>
> out… and I would…did I say racist stuff? Probably, I don't remember. When I
>
> look back, as much as I could say I had moments all along that I felt
>
> uncomfortable, I also had moments where I was completely of that. I was deeply
>
> entrenched in this stuff in Cornwall. It also shows how far I have come, and that
>
> change is possible.

Recalling a Black athlete at her high school that she reconnected with as an adult through

Facebook, Rachel revealed the racist undercurrent at her school:

> It was interesting to hear from him that he lived this life where he was a star
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> football player, and everyone loved him in that sense. But people and coaches and
>
> other football players were blatantly and openly racist and he was just trying to
>
> get through high school and move out of there. He left and went to college
>
> somewhere else. At the time it was not on my radar at all.

Barb also remembered how her friends influenced her behavior in a way that when she

looked back, she cringed:

> My friends were the worst influence. In high school, we made
>
> jokes. And comments about…terrible comments…like: "I am
>
> nervous as a n**** writing a check." I said that that several
>
> times in high school. I look back. I was an asshole. I was low
>
> on empathy.

And Barb went on to explain how segregation informed and abetted her behavior:

> I just think that the simple fact that I existed in circles that did not include Black people, yes it did affect my habits. I didn't have that exposure. You were a lot safer making comments or having assumptions when you don't have diversity in your circle.

Barb's memories of racism and segregation at school were a recurring theme in most interviewees when describing their school experience. Although some attended private school, some attended public school, some attended integrated schools, and some attended segregated schools, most of them still experienced segregation and racism in one form or the other.

Laura, who went to an all-White school and lived in a segregated neighborhood said: "I never ever went to school with Black people. I don't know where they lived. I never thought about it."

Beth, who eventually converted from Christianity to Islam recalled her teacher's complicity in racist attitudes at her school:

> I was staunchly Christian, and Christianity was right. And of course, the only thing that I knew about Islam was from 6th grade social studies when we were studying the cultures of the world. The only thing that we learned about the Middle East was that all the people were Muslim, and all the women were property, and they had to be completely covered and walk two steps behind the men with their head down. So, I didn't like them. And then in 7th grade, by coincidence, my public-school social studies teacher was also the Bible study

teacher, and we were studying all the religions of the world, and every chapter was a different religion of the world. I remember after each chapter, she would finish the chapter and she would say: "And they are all going to hell because they don't believe in Jesus."

Interestingly, Beth eventually attended a school with a majority Black student population and experienced marginalization from a different perspective. Here she describes the experience:

At Central High it was probably 80 – 90% Black, and we were White kids, and we were sometimes subject to unnecessary bullying. One time, during class when no one was in the hallway; I was walking up the stairs on the right, like you do, and these two Black girls started walking down the stairs. They started migrating to my side to the point where I flattened myself against the wall to let them pass. And as they were passing, they said: move you honky bitch. And I was like, really? And I didn't respond, and I wasn't even that offended. It just felt stupid. But you know that is the reality of the power shift in small places.

Those who attended integrated schools often found themselves in honors classes, which were mostly White students. Rachel, who went to an integrated school, described her experience this way: "My circle was predominantly White kids and a lot of those kids in my honors classes were also in my youth group at church and so there was a lot of overlap there." Pam concurred: "I was in honors classes all through junior high and high school. And those were mostly White kids."

Rachel, who attended a racially mixed school in the south recalled disturbing memories of racist behavior:

We would go to school, oh…it is so awful…something would be happening in the playground or the hallway and literally people would gather and chant this thing – I can't even say it – "it's a fight, it's a fight, it's an 'n' word and a White." So, I had contact with Black kids, but it was that kind of contact.

And Barb, this troubling memory of her complicity of racist behavior with her friends with flagrant disregard to the Black people who worked at her school:

We had a day at our high school called slave day and slave day was meant to be playful. I would make you my slave and you would have to carry around my books all day. That was the idea of it. And we would tie people to a tree, not hanging from the tree, but tie them to a tree. We had probably ten Black staff people, and they would see us privileged assholes running around thinking it was funny. It was easy to get away with it because there were no Black

people in the group.

Others described schools where the students self-segregated or assimilated to White culture in order to fit in. Here are several quotes from different interviews which illustrate this point:

- There were only four Black kids in my high school, and they all hung out together. (Linda)

- If someone was Hispanic, they were second or third generation so we didn't really consider them Mexican. (Linda)

- We may have had ten Black kids in the entire school from elementary to high school. They all fit in, and they spoke like us and acted like us. (Beth)
- The people that I grew up with who were a little different than me, I learned pretty quickly that they stayed in their lane and I had to stay in my lane. (Pam)

Two of the interviewees explained that students of color were rare in their school experience and they felt kinship towards them. Tina recalled a young Black girl coming to her nearly all White school and she befriended her:

She had just moved in the town the year before from a place that was more racially diverse. So, I think she felt very on display as the only person of color in the class. I remember clasping hands and she was very dark, and I was very pale, and looking at the contrast between our skin tones.

Linda, who had experienced ostracization at the hands of her more economically advantaged classmates, also felt empathy for a fellow student of mixed race who was shunned by other students in her mostly segregated school:

There was a girl in elementary school, and she was obviously African American. But when her mother came on a field trip, her mother was White. Other kids would tease her or not associate with her. And I knew what that was like because I didn't get invited to birthday parties because I didn't have the cute clothes that allowed me to hang out with them. So, I just sort of gravitated to her and just talked to her and made friends with her. But it was more: you are an outsider and I am an outsider type of thing. But it was definitely she was an outsider because she wasn't White. She was mixed in the 70's…my God!

Three of the interviewees attended segregated schools and then later had an opportunity to attend integrated schools which affected their way of thinking about race. John's parents sought out an opportunity for their son to attend a more integrated school:

> The school in Madison, the junior high was much more diverse. It was one of the reasons that my parents chose to have us go to that school. They wanted us to be able to go to school with more diversity. It was a small private Christian school, but it had a lot of diversity to it.

It was here that John had an opportunity to play sports with several Black students and this experience informed his notions about racial equity:

> They were good friends. I never really viewed it through a lens other than we were part of a team and I knew it was different because I had not interacted much with people of color before, but that was the first exposure with people who were different than I was.

> Barb, who attended the all-White private school that hosted Slave Day mentioned earlier, attended a racially mixed school for two years and enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people:

> During 6th and 7th grade a new middle school opened up. It was public. That was where I had Black friends. I loved the diversity. I was refreshed. Otherwise I would have had no interaction with people that were different from me.

Beth, who switched from a mostly White school to a mostly Black school where she could work to help support herself, found the experience enlightening:

It wasn't until in high school when I met some high school friends in Little Rock from my Bryant High School, and they were Black, and they were hanging out with their other Black friends. It was the first time that I ever heard Ebonics and the first time that I noticed that there were actual cultural differences. It was such a smooth transition in language. That was the first time that I noticed that there were two different cultures going on, and they were fitting in in my culture. Because they needed to.

## ROLE MODELS' INFLUENCE

In addition to segregated schools, segregated churches, and predominantly White neighborhoods defining most of the interviewees' childhood experiences, racist tendencies were regularly expressed within the family. While most indicated during the conversation that race was not really an issue growing up, oftentimes comments would arise that contradicted this assertion. An example is this quote from Linda:

> My dad was um…really hard to explain. He was a very, very kind man who would never show that he disliked someone. He did not speak badly about people. But he certainly didn't see his daughters bringing home people of other races to date. He called my sister's Hispanic boyfriend her border buddy.

Maura, who expressed race was not really an issue growing up in her "White bubble" recalled this about her father: "He definitely has the post-racial belief that if we don't talk about those things, everything is fine. He thinks: 'I work with a Black guy and we get along!'"

Kate came from a family of Democrats. Her mother was White and her father Hispanic, and yet she recalled her mother's racist attitudes towards Black people:

> She referred to Black people as "those people." I asked her about a young friend of mine who was dating an African American person and she was like "no, no, no!" and I said "Mom! How can you judge that interracial relationship when you are married to a Hispanic person?" My mom was also not happy about the Black family that moved in at the end of our street.

Pam recalls a similar sentiment from her dad:

> When I was in high school, a Black boy asked me to go to concert with him. My dad wouldn't let me go. His position was that if you go out with a Black man, no White man will ever want to go out with you again. I remember thinking – what are you talking about? I was 16!

And another interviewee, Rachel, received the same message from her parents and grandparents about interracial dating:

> They would say to me: "You better not date a Black boy." I am like: what? I am in 4th grade! He is a friend! If my orbit contained African American people I was warned: this is not okay. Or, it's okay if they are friend, but don't think about them ever as a boyfriend. It was very clear. Or I would say I had a crush on a boy, and they would say: "It's not a Black boy is it?"

> Several of the people I interviewed were from the south: Louisiana, Alabama and Arkansas. Overt racism was more common in their childhood. Rachel, who grew up in Louisiana shared this about the way her parents spoke about Black people:

The way that my parents and other people would talk about Black people in our own community…it was the really racist ideas about them being closer to animals, like monkeys. These kinds of words would come up in discussions about Black people. It was really just awful and racist. But it was just kind of the way that it is: White people are more civilized somehow. I think that was somewhat religion and somewhat other ideology, but they were so combined in my childhood that it is hard to separate what were those ideologies outside a religious context.

Beth, who grew up in Arkansas, also experienced overt racism. She talked about how her sisters spoke about Black people in starkly offensive ways:

I remember she used the "n" word all the time. And to me, from a very young age, this was an unacceptable word. I refused to use it. My older sister used to say it all the time and every single time I would tell her, don't use that word in front of me. And she would say: "you know it's true, I don't mean it bad, it is just who they are." And I would say: "you can say it all you want to, just don't say it in front of me."

Eventually Beth moved to Phoenix, converted to Islam, and married an Islamic man. Her sister moved to Arizona and expanded her racial prejudice from Black people to other visibly ethnic minorities in Arizona:

I brought her to Arizona, and she went from being racist against Black people to being racist against Mexicans, Muslims and Arabs. She was here when I converted, and she loves my husband. But for years her husband refused to meet

my husband. They would come to Phoenix to visit and they would stay in a hotel and he would refuse to stay at our home because he did not want to meet my husband.

Despite the racist reaction to her husband, Beth tried for years to maintain a close relationship with her sister. They had depended on one another growing up through the instability of their childhood when their mother experienced financial uncertainty and endured two divorces. However, at some point in became clear to Beth the divide between their ideology had become too wide to bear:

She was my stability growing up and we were close all the way until adulthood. And then in 2016, suddenly Muslims were the enemy. Does conducting yourself in a racist way make you racist? I was still in that illusion that conducting yourself in these racist ways was just a lack of enlightenment of how you are being unkind. But I didn't think that my family was racist. In 2016, that is when it is in your face, you cannot deny this anymore.

Laura, who grew up in Georgia, also recalled her sister being hypocritical and racist growing up. In addition, she had an uncle who spewed racist ideology and had extended family members who were members of the clan.

Rachel also experienced family members treating Black people with profound disrespect:

If there was an African American waiter or at a table two down where there happened to be Black people laughing together, they would comment about it, racist comments all around. Race was an issue and race was a thing. I feel like

I was aware of race for a very long time. The message was: don't date a Black person. Or Black people are scary. I feel like that was part of my consciousness for a while just because growing up in a place where race is such an important thing.

People are complex, so many of the same families who demonstrated racist actions and beliefs, also had sparks of tolerant inclinations. For example, Laura, who grew up in Georgia in the 1950's, helped out in her father's doctor's office where there was a waiting room for Blacks and a waiting room for Whites. Yet she was exposed to notions of treating people with dignity. Her parents were both educated (her father a doctor and her mother a degreed nurse) and she felt that influenced the trajectory of their life and the way they thought about things. She described her parents as not racist and her father as very supportive of her. Here she explains the dynamic:

> I remember helping my daddy in his office and Black people had to wait in a different waiting room, everywhere was like that back then. They had the colored water fountain and all of that. I am sure that it not make them feel very good, but they were always nice and they loved my father. And he was always very caring with them. Things like that made me realize that they cared about people and that they shouldn't be treated any differently just because they were Black.

Laura's mother also exposed her to different ways of thinking. When it came time to decide how much to pay Keri, their Black maid, her mother asked around to the other wealthy townspeople. She did not like the answer she heard so she ended up paying Keri a lot more than they recommended. This act of defiance was not taken kindly by the

White townsfolk. Also, against the norm of accepted behavior, Laura's mother would often drive Keri to and from her home for work and she often took Laura along:

> I remember riding with Mother into the Black neighborhoods to pick Keri up and I certainly saw the poverty there. I wasn't afraid at all. I didn't think they were horrible people, just that they were poor. That is the way it was in those days. As a child I didn't know, I just thought that was the way that they lived.

Keri, the family maid who was Black, had a direct impact on Laura's way of thinking about race. She explains it here:

> Keri, who was always there, I was closer to her than I was to my mother. I really think that she influenced me in so many ways, not more than my mother and father, but different ways. She was such a good person. Seeing her and how wonderful she was, and I remember thinking there are so many other Black people like that.

> While a product of time and place (1950's Georgia), her parents both

demonstrated progressive values in a very challenging time in American racial history. Keri's presence in this southern family had a ripple effect. Laura's niece, Barb, who also grew up with Keri and was influenced by her, told me this:

> If I ever acted out and said something racist, which I did, my Aunt Laura would always say: What would Keri think if you said that? Would you say that in front of Keri? So that was always a good thing. That was probably a pivotal thing for me: you know somebody, you love somebody, and you care what she thinks of you. You respect her. Don't shit on her.

Some of the interviewees found that their family members, whose progressive values influenced them growing up, have shifted their ideology over time to a less progressive one. For example, Pam's father, who is now a Trump-supporting right-wing Republican, exhibited more tolerant attitudes when she was young. She remembered a time when new neighbors moved in next door and the man who lived there referred to Black people with the "n" word. Pam had never heard the word before and when she went home to ask her father what it meant, he explained the history of the word and what it meant to use it. She realized quickly that was a word someone should never use. In another instance, during the hostage crisis in the 1980's, people were disparaging immigrants from the Middle East. This is what she remembers about that time and her father's nuanced and sensitive reaction to it:

> Every now and again people would say things about Iranian people because that was during the hostage crisis in Iran in the '80s and the people who moved in next to us were Iranian. But they referred to themselves as Persians and that said a lot to me about how they wanted to blend in and acclimate. They were lovely people. My dad made the comment: they are not Iranians, they are Persians. And I asked him, what is the difference? And he said Iran used to be called Persia and I think that they don't want people to associate them with the country that Iran had become. And I understand that now.

Similarly, Tina, who currently struggles to relate to her far-right wing Trump supporting father, shares similar memories of a more tolerant parent:

I remember being about 15 and going down to the square and there was a group of Black people there and I remember coming home and telling my dad: "I just saw six Black people!" For me, that was a moment since our town was so White. I remember him saying: "So?" I said I thought it was just unusual and he said it is fine. So, I don't remember him back then saying anything that was particularly derogatory towards different races.

Beth, whose mother is now a very conservative Trump supporter (despite the fact that her daughter has converted to Islam), modelled extraordinary feminist chutzpah when her ex-husband refused to support his four daughters.

She was pretty women's rights oriented. She was one of the first women to go to the police academy in Arkansas. And she went to the police academy because she had gone to court and won a judgement for child support against my dad and nobody in the sheriff's department would serve it. They believed that if you were a good wife you wouldn't have to get a divorce and you wouldn't have to go after your ex-husband for money. And so, she went to the police academy just so she could get a deputy sheriff's badge so she could serve her own ex-husband the judgement to get child support. I mean, to me, that is the epitome of women moving forward.

Also, in Beth's family, one of her aunts was gay and had a partner the entire time Beth was growing up. The family's way of dealing with this unusual circumstance (particularly in the 1970's) was very ahead of its time:

It was simply that I had two aunts growing up, they lived together, they were in a

relationship, and only one of them was my blood. As I grew up that was just

normal, it just was. When I was about 12, I started hearing at school about gays,

and that it wasn't okay and so I went to my grandmother and said: "Alise is gay!"

and she said: "I know." I said: "You know? And you are okay with that?" And

she said: "Yes." And I said: "But HOW? It is a sin." And she said: "She is my

daughter and love her and that is all that matters." I said: "But grandma, I don't

know what to do with this." She said: "Did you have a problem with this

yesterday?" And I said: "No." And she said: "Then why is it a problem today?"

And that gave me my anchor of how I interpreted things that were my business,

and things that were not. And this came from a woman from a generation

that…every other stereotype of her generation was true of her except for judging

people.

Rachel, whose Louisiana upbringing stifled any display of liberal progressive values and

included derogatory references to Democrats, had grandparents who were Democrats:

Funnily enough my grandparents were actually Democrats who worked for

Democratic candidates in the city. Later in life my grandmother and I would

totally bond over our love of Bill Clinton and it would be us against the rest of our

family. Once I came out as a Democrat and realized who I am then

she and I would have this little coalition.

Not all role models come from within the family setting. John, who played a lot of

sports with Black athletes, learned from his coach:

The way that my coaches interacted with all of us kids and the broad range of kids they had made an impression on me, both from a racial perspective and a socio-economic perspective. There was great equality in terms of the treatment. So, I probably didn't even absorb that until you asked the question. But the way the coaches acted was probably one way to communicate that none of that stuff matters as it relates to us as a team. There was never any negativity about it or any issues surrounding it. From the perspective of not even thinking about the issue and looking at it from that perspective, I would say the coaches had some impact for us.

CHAPTER 7: PERSONALITY TRAITS

## CURIOSITY AND COURAGE

During the interviews, a common theme emerged where the participants expressed again and again their proclivity for questioning the world around them and standing against what they perceived as unfair. This may have taken the form of pushing against the status quo, being voracious readers, or speaking out against what they perceived as injustice. Here are some of the sentiments expressed in interviews from various interviewees which reflect this tendency:

- I think there was always in me, and it is still kind of true, just

  questioning the way we are in the world, I think I just ask

  more questions. I have always wondered about things. (Rachel)

- I just had this curiosity about people and what they are doing

  and how did they end up in San Francisco…there was just a heartbeat to the

  city that was just so different from this quiet little sleepy town that I was from.

  (Linda)

- I have always been an inquisitive person. (Leslie)

- I don't know if it is intellectual curiosity, or if it is just the way my heart is,

  but certain things bothered me. (Rachel)

- I was very interested in what they (her parents) would talk about when they

  talked politics. (Linda)

Several people I interviewed expressed that their family and their friends did not often appreciate their inquisitiveness, and authority figures would try to squelch their curiosity:

- I would ask my mom all kinds of strange questions and I remember my mom saying: you ask the strangest questions, where do you get these ideas? (Beth)

- Whatever natural curiosity or questions that I had about the world were just things that were not supported at a young age. (Maura)

- I had many questions about authority, but what my colonel father taught me was you don't question. That is a form of insubordination. (Leslie)

- Apparently, I was always the one in Sunday school that was talking back to the Sunday school teacher. (Rachel)

- I didn't feel like I could express my opinion to my mother or my younger sister because they would disagree no matter what. (Barb)

- I was very frustrated that when I questioned things, I was told that it was just a lack of faith. (Beth)

- I guess I had enough intellectual curiosity to take that thread and run with it and find out why, why? (Linda)

Many described an early affinity for recognizing injustice and pushing against the status quo. Beth describes being born with that sense:

I used to drive my mom crazy. I don't know where that came from and my mom used to always say that she didn't know where it came from. I was born with it. I don't ever remember being without it.

Linda described her justice-oriented nature this way:

> I felt a kinship to people who were rejected because of something beyond their
> control. I just have this streak of calling out what isn't fair. If I am invited to the
> table, I am going to bring a friend with me.

Beth shared a couple of stories with me that illustrated her extraordinary
willingness to stand up for what she thought was right. Typically a quiet and
introspective child, when issues of injustice arose, she seemed to summon courage from a
hidden place deep down:

> Although I was quiet in school, I would always speak up about injustice. Once a
> guy said that if girls would close their legs, they wouldn't need an abortion. I
> rarely talked in this class, but I said: "you understand it only takes one time and it
> takes two people to have sex, right?" My mind is blown because this is the same
> kid that had played Buttermilk Biscuit in his car on a field trip we went on.
> Buttermilk Biscuit is this rap song all about how much you like this girls' ass and
> having sex with her. And I am like: "You are a Buttermilk Biscuit guy!!! And you
> are talking about girl's keeping their legs closed?" So, I got in trouble for
> speaking up, he didn't get in any trouble, but I got an assignment to do a term
> paper on abortion. I went to the university to the microfiche and did a research
> paper on the number of women who were married and already with children, who
> died from backroom abortions in the 1920's. This was probably not what the
> teacher was expecting.

Standing up for what was right, holding the hand of an off-cast classmate, and kinship with people who were othered, was a common theme in many of the stories shared with me. This tendency seemed to start young and persist through their lifetime.

Another common point made by the interviewees was their expressed love of reading throughout their lives:

- I was a very curious child… my brother and I would read a lot. The differences I experienced were through my joy of reading. I read a lot. (Maura)

- I was a big reader. The books had different races in them, different ethnicities than what I was exposed to. (Beth)

- I have always been a big reader, since I was old enough to read, I read people like Maya Angelou. (Pam)

This tendency to read voraciously was often accompanied by expressions of their analytical and empathetic tendencies. Beth's story illustrates this point:

I am in 6th grade reading this book and thinking – amazing book - this had so much depth and descriptions of things that a 6th grader just shouldn't know. Of course, now I feel like maybe they should. Both reading books and the way that I analyzed books was unique in my family and friends. I am the kind of person that I tend to be hyper-aware of how I behave so I can sit and overanalyze how I react to something. I am watching other people's experiences and I am considering not only their experience, I am considering how I might – and I always understand it is a might because never know until you are in that

experience – I am already reflecting on whether I would have the same reaction. I analyze everything.

Reading, analyzing and curiosity were strong themes expressed through nearly every interview. Rarely satisfied with information that did not comport with their own way of thinking, the interviewees challenged, inquired and read their way to an understanding that felt more comfortable to them.

<div align="center">FAMILY CONFLICT – BLACK SHEEP OF FAMILY</div>

In addition to strong curiosity, most of the interviewees described themselves as a fish out of water within their family or community. For example, Leslie simply felt disconnected to her family's fervent evangelical hatred towards anyone different than they were: "I was not inclined to be intolerant. I wanted to be a musician." Beth also felt like she did not belong in her family nor with her friends:

> First of all, understand that I was kind of an odd child in that I thought about
>
> things a lot. Even as a small child I would observe people, and I would analyze.
>
> So even from a young age I would analyze all kinds of strange things.

Oftentimes this feeling of not belonging with ones' own family members manifested in conflict. Laura recalls this dynamic with her sister that persists today:

> My younger sister was three years younger and we never got along. She was
>
> bossy and wanted to be in control of everything. We disagreed. We had a
>
> chemical imbalance, I think. We could stand to be around each other for about
>
> fifteen minutes. Even as adults.

As children growing up, several of the participants described how they seemed to be quite different from their siblings in terms of values and priorities. Laura describes this dynamic: "My sister was much more concerned about social status than I was. I mean even as children. She always wanted to be at the country club with her friends."

And Rachel explains a similar disconnect between her and her sister:

> I think she is just more comfortable with the status quo. Early on with the church stuff it never bothered her- the unfairness of punishing people who did not know Jesus. I had questions about that because it didn't sit right with me, but it didn't…she didn't care. But there were things around class issues that incensed me that didn't her. It just wasn't part of her consciousness.

It wasn't just among siblings where conflict arose. Rachel also recalled tense encounters with her parents when they did not want her to associate with a new Black friend she met at school:

> I was always bothered by it by some register. Like when my parents said that about (my new friend), I remember feeling it was unfair and not right. I really liked him, and he was a really nice person and there was something wrong with it on some level. On some level, (their way of thinking) never quite resonated with me. There was even back then, moments of not feeling 100% comfortable with it, but I wasn't articulating it then. There was always something there which grew later because of some other experiences.

Tension also arose when Rachel experienced her parents' casual racist remarks when they were in public:

My parents would go out for dinner and go to a restaurant and if there was an

African American waiter or a table two tables down where there happened to be

Black people laughing together, they would comment about it, racist comments

all around.

For some, it took relocating away from their family to really understand who they were.

Laura experienced this when she moved away from her family's sphere of influence:

When I finally came out of my slumber, I realized that I was a Democrat the

whole time. I had just gone along with whatever people said and not paying much

attention to it.

A feeling of unease within their own social circle permeated the childhood of

most of the interviewees. Growing up in families who seemed comfortable expressing

racist attitudes did not resonate. Even though it was all that they knew, being ensconced

in a mostly White community, there was still a strong feeling that they did not think what

they were seeing and hearing was right.

RELIGIOUS QUESTIONING

In addition to a love of reading and curiosity, religious questioning was a very

strong theme throughout many of the interviews. For example, Rachel, who grew up in a

strict evangelical family, struggled with the messages her church conveyed about the

inferiority of Africans and Blacks in America. Although unable to articulate exactly what

it was that bothered her, she seemed to intuitively know the message was wrong: "It

wasn't me saying: 'you are a bunch of colonialist assholes.' It was more just like: I don't understand."

Beth, you may recall, converted to Islam from Christianity. She found the church she attended as a child hypocritical and closeminded. She expressed her religious conflict this way:

I had a lot of issues, a lot of questions growing up about what was said at the pulpit and what was practiced in the pews. I remember thinking: how do we know that? That is a lot of religions, that is a lot of people who don't seem to be doing anything wrong and they don't know anything else. What if YOU are the one that is wrong? What if THEY are right?

Beth, an avid reader and analytical thinker, also wondered why God gave her an inquisitive mind if he only wanted her to follow along blindly what she was being told in the church:

So, for me, looking at sexism, or being told that questioning things was wrong and that I just had to have faith, my idea from a very young age was: if God didn't want me questioning things, why did he give me a brain? To me that was just so illogical. I mean, he could have just made me brainless. HE chose not to. So, there is a reason he made me have these questions.

Rachel and Leslie both struggled with a church that taught them that God loved his children, but that he was also very hateful towards some of his flock. Rachel put it this way:

I don't understand exactly the connection between a God that is going to kill

everyone that hasn't heard of him and a God that is supposed to love all the

children Black or Brown, yellow or White or whatever that song was.

And Leslie, who wrestled with her faith, explained it this way:

I really started into this crisis of a hatred toward God simultaneously influenced

by a belief in Jesus and a love and acceptance of a savior who never criticized

transgender people, or prostitutes, or people who were on drugs, or lepers. I loved

Jesus; I just don't love the heavenly Father who slaughtered him and Jesus said

that greatest command was to love the lord with all my heart my sole my strength.

And love thy neighbor, assuming I can love my neighbor, which is hard enough. I

can't love all three components of the trinity – the holy spirit is fine, Jesus is fine,

but I cannot love this horrible heavenly Father whose only solution, despite all of

his power and knowledge and wisdom and ever-presence, for fixing the

imperfection of the human heart and condition is to kill his own son.

Tina's transformation to a progressive liberal was linked to her moving away from the

church all together:

I stepped away from religion and my journey to the left went hand in hand. For

me, it is all about questioning things. Thinking about it a bit more deeply, I just

began questioning and it took me away from that identity of Christian

conservative.

Linda also struggled with mixed messages in the church and has tried to forge her own

understanding of God:

During the Jimmy Swaggart time, they would be on TV and they would be

spouting all this hell and fire and brimstone and damnation and calling themselves

Christians. And that didn't look anything like the Christianity that I practiced in

Church. His teachings are: you love your neighbor, you feed the hungry, you

welcome the stranger, you clothe the naked. But then I found that not everybody

that is a Christian does those things. I started rejecting religion and being more

attracted to good people – or people who shared my values.

Leslie experienced great angst as she struggled immensely with the mixed

messages of love and hate that she learned about God in church. Although she is now a

woman in her fifties, tears well up as she tries to explain the complicated relationship she

has with religion:

I really started into this crisis of a hatred toward God. I was simultaneously

influenced by a belief in Jesus and a love and acceptance of a savior who never

criticized transgender people, people or other marginalized people. And this

spiritual and theological conflict really reached a boiling point for me. How can

this sadistic guy who slaughters his son love any of us if he is such a hard ass and

so into punishment? I was starting to have really serious doubts about God and

this crisis that had always existed in my mind from a very early age about a savior

who seems pretty loveable and easy to follow, but a heavenly Father who is

repugnant and frightening.

Expressions of religion, and their current association to it, varied amongst the participants. However, nearly all of the interviewees expressed some sort of religious questioning and subsequent religious adjustment from their childhood experience.

CHAPTER 8: TRANSFORMATIONAL FACTORS

Six themes emerged in the data participants identified as the reasons for their ideological shift. Most of the time, several themes overlapped. The six intersecting themes were: attending college, experiencing new environments, interacting with new people, learning new ways of knowing the world, job experiences and some sort of crisis.

THE EFFECT OF COLLEGE

Attending college was a key influence in many of the participants' lives. It is worth noting that in each case, the interviewee attended a school outside of their hometown rather than attending the secondary educational institute where their friends went. I think this is important to consider because it ties in several of the other themes. By attending a college within a new environment with all new people, they were exposed to not only college-level educational experiences which may have opened their minds to new ways of knowing, but they were also exposed to new people outside their social circle who thought differently. It was less likely they would simply return to the comfort zone of their own way of thinking while at college since those people were not readily available to socialize with. Tina succinctly described it this way:

> It is just the time of your life that you separate from your parents and you start to question things and getting some tools to think about the world in a different way. I think it does promote change in that way. And it certainly did for me.

Barb recalled she did not follow her peers in attending the local university which seemed to support the racist ideology she rejected:

Most people would go to University of Georgia as their default college. That was

the last place that I wanted to go. I just started wanting to get out of it, all the

pressure and the ridicule, and judgement and treatment of other people, it just

started getting to be pretty offensive.

When Barb spent a summer in another state with people who thought differently from her

peers, and more in line with her sensibility, her attitude changed:

The people that I was friends with were different than me. They were White but

they were more down to earth. I got a better feeling of just respect and

individuality. When I came back to high school my senior year, I got straight A's.

I didn't give a shit about as much as I did before. I felt a little more liberated from

it.

Pam, who was raised in a very conservative Republican family, didn't realize how

narrow her ideology was until experiencing college during a major election year:

Some of that messaging and talking points had filtered to me throughout college.

Honestly, you have to go outside the post-stamped relatively sized area that is

your background. It is the only way, especially for White people. It is the way that

you are going to find out what is going on there. I didn't really understand that I

was skewing conservative politically until in college and the 1986 Arizona

gubernatorial election.

You will see that attending college overlaps in many cases with a new

environment, new people, learning new ways of knowing the world, and in some cases,

precipitating a crisis event. As Derek put it: "I think it speaks to my diagnosis now, which

is that it is not about: can I persuade you? Rather it is: what is your life experience? What has your experience led you to?"

 For the purposes of reviewing the data, I have categorized the factors into six major areas, however, it is worth remembering that many of these data points are inter-related. On other note, one of the participant's transformational educational experience did not begin in college, but rather in high school. Rachel left home and attended a boarding school in another part of the state. Consistent with the theme, however, is that she left her family bubble and experienced new people and ways of knowing in the world which had a tremendous impact on her transformation.

Rachel was first exposed to the alternate boarding high school when her sister was attending it. She would visit her sister at the boarding school, and for a young woman who had been very controlled by her evangelical parents and ensconced within a racist community, being on the grounds of a liberal arts high school was liberating. She set her sights on achieving good enough grades to be accepted in her junior year of high school and that is where she ended up. Here is how Rachel described it:

It was the coolest place, all these smart people. It was a school for gifted and talented kids from all over the state. It was like a college campus, they lived in dorms. The whole place, it was just so different. In my hometown, if you weren't a cheerleader or popular it was…I don't know…I was nerdy and smart and at this other school, all the kids were nerdy and smart. It was this transformational turning point in my life. I lived in a dorm with a bunch of other people. My suite mates, some were from New Orleans, which up to this point had been kind of this

city of sin. And so, I met people from all over the state. I met kids whose parents were democrats. Really smart kids from all over, with all kinds of interests. And all my teachers mostly had PhD's. I met teachers who were liberal and who were smart.

You will note the converging themes of a college-like experience away from home, new people she was exposed to, and news ways of understanding the world. As she indicated above, this unique high school experience was life altering for her and she describes the feeling as:

> It was very exciting. It was a turning point in my life for so many reasons. I just felt like…it was a relief. It was a place I felt comfortable with, and I was with people that were my people, and adults who were my people. It was a relief. From that moment I couldn't ever go back to that tiny town with those tiny people and those ways of thinking. It was a shift and it felt liberating and exciting. And affirming. And maybe a little confusing at the beginning trying to sort out why was I taught all this other stuff before.

Rachel went on to college and the experience deepened her resolve to continue her transformation of understanding social issues. It was at university where she found an opportunity to learn about topics which ignited her imagination:

> I took a class on apartheid because that was happening at the time in South Africa. I joined anti-racist organizations; I did more work with Amnesty International. I got involved in anti-hunger clubs. I went full on to all of the things that liberal arts college students do. And it was great.

For other participants, college was part of their transformational experience, however the changes were less dramatic and more eventual. Holding onto their old ways of thinking prevailed for a period of time. However, eventually, as they learned new information, their old ways of thinking began to falter. Tina, who was raised in a small, rural, mostly White Christian town, began her college career at a nearby community college. Here she encountered a professor who respectfully challenged her notions about religion:

> It started for me (realizing people thought differently from her) from a religious standpoint. I took a class at college that examined creationism versus evolution and really breaking it down – my professor did a really good job and I wish I could go back and thank him –but he did it in a very respectful way.

Other classes in college further challenged her beliefs:

> In college I did a minor in sociology. One of the first things that you learn in sociology is that you are not a representative sample size, so your experiences are not necessarily what is true for the rest of the world. I took a sociology of women class and that opened my up to gender and equality issues. And then I took sociology of work and we learned about the disparity between different races and their pay and their treatment. I think that was when I started to at least become aware of the inequality in the world. It was never a radical change. It just slowly happened.

Tina's experience was a slow awakening to new information she needed to process against the frame of reference she has been raised with. Eventually she left the

small community college and attended a university in a city about one hundred miles away from her small, rural town and encountered a diverse population for the first time. Her transformation continued as she persisted in taking classes that presented her with challenging and interesting information. She was able to process the new information with people who came from all different types of backgrounds and experiences.

Barb described a similar awakening to new ways of knowing when she went to a college away from her southern home and was exposed to people from a different part of the United States:

> I wanted to go away, and the college I attended was six hours away from home. A lot of the people from the Northeast went there because it was more affordable than the Ivy league schools. Not that there aren't racists in the Northeast, but it was a sidestep to people who were different than the way that I had been raised. But it was still different. It still gave me perspective. It slowly gave me perspective.

Maura describes a similar college experience to Tina's and Barb's. Maura also came from a very homogeneous White small town and was raised evangelical Christian. Before attending college, however, Maura had a traumatic crisis that shook her to her core. Her boyfriend at the time had family who lived in a nearby integrated city. Maura had rarely left her rarefied White community but decided to accompany him to meet them. Before the visit, they stopped at a nearby mall:

> It was the day that I realized that I was a racist. We get to the mall and we park, and I start noticing there are a lot of Black people walking around and I am like:

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hmmmmmm, okay. Then we walk up to go inside the mall and pretty much the

moment the A/C hits my face and I see that probably about 90% of the people

walking in front of me are Black. And I get that physiological racist response. My

heart race begins, I get sweaty palms, and I immediately start sweating. Holy shit

– why am I scared? All I knew in that instant was that I had a natural reaction to

something I didn't like. And I made myself sick. And that was the moment, and it

took me another year for someone to help me label what that was…the fact that I

had grown up in a White bubble…it was a racist reaction. I was being a racist…I

hated that moment in the mall, and I was disappointed in myself.

Maura's response was so visceral and so dramatic, it gave her pause to wonder

where her fear had come from. She rarely had contact with Black people growing up and

race was a non-issue (or so she thought) since the community was so homogenously

Christian White. In college, Maura began to understand what had happened to her in the

mall and why.

Some of the classes that I was taking in college were talking about race and

inequality. I started becoming more conscious of the classes I was signing up for.

I met a professor in the area of rhetoric, and he started talking about inequality

and how we socially construct inequality and I am like: these are the words!!

People say it doesn't matter. IT MATTERS! These things that I had been thinking

about…I got into a lot of trouble growing up in church asking questions and I was

told: you are just overthinking things, things are fine. So, it wasn't until eighteen

or nineteen, getting the language of what was going on. I started being more self-aware and proactive about the kinds of classes that I was taking and what to read.

Notably, Maura had some excellent professors who challenged her way of thinking and who also seized on current events to permit the students to make connections between theory and practice. Here she describes an assignment that had a significant impact on her:

The Black student union had a silent protest right after Eric Garner had been choked to death. YikYak was a thing, a social media platform where you can post things anonymously, GREAT IDEA, (sarcasm) and the larger student body posted racist remarks. The next couple of days, nooses started showing up in trees, and Black students had stuff spray painted on their cars. I was in this citizenship class and me and another person in the class wondered if there something that we could do. The professor allowed us to change the entire seminar and we ended up opening it up to have focus groups and dialogues about race. That lead to helping with the leadership program on campus and that lead to us working with community groups.

Another person who had a very dramatic college experience that had a crucial effect on his transformation was Derek. Derek grew up in a proudly White nationalist family. His parents led a notorious racial hate group. His godfather was the infamous southern racist leader David Duke. Derek was being groomed to be the next leader to follow in his father's footsteps. Interestingly, he was raised to be a critical thinker and to

expose himself to different ideas by reading and interacting with people who challenged his beliefs.

An essential part of my upbringing was that they were self-consciously openminded in practice, it is questionable how much that played out, but all their rhetoric and worldview was that you should only be persuaded by facts and that you have to be open to being corrected and that you should also not be persuaded by what you are supposed to follow, but rather follow information to where it leads and then be committed to it. And also, another major aspect is that it isn't an academic issue, it is the people that matter, and to them it is the White people. But the idea was that there is no point in arguing theoretical things, that what matters is your efforts for other people and that means activism and advocacy. So, I was raised in a scene where that was emphasized. I think that was probably central.

His parents were firm that their White supremacist ideas were of sound logic and were not concerned when he chose a liberal arts college to study history. His parents felt that Derek was smart and charismatic and that surely he would find some recruits at the college for their White supremacist organization. Instead, for the first time in his life, Derek began interacting on a personal level with people he was supposed to hate. "In the past, the victims of his rhetoric had always been out of sight on the other side of the curtain, imaginary enemies nursing imaginary wounds, but now he had seen the injuries

firsthand."[25] Eventually Derek became close to members of the communities he had been taught to dehumanize.

> I got into a relationship with a Jewish student (Rose) before I knew she was Jewish. I think a relationship with a person whose identity was marginalized by my worldview was a strong factor in the questioning of that worldview. I think that is objectively true… being close to the people whose identity was marginalized by my worldview made me challenge my worldview.

It was easy to be certain and firm when the enemy remained impersonal and the issue was purely abstract, but now the issue was Rose,[26] his new girlfriend. Eventually Derek began a relationship with a White Christian woman named Allison who vehemently opposed his notions of White supremacy.

> She was initially the only person on campus that I interacted with whose identity was not marginalized by my worldview – she was Christian and White and so her opposition to my ideology carried that kind of weight because she could have been a part of it and still rejected it. And then she also played the role in arguing what is or what is not a good fact.

In addition to his interactions with Allison, Derek was exposed to many people on campus who challenged his beliefs with different views and reading materials.

> I was starting out just wanting to know what parts they had misunderstood. Their fundamental worldview was different in all aspects and the arguments within it. Without that engagement there wouldn't have been nearly as much intentional

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[25] See Saslow (2018), page 66
[26] See Saslow (2018), page 43

change. There wouldn't have been any debate, there wouldn't have been any direct arguments that lead to me conceding points. I could have found that literature myself and it would not have been as persuasive. The fact that I was part of a campus community that was believing these things, it wasn't just the articles, but the context I read them in that was central.

Derek found himself ostracized by a community that he came to care deeply about. This is significant to his story and he believes the investment in his new relationships is central to his transformation and would not have occurred without that connection:

I think the condemnation was even more important because that was the whole reason that I was engaging in the conversations. But without the valid personal stuff I would not, in good faith, engaged in whether my argument was good. Which I think is important to how intentionally and self-consciously you are challenging your beliefs. A community that I sympathized with and felt that I was a part of was condemning me in a fundamental way. I think it is important to emphasize that because you could have a conversation with a nice person at a coffee shop but it isn't as impactful as you're in a neighborhood where everyone around you, all your neighbors are very upset about something that you believe, and then someone wants to sit down and talk to you. Then it is very important.

Leslie also found college to be critical to her transformation. If you recall, Leslie's family was very authoritarian, evangelical Christian. Questioning the pulpit or her father was strictly forbidden. However, she selected journalism as a major and

eventually law as a post graduate student. Both disciplines demanded she learn how to consider other people's views on issues, and this fundamentally changed the way she viewed the world.

It was subtle, but distinct. In college, my major was journalism and journalism is a unique type of discipline. It affords a person the opportunity to be ethical and address subjects in an objective and thorough manner. I was being taught to open my mind and to entertain other ideas, not necessarily ones that I would embrace, so that I could write an objective piece. That was one of the big take-aways for me in my studies. The one that is most relevant here.

One particular moment in law school that stood out in Leslie's mind occurred in a family law class where lifestyles that had been condemned in her family were spoken of as a matter of fact, and with consideration and professionalism.

I specifically remember in my family law course reading cases and having discussion about two lesbians who wanted to have a child and they contracted with someone to buy a donation of sperm so one could get pregnant. Then they have this child and split up. Based on my upbringing I found it shocking that anybody was even talking about this without snickering or saying: "What is wrong with these people? What is wrong with our government that this is even something that is being entertained?" So that contributed to a crisis for me, because I am trying to be a good evangelical believing in God and believing that topics of that nature should not even be tolerated, let alone discussed with any degree of acceptance. It really was an eye-opening experience.

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College played a major role in many of the participants transformations. However, there were other types of new environments that played significant roles as well. Interactions through sports informed progressive opinions about different races for some of the interviewees. Echoing Derek's comments about having investment and personal connection to a community in order to understand and appreciate different viewpoints, sports offered a community for different types of people to engage and work towards a common goal. John described his experience this way:

> Playing sports with a group of young African Americans who I had never interacted with in terms of close interaction and just the fact that they were great kids, they were a lot of fun, we played well together for a variety of different sport. Also, maybe my coaches and the way they interacted with all of us kids. There was great equality in terms of the treatment. So, I probably didn't even absorb that until you asked the question. But just the way the coaches acted was probably one way to communicate that none of that stuff matters as it relates to us as a team.

Christian, who eventually joined one of the most notorious skinhead neo-Nazi groups in America, found that even with his extreme views, sports offered a bridge to people of different races.

> When I was on the high school football team and had to play with Black teammates and Latino teammates on the football field, there was a lot of respect for each other. I was always considered to be their leader on the field.

There were other new environments that afforded the participants a chance to interact with difference. Barb spent a summer in the mountains away from home working at a resort.

> I spent a summer in the mountains of North Carolina between my junior and senior year of high school, and that was a big deal. I got away from the bullshit of my town and I started to realize that there were more people in the world besides them and that I could have my own interests and I didn't have to follow what they did.

Barb's liberating experience in the mountains led her to another great adventure: The Peace Corps. As early as the training sessions, her eyes were opened to the way other families thought.

> I remember talking to one of my best friends during training and she told me that her mother was progressive and that her stepfather did Peace Corps and I was like: Are you shitting me? I didn't know anybody who had liberal parents and I remember thinking: wow, wouldn't that be amazing? To not have to fight and when you are developing yourself as a person that you are developing into what your parents had hoped for you. That is a thing.

Rachel had a similar revelation about the possibility of liberal-minded parents when she spent time with people outside her social circle and outside of her family:

> It was very interesting to hear people talk about their own parents and how their parents were supporting other kinds of political figures and I was like: Oh, wow interesting, your parents are liberal.

For Beth, moving to Arizona from Arkansas, where there was a much larger Muslim population, opened her up to a whole new world.

> In Arizona the mosque was having an open house and I thought: good, I will go. And I went there and listened to the lecture and ate I up, and then I met my best friend.

Sometimes, for a person like Laura who grew up wealth and privileged in a homogenously White neighborhood, just leaving one's community can open their eyes.

> My husband lived in a downtown neighborhood in Atlanta and he would pass through poor neighborhoods where people slept on the street with men sitting on a curb with their head down – what chance do they have? No one is going to hire a guy sitting on the curb. It is just not fair.

Eventually Laura moved to a more liberal part of Georgia and found herself surrounded by people whose values resonated with her own.

> In that neighborhood in Atlanta it was a bastion of liberals (I lived there for 30 years). It was wonderful. My husband is very liberal. He was a sociology professor. That was who we were social with. There was always political talk and liberal talk and it made me think about it. And when I went home, I noticed the difference. I was always just a little depressed after I went home. You feel like you have to conform with the way that they think.

It was during this time period that the Rodney King trial and verdict occurred, and it had an unnerving effect on Laura:

The Rodney King verdict. That was the first time I was ashamed to be a White

person. I was driving home from downtown Atlanta and I just wanted to get home

so no one can see me. It was horrible.

Linda was raised in a mostly White Catholic suburb in the San Francisco Bay area

and had some exposure to difference when she would accompany her father to work in

the city. This opened her eyes to different ways of living and being and it fascinated her:

> I loved going to work with my dad in the city. He worked in the tenderloin
>
> district. It was so vastly different than this little hick town that I lived in. I
>
> think that contributed to the transformation. You would walk down the street and
>
> there would be panhandlers and a ton of diversity.

Linda, whose interest in diversity was piqued by early experiences with her father,

decided to move to a nearby community that mostly housed African Americans.

> In my early 20's, I moved to Richmond in Oakland that was a predominantly
>
> Black community. Wow. Vastly different from the "safe" White upper middle-
>
> class enclave where I grew up, to abject poverty. I didn't understand the
>
> underlying dynamics of why those conditions existed. I cracked a book and I
>
> started reading and I started listening when Black people would talk about public
>
> policy, and I came to understand through education, that it is not a level playing
>
> field. I was given a pass because I was White. And Black girls were treated
>
> differently by the police. By the courts, by the jails, by probation, everybody.
>
> I just made a mistake – THEY were criminals. This stuff is systematic.

Her experience was a dramatic immersion into injustice in America and it left a deep impression on her that was a major factor in her transformation. One particular event was deeply traumatic and has continued to inform her conversion to justice advocate:

A huge moment for me, when I really, really got the racism, was when I was in Oakland with my boyfriend. He was Black and his stupid-ass sister saw some cops. For some reason she yells out "Rollers!" Rollers is street lingo for cops. So, when the cops hear rollers, they know you are alerting whoever to hide their stuff. So, they swoop up on my boyfriend, and I am standing right there. They are talking to him and he is being very, very cordial. He is the one who taught me…I mouthed off to a cop one time – because I can do that. And he said: "Don't EVER do that, you gotta be 'yes sir, no sir,' as polite as you can." I am pulling from my White privilege and he is like no, no, no that is not how it works here. So, I am watching him behave impeccably, they arrest him and take him off. I am all – what the fuck?? I didn't know what they arrested him for. They released him the next day from the hospital. And I lost my shit. I wanted pictures taken, I wanted reports made, I was going to call the DA. I wanted ANSWERS. And he just said… "It happens." I couldn't believe it. He did not resist arrest, that was what they put in the paperwork, that he resisted arrest. But then they dropped all the charges and let him go. He said they just took him to an alley, beat the shit out of him and dropped him at the hospital. It is true. They really do that. That was the powerful abusing the powerless.

Linda's experience and description of this traumatic event illustrates vividly the importance of immersion in a community, but it also reveals the significance of having a connection to it as well. It confirms that casual contact may not be enough to illicit real change in one's justice orientation. Although not all disorienting dilemmas require such a harrowing experience, having mutual care and respect for the people with whom you are attempting to make a connection, is vital.

## THE EFFECT OF PARTNERS

Another factor contributing to several of the participants' ideological shift came from partners in their lives. Earlier we learned of the tremendous impact Derek's relationship with a young Jewish woman, and then his girlfriend who challenged him on his White supremacist notions, had on his new way of thinking. Christian, the young neo-Nazi, was also influenced by his girlfriend who eventually became his wife. In Christian's autobiographical book he stated: "I began to see my actions through (her) lens and before long they appeared very different."[27] As he interacted with more people of color in school and in sports, his girlfriend's lens became his. Again, an excerpt from his autobiography: "Looking at counter-protesters (Christian) saw his funny, gay classmate, his Black football players and thoughts drifted back to Lisa who asked why he hated so much."[28] When Christian's involvement in the neo-Nazi movement became too much for Lisa to bear, she left him. This was a dramatic moment in Christian's life. When I asked him, what was the most pivotal thing that happened in his life that caused him to change,

[27] See Picciolini (2017), page 187
[28] See Piccioloini (2017) page 209, 210

he explained that it was losing the connection to his wife, who represented the most important part of who he was, was most crucial:

> I think it was my wife leaving with the children. My theory is I gravitated toward extremist behavior, and people gravitate towards extremist behavior, because they are looking for purpose, identity, community. The purpose may be riddled with trauma or something too. But my wife and children were the first things in my life to challenge that sense of identity, community and purpose that I found in the movement. When I lost them, I used that opportunity, not only to walk away from the movement, but to build that positive sense of identity, community and purpose. So, I think that was the catalyst.

In a less dramatic turn, Kate was also influenced by her husband. While Kate was raised in a Democratic-leaning family, her new husband came from a very conservative Republican family. This caused her to shift her ideology to more conservative out of love and respect for him, but also because for the first time in her life, she felt some financial security. At that time, she associated financial security with right-leaning politics:

> I think I became more to the right when I married my husband. I married someone who was in politics and he was very conservative. I married a republican, conservative man who was watching Rush Limbaugh. I felt financially secure for the first time in my life. I grew up poor and now I have some money, and I think that pushed me to the right.

Interestingly, Kate and her husband eventually turned to left-leaning political notions over the last several years:

The marriage evolved and he changed from this far, far-right person and he comes to the middle. He starts talking about Arizona and how hard it is to be a Republican because of some of the public policy. So, I saw him moving more to the left and coming more toward me. So, as a partnership, we went more moderate. But then when Trump got into office, we went more left of moderate. Now we are both swinging way, way to the left. More than we ever thought we would.

For Leslie, the dissolution of her marriage began her trajectory into exploring different lifestyles and ways of being. Once her marriage was over, she began to see she did not have a lot in common with the community she had once adhered to:

Once I got out, I was ready to start questioning everything. Questioning God, questioning if I really belonged as a Republican, because all of these people that I had been hanging around with, especially in the church and National Guard, they were all right-wing Republicans and many of them I couldn't respect. Many of whom I did not think were terribly intelligent. Many of whom had said some things that just made me think: this person is nuts. I thought, you know, I have lived a very sheltered life, intentionally kept away from a lot of things that I had gradually learned was not as bad and as threatening as I was misled to believe by ultra-conservative parents. So, I am going to start exploring, and at this point, I did not have anything to lose.

Job experiences were another factor in several interviewees' lives that played a major role in their transformations. Each of them had jobs that afforded them the opportunity to work with communities they had previously not had contact with. For example, when Kate returned to work and taught in an ethnically diverse school, her eyes were opened to the prejudices that existed in the teachers' opinions of their students:

> I never had any strong opinions until I got into the school system and saw the injustices there. I started teaching. That's when I started to see the differences and how people are treated differently depending on their culture. Teachers would make negative comments about other students and they were always in the lower income or Hispanic population. There would be conversations between teachers in the lounge that were mind boggling to me.

> Maura, who went through a major transformation in college, returned home to a mother who was contending with oppressive systems in her teaching job that mirrored some of what Kate expressed: "She was like 'segregation is a thing!' My mom is 50 years old acknowledging racial consciousness…it is her material reality in a job that is grappling with this.

> Leslie's career choice of law forced her to look at life through others' lenses in order to effectively represent her clients:

> I was now a full-time lawyer who was taught you are not going to survive in this career unless you question things because unless you question everything, you are not going to be able to represent your client well.

Although not strictly work experience, Barb's first volunteer experience whet her appetite

for more involvement in social justice work:

> I got involved in the Action Council, and it was doing the work of that
>
> philanthropy that made me start realizing that I could make a difference. It just
>
> made me realize how change happens for people. That was when I first started
>
> caring.

> From that first experience, Barb's interest in justice work blossomed and she has

made a career out of helping people less fortunate than her. This has made an impact on

how she views the world and continues to inform her activism.

> I was very interested in why people were in prison and how they got there and
>
> why other people weren't in prison. That is what made me want to work in early
>
> childhood education and parent engagement: to try and prevent crime and give
>
> everyone a level playing field. I moved to Atlanta after two years and I worked at
>
> a racial justice organization called the Southern Regional Council. I took the job
>
> because I wanted to be more in the trenches.

> Another interviewee, Pam, graduated from college and took a job at a news

station whose employees thought quite differently from the way she had been raised:

> I went to work at Channel 5 in 1989. I worked with some people who had more
>
> liberal and centrist viewpoints. I learned a lot from that group. I remember
>
> thinking: how did I not see what is going on right in front of me!

Eventually Pam found herself single and just trying to survive and feed her children after

her divorce when she took a job that exposed her to different communities. It was during

this work experience that her eyes were opened to the inequities that existed in the community outside of her own:

> I needed a job and I got to see people and neighborhoods and communities that were not like where I had grown up. It was the best thing I did, in terms of my worldview. I started asking more questions and stopped assuming that I knew everything, and I tell you what, that was the best thing that could have happened, was just kind of being on the ground with these folks and talking to the people. It is just hilarious that people think that they know what it is like to be poor in this country. If you are of a certain income level, if you live in a certain place or were raised a different way or in different certain circumstances, then you have no idea how much we penalize people that are poor in this country.

For Laura, who grew up in the south in the early 1960's and was the daughter of a wealthy doctor, her early life experience included separate waiting rooms and water fountains for her father's Black patients. Laura worked at her father's clinic, and even though they were products of their decade, she and her father showed respect for all of his patients.

> We worked in his clinic as children in the summer. We would do things like write their name on the ledger or take their $4 for an office visit. My father was always respectful of everyone.

This early experience working with different people and having a role model who exhibited tolerance and decency affected the lens through which Laura viewed her work experiences as she matured:

I worked with so many people who were conscientious – they had to have two or

three jobs just to make a living. I remember going to a parking deck and there was

an old Black man taking the money and he could barely stand up and I remember

thinking this is probably his third job. Why does he have to do that? I was

working with Black people who were obviously very smart but were unable to go

to college to get better jobs.

John, who until our interview and discussion about jobs, had not connected his

career choices with his desire to have an impact on oppressive systems. However, his

work choices throughout his life have afforded him the opportunity to make a difference

in the systems affecting marginalized people:

I think the career choice was more around public service. I look back on my

career now through the lens of this conversation and I think it had a big impact in

terms of trying to deal with those issues. I can point to my career as a way to try

and deal with both of those.

John's career immersed him in struggling communities, and this was vastly

different from the cloistered and safe childhood he had enjoyed. He was able to interact

one-on-one with leaders in marginalized communities, building meaningful programs

with enduring effects:

The government program that I was involved in served a number of individuals of

different races: Hispanic, tribal, African American. I look back on my career now

through the lens of this conversation and I think it had a big impact in terms of

trying to deal with those issues. I had the opportunity to be exposed to some of

their challenges. When you spend a day and half on the Navajo reservation,

you are exposed to the challenges they face – a group of people who had every

treaty with the federal government ignored over the course of time and as a result

ended up in this completely challenging area with incredibly challenging

economic issues and just awful income inequality. So yes, it was an incredible

lesson for me to have those continued opportunities and it was also very humbling

in terms of being able to interact with such a wide number of people and learn a

bit more about their traditions and their cultures. I wouldn't trade that. Every day

I was exposed to thinking about the program I was responsible for through the

lens of income inequality and race.

Christian recognized two major factors that affected his transformation. One was

considered earlier when his wife left with their children due to his continued involvement

in the neo-Nazi movement. However, the other significant factor was the interactions

with a wide range of people he met when he started a record business. When he opened

the record store, he began to depend on a wider community and unwittingly became more

tolerant of people who thought differently than him.[29] He met gay people, Jewish people,

Black people. They would discuss their music interests and slowly he began to realize:

These are good people; I don't want to hurt them. Life became more interesting.[30]

The more I chatted with them, made small talk, tried to remember their names and

answer their questions… I discovered how decent they were…they were people

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[29] See Picciolini (2017), page 230
[30] See Piccioloni (2017), page 234

with whom I had much more in common with than the ones I had surrounded myself with.[31]

THE EFFECT OF READING, LEARNING AND UNLEARNING

Exposure to new people and places led to new ways of thinking about the world. Several of the interviewees talked about the process of unlearning and experiencing cognitive dissonance. Christian specifically named it: "It was all of that cognitive dissonance building up until I just couldn't do it anymore." Rachel also expressed her awakening at college this way:

> For the first probably year I had this cognitive dissonance of: wait, my parents
> think this, oh these people are talking about issues. All the things that my parents
> talked so positively about; these people are talking in the exact opposite way
> about these things.

Derek, who came to college from a White supremacist family, found himself surrounded by new ideas and information that pulled apart his once firm notions of White superiority. "My brain now has two ways of thinking, a White nationalist way and a new way…it's like living in two different realms."[32] Derek went further to describe the dissonance that led to his transformation when he met a dear friend whom his ideology had taught to hate:

> A critical juncture was when I'd realized that a friend was considered an outsider
> by the philosophy I supported. It's a huge contradiction to share your summer

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[31] See Picciolini (2017), page 233
[32] See Saslow (2018), page 241

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plans with someone whom you completely respect, only to then realize that your

ideology doesn't consider them a full member of society – I couldn't resolve that.

There were several others who described the cognitive dissonance they

experienced as they reexamined their old way of thinking through a new lens. Exposure

to new people and new ideas challenged the notions they had been raised with. In some

cases, it was upsetting. In other cases, it was exciting, because for the first time they were

connecting with ideas that deeply resonated with them but they had no opportunity for

expression before. Here are some examples that illustrate this point from the interviews:

- I was having to do a lot of unlearning. (Maura)

- I was exposed for the first time to a different way of thinking about a lot of

  different issues. And I really credit those two years of being at that liberal arts

  high school for really becoming aware. I started to understand how oppression

  worked across the world and I just started learning about different ways of

  thinking about the world and I just started understanding. But it was that

  initial just being exposed to other ways of thinking about social issues. And

  my parents to this day would say: that high school school ruined you. (Rachel)

- My parents would talk about people on welfare and say they didn't work hard

  enough and this discourse about poor people, and meaning poor Black people

  really, using the system and wasting resources. "Our tax money shouldn't go

  to pay for this!" And in the middle of the Reagan era that was very popular,

  right? And I would have this sense sometimes, listening to my parents: but

what if people are just hungry? Why is it wrong to think about giving people

food? I always had a little bit of a conflict there. But once I heard there was

a thing called Democrats and there are people who put their whole platform

on people who don't have enough to eat, and I was like: Oh, that feels so

much better. That resonates. (Rachel)

- I think what has made me comfortable in transforming is that I started in a

place that was very insecure and ended up in a place I feel very secure. I don't

have to cling to some of those things that provided me comfort as a child.

(Tina)

Leslie, whose strict evangelical background was so diametrically opposed to her

new way of questioning and learning, found the dissonance deeply troubling:

I was simultaneously dragged into this mindset (Pentecostal Church) that was

very counter-productive to what I was learning that was necessary to be a

professional. So, it was a terrible time for me.

Leslie was not the only person who was interviewed who struggled with religion

during their transition. Many found they either had to leave religion behind all together or

find a new way to mesh their religious practice with their new understanding of justice

and equity. For some, their religion fell away all together, and for others it was a slow

change over time. In either case, their questioning of assumptions they were raised with

caused dissonance they felt compelled to resolve:

- Even religion I hung onto for a while. I identified as Christian much longer

than I really believed those things. They slowly fell away. I started doubting

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religion in high school, I never felt that deep connection to God that everyone

around me in my church seemed to have. So, there wasn't really a crisis of

faith. It just slowly evolved a certain direction. (Tina)

- All the rules in the church. That is what changed it. Seeing the way other

  people were being treated. Seeing how the only gay couple at the school were

  treated. Other than being gay, they were following all the rules. So, the

  transforming piece for me was probably watching this gay couple at the

  Catholic school, and they are living this stringent Catholic belief system, but

  they are gay, (and not accepted) and I am like: that doesn't even make sense to

  me. (Kate)

- To be honest, it is religion that pushed me more to social justice. Going "What

  the hell? This is not cool!" It doesn't make me love Jesus any less, but it

  makes me not love the community that asks you to put on blinders and blindly

  follow. (Kate)

- Unlike these hardline religious people who say the most hateful things but

  profess to follow a savior that professes love, I can be more compassionate,

  and I can also trust in God and say: "We will figure this out." (Leslie)

Also emerging in this theme of learning was the effect of reading and studying.

Once again, their long-held assumptions were challenged, and their biases revealed, once

they were exposed to new theories and new vocabulary. Several participants described

the process of seeking out new information during their transformation and how pivotal

this experience of learning was for them:

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- I started to read more and being willing to examine my own beliefs and where are my biases, because we all have them.  (Pam)

- I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't have the language; it has taken year after year. (Maura)

- Let's be honest, I was trying to convert them. I would go to these Middle Eastern students, and I would tell them that they were all going to hell because they didn't believe in Jesus and Mary and that was unacceptable. They would explain that only do we believe in Mary, but there is a whole chapter named Mary that tells you all about Mary and the birth of Jesus who we also believe in, we just have a slightly different take on it. So, I would argue and argue, and then I decided that I needed to study because I wasn't winning. I started studying and asking questions and at some point, I decided this actually works for me. (Beth)

- One thing I remember, we had to write a persuasive paper, and my position was that we should eliminate affirmative action. I studied it and I came out questioning that position. Because to do that paper I had to read authors who had a more diverse view. It at least triggered a thought about that there was disparity in the school system. (Tina)

Barb described an eye-opening learning moment when she attended diversity training:

When I went to Peace Corp when I was 27, we did a diversity training, there were thirty of us and maybe five were African Americans. We had to talk about race in a facilitated conversation - and one of the Black participants shared that someone

would not get in the elevator with him in Chicago before we left. And that was

really eye-opening for me.

CHAPTER 9: TRANSFORMATION INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Having had a major ideological shift to a more progressive view that promotes notions of equality and the tearing down of systems that perpetuate injustice, gleaning insight from the participants as to what sorts of strategies might work to move other people to a more socially just mindset was important. The suggestions fell into four major categories: stories, unlearning, exposure and effective marketing.

THE POWER OF STORIES

Many participants extolled the power of story and personalizing the struggles that oppressed populations face. Christian, who works with former neo-Nazis who are trying to leave the movement said: "I use experiences to change people's minds." He has a group of community members who have been victimized by racist acts who are willing to spend time with the former White supremacists, getting to know them on a personal level. Christian explains it this way: "This is usually the step where I begin to immerse them in situations with people that they thought they hated in the past. Establish human connection and foster humanization."

The potential for re-traumatization of the oppressed people in this scenario seems great. However, Christian explains these interactions occur late in the process of transformation and that he has more self-identified interventionists willing to help than he can utilize because of their respect for the process and the impact it has had. Maura touches on this concern, reminding us that this work should largely be on the shoulders of White people, rather than relying on the Black community to teach us:

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The increasing conversation is that it is not every person of color's job to educate

everyone. At some point, as White people, this has to be our job. We have to sit

with the uncomfortableness that I am going to be limited by my White view of

things in creating these kinds of things. But it can't be solely on the shoulders

of Black people to do this.

Tina suggested this about the potential power of story if it personalizes the experience

and makes the reader empathize and relate to their challenges:

It has to be a story about a specific child, about how they experienced something,

and it is a child of color and then asking for those empathic questions: how do you

think that child felt in that situation?

Derek agrees and explains that personal connection is of paramount importance:

My theory is that there is no person, no matter how abstract the thing they are

thinking about is, who is persuaded by something other than another human

being. Trying to make connections and then connecting with that person, that is

the key.

Maura emphasizes the critical nature of mutual understanding: "The curriculum

must come from a place of understanding." Tina agrees with Maura's assessment and

adds the import of connection: "The conversation can always be: what is the harm done

to other people with this action?"

Rachel, an educator, found that documentaries that tell specific stories of

individuals was most powerful in her classroom. Rather than statistics or general

information, powerful personal stories resonate best in her classroom:

I use a lot of documentaries. I think those illustrate someone's story, not just

through a news program or academic program, but rather to really emotionally

engage. I feel like documentaries do that really well. Fictionalized and non-

fictionalized storytelling, I think to me, that has been way more powerful than all

the statistics about people that are incarcerated around race, or whatever. So,

something around storytelling. To have them exposed to other stories where

people are humanized.

Maura, also an educator, suggests that documentaries have the potential to dispel

notions that we live in a post racial society. By creating a strong narrative story of

people's real struggles, it becomes more difficult to cling to the idea that racism is a thing

of the past:

I think my starting point would be the documentary *I am Not Your Negro*. It is

based off of James Baldwin's unfinished opus *Remember this House*. It weaves

together this really nice historical narrative that is constantly contrasting the civil

rights era versus now because people like my dad and in the south who aren't the

overt racists – they perpetuate that narrative: "Things aren't as bad as they were

back then, things are so much better." And this documentary forces you, as a

White audience, to realize that it hasn't gotten any better.

Along the same lines as storytelling was the suggestion of role-playing. Pam took

part in a poverty simulation exercise that opened her eyes to the everyday challenges of

being poor in America. Pam found that she and her colleagues had a much more

empathetic response to their clients after having experienced the role-playing exercise.

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Barb has also found that role-playing is helpful in forcing people outside their own experience and in creating empathy for the struggles other people experience:

> Role-playing is key. I think we minimize the impact of culture and even to understand and do a deep analysis of history of racism in our country and what that was like to go through and fight for basic shit. I feel like we can go so much deeper and I think we can understand why people are so fucking mad. If we could get in their shoes and know what it feels like to not be listened to.

THE POWER OF UNLEARNING

Many respondents felt that unlearning ways of knowing was critical to a more social justice orientation. Reading and a thorough education were cited as critical to that end. Maura stated, "It would be lovely if we taught the complexity of history in high school." Linda echoed this notion by expressing her frustration at the limits of her public high school education:

> Teach the historical context of institutional racism. I had to teach myself Jim Crow. In school we would talk about MLK and Harriet Tubman, and we would do a unit of slavery, but then it was like: we are all good now. But it doesn't address the connections: the whole Jim Crow era, the northern migration for jobs, the fact that they were kept out of housing, the inability to get home or business loans, shitty schools because money is not distributed equally. That kind of stuff we are not learning in elementary school or high school. You have to pursue that, and I

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think it is so critical to understanding why there is such a racial divide between the haves and the have nots.

Pam agrees and discusses her frustration with the lack of available material to high school students in America:

> There is a reason they didn't teach women's rights and civil rights in this country or real history. It's because all the textbooks are manufactured in Texas. How many of us knew about the Night of Terror when the suffragists were trying to get women the right to vote? How many of us knew about Emmitt Till? Do you know I was out of college before I knew who Emmitt Till was? That is WRONG. They didn't teach the Trail of Tears. They didn't teach about Cesar Chavez and I live in Arizona! I didn't know who Cesar Chavez was until I went to work for a television station. Really?? We need to understand that a legacy of systemic history in Baltimore caused the housing crisis there that lead to systemic lead poisoning for an entire generation, or two. Jesus Christ.

Tina also insists that an understanding of empirical evidence is critical to an awakening of White privilege and systematic oppression:

> I think some of the things that made me recognize that things are different are when you hear statistics like Whites and Blacks use marijuana at the same rates, but Blacks go to jail a lot more for it and have harsher sentences. And children of color are more likely to be expelled for the same behavior. So, you really have to take those kinds of hard evidence that you can't dispute and put aside my own sense of my own accomplishment and recognize that even though I didn't have a

strong economic background or a lot of parental support as a child there were

certain things – like even the concept of going to college – I couldn't really afford

it without grants – it was still there. With all the stats and evidence, that was the

gateway to start thinking about other people's perspectives. People who are

naturally more seeking information and are curious, that is where those kinds of

empirical evidence are maybe where you can switch it.

Reading was emphasized over and over again by the interviewees. Pam was

emphatic that reading is the single most important habit one can exercise to understand

racial inequity:

I just wish people would READ. Read your history and know what is going on in

this county. Crack a book for fuck's sake. This is real, income equality is real, and

the corporate welfare is real, systemic racism is real. And if people would - this is

a soapbox moment - but if people would turn off Fox News and go crack a book

or go read something that goes outside of your comfort zone.

Maura succinctly agrees: "Keep reading. For the love of God, don't stop reading." Maura

continues by describing the challenge of having people disassociating and unlearning an

ideology that serves them:

You have to get them to disassociate with the ideology that they so heavily

believe in to get them to recognize that the thing that they believe in is the very

thing that is oppressing them as well… it is harmful in that it allows them to

continue to identify with the rich White people who do not give two shits about

them. It just leads to perpetual poverty like in my family.

Christian, who works with former neo-Nazis, suggests that in order to be successful in the unlearning process, finding common values is key:

> I never debate their ideology. I find that when you tear away the armor of hate and all the monster suit that they wear, there really is a broken child inside and it doesn't matter if they are sixteen or sixty, that foundationally the values are kind of the same that we share. And it is a scary thought, but they care about their families in most cases, they want to be safe and have agency in life, they want to be connected to community and be respected. We must meet them in the middle as a broken human – which we all are – that is kind of the universality of our brokenness and the glue that can bring us together.

Christian goes on to describe the importance of trying to overcome difference by identifying common values. He believes (and his work with former White supremacists backs up his claim) that if common values are placed at the forefront, the chances of meeting in the middle will increase:

> If we start in the middle with the things we have in common – our core values – not ideology, not all the layers that we build up, eventually as we begin conversations we will go off track. People who have different issues that hit home or whatever. We will go off track. But we can always find ourselves back to that middle. A core value is: I want to be healthy, safe, and I want my children to be healthy, safe, and educated. Those are core values. Everybody wants those. That is where we need to start. And we will go off track. Wildly sometimes. But we have a point of reference to go back to. Maybe that point of reference, the fact that

we are all broken and have those same core fundamental values, maybe that is

what actually brings us together. Right now, the loudest voices are forcing us to

choose sides and when there are only two sides, where are the people who are not

on either side going to go? Those are the people we need to find a way to reach,

otherwise, we will lose them. There is probably an equation that you could map

out between how central your belief system is to your identity and how likely you

are to stop believing it. That there is an inverse relationship. So, if you casually

believe something then it's not going to be as hard.

Beth characterizes the reachable people in the middle this way:

Watchers are the key. They are the ones who never talk, but they are reading. And

those are the people that you can see the change in. The talkers, they already have

an opinion and they are usually pretty set. It is the watchers.

And finally, Derek succinctly stated his aim in helping people unlearn their racist

attitudes: "I am trying to make the case that it is NOT in their best interest."


## THE POWER OF EXPOSURE

Besides cracking a book and educating oneself theoretically, all of the

respondents insisted that immersing oneself in difference was critical to truly

understanding the challenges faced by other communities. Here are some examples of

their comments:

- Go volunteer. Do it! (Pam)

- People need to get off the couch. They need to get involved and they need to understand that especially if you are in a position of privilege. (Pam)

- AmeriCorps! (Pam)

- Start sooner. Ask questions!  (Linda)

- Get involved, ask questions. I didn't do any of those things. (Kate)

- I lived my little conservative two and a half whatever kids and my church thing and all of that. I should have been asking questions. (Kate)

- If you just do status quo and keep your blinders on and your status quo is okay, you are going to do that. (Kate)

- It is not enough to just be kind. You have to be involved. (Kate)

John agreed with these sentiments and suggests the rewards of getting out of a place of comfort are great:

Force yourself to be uncomfortable sometimes. I think often we don't interact with enough people that are different – either from an economic or cultural perspective – because we don't want to be uncomfortable. And I think we have to recognize that we are missing out as a result of it.

There was a myriad of ways that this was accomplished: attending college away from home, volunteering in other communities or even other countries, and taking on jobs that included interactions with different cultures and communities. Derek suggested that perhaps college is the perfect example of a potential incubator of transformation:

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I feel like college is the closest thing that society has invented that is like what that intervention looks like. You take people, and you move them to another state where they are in close quarters with people who are unlike the ones that they lived with before, and then the point of college is to do reading and be exposed to new ideas and you know, that's the model that you would come up with if you wanted to change people's perspective in the world.

Although Derek espouses college as a perfect model for a potential model to effect different ways of seeing the world, he does not think it is the only way. Any immersion in difference may serve the same purpose:

My hypothesis is that you will find out that all the people who you interview changed their communities. Some sort of different situation with people that they hadn't been committed to before in any kind of way and then they started talking to the people. Once they did that, they committed to them. No one will listen to your argument unless they care about you and have some investment in you.

Christian concurred with Derek and suggested that it takes the compassion of someone near to a person to open their eyes and think: what if I am wrong? John also agrees with Derek and Christian and describes the importance of taking advantage of interfacing with people who know different experiences than you do:

I would say when the opportunities arise along the way to make sure you take advantage of those. And in the case of people who come from different races and different cultures, to take the opportunity to learn more about those individuals because you may or may not have the opportunity to interface frequently with

certain cultures or races. Nothing can replace the lived experience of going out into communities and interacting with folks that are of a different income status, or culture, or race. So, any curriculum that you develop has to be going out into communities and creating opportunities to see life through the lens of the people that are in those communities.

John's opportunities to work with Native American communities offered him a glimpse into their challenges directly. This provided him with insight that would not be found any other way other than immersion with difference:

When you spend a day and half on the Navajo reservation, you are exposed to the challenges they face – a group of people who had every treaty with the federal government ignored over the course of time and as a result ended up in this completely challenging area with incredibly challenging economic issues and just awful income. Every day I was exposed to thinking about the program I was responsible for through the lens of income inequality and race. It was an incredible lesson for me to have those continued opportunities and very humbling in terms of being able to interact with such a wide number of people and learn a bit more about their traditions and their cultures. I wouldn't trade that.

Derek insists one must go a step further than simply exposure to difference. Rather, he believes that some commitment to the community is crucial for a true transformation to occur:

Just exposure alone is not actually the metric, I think it is how committed you are to the people. Do you consider them YOUR people? Are they within your

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universe of obligation? Are they people you feel some sort of responsibility to? Because without that, why would you feel any sort of empathy for them and also why would you listen to their critiques of your world? You have this image in your head of who is important to you and that is what drives your worldview, your beliefs, your ideology and how you interpret arguments. And so that has to change before you change your mind. If I just show up and say you're are wrong, your reaction will be to be loyal to the people that you think are important.

## THE POWER OF MARKETING

In the discussions with participants about the best ways to promote transformations in people, in addition to education and immersion, many people expressed the way in which the information is delivered is key. Specifically, several people mentioned the word "marketing" in their description of how to think about best practices of reaching out to privileged communities. Beth concisely explained this notion here:

> Number one is that it shouldn't include the fact that you are trying to get them to have a transition! Because the only people who show up for these things are people who are already transitioning or transitioned! You have to make it about something else that happens to give them that experience where they might have a transition but without telling them that that is what the experience is for. It is all about marketing. I mean: who is your audience?? Speak with them.

Tina concurred with Beth that obvious agendas are a barrier to learning, while natural

exposure is not:

> I think representation is important. It is hard to get someone to come to something
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> that is specifically about learning more about these things. You have to work it
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> into things that they would do anyway. Like my in-laws were very much against
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> gay marriage until they met the very nice lesbian couple down the street. It has to
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> be a natural exposure. It is really hard to break through those bubbles. I think you
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> can't come through with that obvious agenda because it just puts walls up.

Although Tina speaks of natural exposure, in a sense you can simulate natural

exposure with intentionality. Creative marketing may accomplish this goal. Christian,

who runs an international outreach program for former neo-Nazis who wish to transform

their lives, also touched on the fact that many social justice interventions target people

who are already transformed. Reaching people who do not comprehend historical

injustice and current systems of oppression is challenging. They often don't participate in

the programs that should be aimed at them:

> It is marketing, right? We are more likely to bring products to the ones who are
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> most likely to consume them. From a financial standpoint that makes sense. But if
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> we are driven by the social message rather than the financial reasons, we are
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> driven by exposure reasons, it needs to be marketed more in a relatable way.

Christian described a couple of recent films that accomplished this fete. *Get Out*

was a horror movie that was a critical and financial success at the box office. It was a

very entertaining film with messages of social injustice and racism infused throughout the

story. The film was popular across many demographics and while people were being entertained with an engaging (and terrifying) story, social justice messages were expertly delivered simultaneously. Another recent film discussed was *Black Panther* that was imbued with Black power and centered people of color and women as leaders against corrupt power. Christian suggests that the audience should be trusted to understand more subtle messages of social justice:

> You need to find a way to appeal to whatever that they can relate to. If you want to get a social message across, it is not leading with the social message. We need to treat people as smart enough to uncover whatever we are trying to get across. I don't think we need to be so explicit. I think we can be implicit and sometimes it will have more weight if people think that they came to the conclusion themselves. So maybe it is a bit of reverse psychology that we have to use.

Films with subtle social justice messaging is only one example of how to "market" social justice interventions. What was being expressed was the necessity to make a connection between the messenger and the person you are targeting with that message. Perhaps the term "marketing" comes with neoliberal baggage, but it was a theme that recurred in several of the interviews and I think it is a strategy that could be strategically and successfully utilized. It may arise from my former experience as a businessperson, but it seems to me that if neoliberal logic can be deployed to assist in undermining White hegemony, we ought to use it. Derek suggests we try to understand more about who we are connecting with to find more successful ways of reaching an audience:

The first question has to be: are you actually connecting? That is more

manageable. You can create situations where people are actually connecting with

something other than what they are actually disagreeing on. Be it a sport's team or

love the same TV show or something. It doesn't have to be really dramatic. Or it

can be that you are at the same college. I think that is what is actually happening

when people open themselves up in a college situation, they have had a change of

context so now they have something in common with someone who, on other

levels, they have a lot of conflict.

It is a challenging task to reach out to White people who are sensitive about being

called racist and who are also benefitting from the current state of injustice. Barb calls out

an inconvenient truth that in order to reach White people with messages about social

justice it might be necessary to tamp down Black people's rightful anger:

I think that the thing that is hardest about their delivery (Black activist facilitators)

is that they are not gentle. Their style is that of an activist. There is something

about the culture and the delivery that is hard for White people in general. They

are crusaders, super loud, brave, vitriolic, daring, people putting themselves out

there and they feel an urgency. And we aren't any of those things. So how do you

translate that into a speak that we can handle?  I don't think that it is the message,

but the delivery, that is too intense for White people. It is all assimilation

shit. If someone is loud or more crusading or more strong, it immediately puts

someone on the defensive and a lot of White people can't identify with it. Most of

the Black folks on mainstream TV, if you turn the video off, you wouldn't even

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know that they were Black and that is what keeps them in the mainstream. There is a reality of what is happening there. It is easier for White people to hear their opinions because we can identify with them because they seem just like us.

Former White supremacist, Derek, explains the challenges in trying to help White people unlearn their racist notions:

Most White people don't want to be called racist, but they do want to make sure their culture and their position in society isn't going to be undermined. My real fear is that White people will look at it and say: "I can see that this is unfair, but it is unfair in a way that suits me so why should I change?"

Maura explains the tendency of White people not wanting to change because the status quo suits them:

It takes effort to examine one's bias and why we have them. And if you are comfortable with the status quo, why go digging up something that is going to challenge your beliefs? Those who are in power and control and the structure don't want to give any of that up.

Finally, a couple of the participants suggested it is up to those who have transformed their thinking to model for others why a social justice orientation is the path to a good life. Leslie believes that if marginalized people can show there are different ways of being successful and happy, this will lead to a more socially just world:

We just need to be seen as reliable, successful contributors to the common good. As we live that kind of life, be prepared to tell our story when we interact with people who are willing to take the time to say: wow, your life is really interesting.

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How the heck did you get there? There has to be a whole lot of us to model the

behavior that we want to see. And I don't think there is enough of us doing it yet.

There just isn't.

CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to attempt to document the factors that helped induce a person to dramatically shift their ideological framework from one of accepting White hegemony as the putative way of the world, to an understanding of systemic racism and a desire to dismantle White hegemony. The questions guiding the study were:

1. What factors precipitated one's ideological shift from a narrow, conservative and post-racial view of the world, to a view that is more socially aware of current and historical factors that negatively affect marginalized populations?

2. What factors appear to be consistent in the participants' responses that may be identified and utilized to create more effective diversity programs and other justice-related interventions?

In addition, a question I hadn't thought of asking before the inquiry was also answered:

3. Are there any factors that were consistent in the participants' childhood that might lead to an understanding of why the shift occurred?

In order to prepare for this inquiry, a literature review was conducted. First, I reviewed the historical context of racism and how it informs the current state of White hegemony. The "common sense" notion of maintaining Whiteness as the ultimate standard to maintain hegemonic cultural dominance was reflected upon, with particular attention afforded to the interplay of public policy and private prejudice (often coded in the language of colorblindness) that works to uphold Whiteness as the mythical norm. Common sense adherence to Whiteness is found weaved throughout the narratives of the

interviews conducted. Though often not intentional, nor rooted in hatred or overt prejudice, this adherence stealthily ungirds the systemic nature of racism that prevails in North American society.

Next, I explored the efficacy of Critical White Studies as an antidote to the hegemonic impulse. Critical White Studies aims to explore the normalization of Whiteness with the aim of dismantling White supremacy. However, it is fraught with challenges of who should do the work. This is exacerbated by tribalism and isolation that litters the social landscape. Also key to this inquiry is the understanding of construction of White identity.

Critical White Studies' aim is to disrupt the stealth nature of White hegemony by forcing White people to explore the construction of Whiteness and consider the effects this construction has on non-White people. The third area of exploration takes this on by tackling the inquiry of the construction of Whiteness and the most effective way to accomplish it. Pedagogy for the Privileged undertakes the task of understanding privileged learners for the goal of emancipating them from their White supremacist logic in the service of social justice. Freire's notion of conscientizacao is theorized in the context of transforming White identity to one dedicated to social action for the common good. Philosophies of relevant curriculum was considered that could include accurate historical content as well as empathetic touchpoints. This research reveals the participants were exposed to some form of Pedagogy for the Privileged in the journey towards a more social justice orientation.

Finally, the possibility of Transformative Learning as a vehicle for social transformation was considered. Jack Mezirow believed learning is constructivist in nature and worldviews may shift when underlying meaning structures constructed from our childhood are disrupted by disorienting dilemmas. Critical reflexivity spurred by a disorienting dilemma may trigger a person to reconsider why they have attached a particular meaning to something, and a perspective transformation might occur. Many examples of disrupting dilemmas were expressed in the interviews and will be considered here.

The data for this study was collected over approximately a four-month period from August 29, 2019 to December 12, 2019. Interviewees were initially identified through a social media appeal that described the type of interviewee I was looking for. I had three possible pools of interviewees: one was my personal social media network, the second was from a grassroots political resistance group I started two years ago in my generally White, conservative community, and the third pool was through my professional affiliation at Arizona State University. Additional interviewees were identified through snowball sampling. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were performed that lasted from forty-five minutes to ninety minutes. In two instances, brief follow-up questions were asked.

Analysis of the data revealed several themes: in most instances the childhood of the participants was marred by some significant challenges (financial or familial instability and strict religious or authoritarian tendencies that sometimes bordered on abusive). Most experienced racial segregation and had role models who either reinforced

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racist attitudes or challenged them. Another strong theme that emerged was that certain personality traits were consistent amongst the interviews which included curiosity and a feeling they did not fit with their family's and/or church's way of thinking.

Critical to this study was the identification of transformational disorienting dilemmas that came from overlapping areas of attending an out of hometown college and encountering new people and ways of knowing. Unlearning their previously incorrect notions of history and White hegemony were gleaned through exposure to difference and new alliances with previously unknown or misunderstood populations.

First, turning in more detail to the themes that emerged during the interviewees' childhood, an interesting combination of factors seem to predict a future predilection for a social justice transformation. Nearly all were raised in families that adhered to what Gramsci (in Hodgkinson and Foley, 2003) and Apostolidis (2010) denoted as a common sense understanding that upholds the hegemonic dominance. Oftentimes, compliance with common sense is so pervasive (particularly in homogenous communities), that one is not even aware of their amenability to it. Kinloch and Lensmire (2019, p. 119) described the efficiency with how Whiteness is "inscribed, reified, and normalized" in family and "intimate living spaces (which) perpetuates the ongoing marginalization, oppression and traumatization of students of color."

Evidence of this was found in comments from interviewees such as "race was not a factor growing up" and "we did not talk about race". Belying their initial reaction to the question of their experiences of racism growing up as non-existent were memories of racism they indeed had experienced once we delved deeper into the conversation. It is

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worth noting, however, that the families from the study were not a homogenous group in the manner with which their adherence to White hegemony was expressed as it ranged from what Omi and Winant (2014, p. 15) described as from *de jure* segregation to *de facto* segregation. Some families were demonstrative in their racial hatred, making derogatory racist jokes and comments infused with the "n" word. In some cases, institutions infused the community with colonial White supremacy wrapped in the guise of charity. An example was the church that hosted an African "model" family who embraced White supremacists' ideals, and yet the same church ignored the need of Black families on the next block. Notions of Africans being "animal-like" and needing colonial intervention demonstrated the degree of White hegemonic adherence in this community. Other participants' experiences were not quite as drastically and overtly racist in their manifestation. Ignoring racial difference, denying race was an issue at all, and exoticizing people who were different were examples of less insidious expressions of racism, but problematic, nonetheless.

White hegemony, however, is complicated and rarely practiced with purely negative intent. This is a condition of hegemony that seems rarely addressed in the literature but that I found quite frequently in the stories of my interviewees. For example, one father gently and eloquently explained to his daughter why using the "n" word is deeply hurtful. Another father provided a thoughtful and nuanced explanation why different labels applied to Middle Eastern people may have devastating effects on how they are received in their new White communities. Another participant's mother, who was tired of the contempt shown her by the police department when she was trying to

have an alimony agreement enforced, joined the local (all men's) police department to serve her ex-husband a court decree herself. She demonstrated tremendous strength in the face of seemingly insurmountable misogyny. Yet, all of these family members currently proudly proclaim their support of President Donald Trump, known for his racist White supremacist and misogynistic alliances. All of these examples of compliance with White hegemonic behavior, and rejection of White hegemonic behavior, illustrate the breadth of its expression in this study. More typically (and moderately), a strategy of White transparency (Flagg 1997) prevailed. There was a tendency to not think about Whiteness, but rather to see it as the norm against which all others were measured.

To take it further, isolation and tribalism contribute to this phenomenon of transparency and colorblindness, and it is exacerbated by the segregation of people by race and class. It is difficult to connect with people with whom you have little or no meaningful contact with. Pettigrew (1998) found that "prejudiced people avoid intergroup contact, so the causal link between contact and prejudice is two-way" (p. 80). Lipsitz (2006) suggests public policy and private prejudice work together to uphold racial hierarchies of society and that every choice a White person makes (from jobs, to communities, to schools and churches) reflects a conscious consideration of race (their own and others'). It is here we see one manifestation of the unconscious adherence to the order demanded by White hegemony and common sense that Gramsci alleged. The participants, almost without exception, were segregated in one or all of these areas of their lives: community, school and church. If, as Mezirow maintained, a person's frame of reference is shaped by perspectives rooted in sociolinguistic, psychological and

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epistemic codes created largely from our family, friends and from cultural assimilation (1994), one can easily see how maintaining a closed racially homogenous social circle creates racially biased worldviews. Kane (2001) goes further and describes naïve consciousness as one which critically accepts its social experience as whole and accurate. When we find reason to question our known truth, we will seek validation from those closest to us to morph the experience to fit within our frame of reference. This serves to reinforce our habitual ways of thinking and it is through these frames of reference that we make meaning to form and distort what we think and believe.  Keating (2013) has another term for a very similar phenomena she calls status-quo stories. "Status-quo stories describe worldviews, belief systems, and actions that normalize and naturalize the existing social system, values, and standards so entirely that they stunt our imaginations and shape our lives" (p. 169).

Although there was some evidence of Keating and Kane's assertions in the data, more typically in this cohort was a constant nagging of doubt, and often outright rejection, of their familial dogma and status quo stories. Rather than trying to morph what their parents were telling them within their disturbed frame of reference, these participants employed their curiosity to find out exactly what was wrong or missing from their parental schema of belief. Interestingly, some of the interviewees' siblings did follow Kane's description of falling back in line with the family schema of beliefs and these were the siblings who have generally stayed close to their familial home.

Winans (2005) touched on another experience the respondents expressed. Winans recalled that her students at a rural and mostly White college did not have contact with

other races. The views of her students echoed the notions of the participants of this study which was simply that everyone was the same and race did not matter. She coined this "White talk" and described it as a culture of niceness that makes everyone seem the same and connotes innocence. Winans contends that this way of thinking "achieves power because it generates norms so effectively that the constructed nature of those norms remains invisible to many" (p. 255). This was true in some cases, however, many of the participants eventually rejected this way of thinking throughout their lifetime.

Schools' hegemonic potential that Burawoy (2011, p. 3) described as securing "the active participation of students and teachers in the pursuit of credentials" that bolster the hegemony, was also described by most participants. Schools were either sites of complete segregation (White only) or effective segregation (most Whites in separate honors classes). The honors classes better prepared White students for college and eventually the workforce and the symbolic domination described by Burawoy is complete: "The *combination* of enthusiastic participation and systematic misrecognition…the power of the school system is redoubled by the labor market which rewards academic success" (Burawoy 2011, p. 3).

Further, the way participants described their school experience was similar to Giroux's assessment that "…the issue is not whether public or higher education has become contaminated with politics, it is more importantly about recognizing that education is already a part of politics, power and authority" (Giroux, 2003, p. 14). This was manifested in many ways, but perhaps most telling in their recount of their high school experience was what Dhamoon (2010) also described as the lack of any attempts

at a multicultural historical context that addressed issues of colonialism, racism or White privilege. For many, their first foray into understanding any of this important context was in college and they felt blindsided by the flurry of information. White culture was so dominant, it was essentially invisible to the participants at the time and they were unable to see it. Woo (in Moraga and Anzaldua, 1983) described it this way: "The option of becoming integrated means having to become invisible, ghost-like, identity-less, community-less and totally alienated. The perils of 'passing White' indeed" (p. 144). One of the interviewees, Beth, describes her awakening to Woo's observation when she went from a predominantly White middle-class high school to a predominantly Black lower-class high school: "That was the first time that I noticed that there were two different cultures going on, and they were fitting in in my culture. Because they needed to."

This apparent lack of context and history is most troubling because of the societal effects that resonate, especially for people of color. It is from this ignorance that systems of oppression are built. Lipsitz (2006, p. 18, 210) describes the potential damage and possibility that education provides succinctly here:

Unaware of history white Americans produce largely cultural explanations for structural social problems…it often attributes the economic advantage enjoyed by whites to their family values, faith, and foresight – rather than to the favoritism they enjoy through their possessive investment in whiteness…inequitable distribution of wealth is the product of institutionalized white supremacy and economic exploitation, (but) it is seen by whites as part of the natural order of things that cannot legitimately be disturbed. (Education provides) critical

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awareness insights into the history and consequences of accepted social norms, cultural codes, ideologies, and institutionalized practices that oppress learners.

Lipsitz eloquently sums up the devastating effect the lack of comprehensive, contextual and historical multicultural education has on the possibility of tearing down unfair systemic machinations. Of course, many would argue this is by design – a system of institutionalized ignorance that maintains the status quo in favor of White hegemonic advantage. However, clearly some White people of conscious are malleable to the forces of historical and systemic accuracy, if only education will provide it to them.

Curry-Stevens (2005, p. 19) suggests privileged spaces reinforce a lack of understanding or appreciation for cultural differences and cultural challenges where a "profound separation between the haves and have-nots (exists that) leads to an ignorance that stems from their lack of contact with the lived realities of the average and more vulnerable citizens." In Nicholls' (2011) view, cultural and strategic identification with others' can only be achieved through interaction with others, and one can see that the backgrounds of most interviewees did not permit this opportunity. (However, we will see later in the discussion what changed in their lives to permit this possibility.)

Further complicating the likelihood of White people learning about privilege, hegemony and oppression, is the strategy of dividing and conquering which is utilized against minority communities and their potential allies. Maura recalled that her family had a very difficult time hearing her new theories of racial injustice and clung to ideologies that worked against their own interest. Although her family shared financial challenges with their poor, Black neighbors and would have benefitted from the social

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programs offered through progressive platforms, they clung to the ideology that kept them connected to rich, White community members and rejected any solidarity with their poor neighbors:

> You have to get them to disassociate with the ideology that they so heavily believe in to get them to recognize that the thing that they believe in is the very thing that is oppressing them as well.

Lensmire (2010) concurs with Maura's assessment stating that by granting some privileges to White people who are out of reach of the poor and working-class, it is easier "to convince White people to support White supremacy. …eventually persuading poor and working-class Whites to embrace the idea of white supremacy." Allen (2004, p. 128) stated it this way:

> Internalized racism is a tool that whites deploy to keep those within a racial group at odds with each other and distracted from organizing against white supremacy…where blacks aspire to 'white ideal' and whites give more privilege to blacks who toe the line.

Another complication in the quest for possible allegiance across difference was expressed by Miller and Tanner (2018) who described White discomfort when young people wish to interact with people of color but are admonished by their (White) family and friends when the social order is disturbed. Rachel described her parents' and grandparents' reaction when she began a friendship with a Black boy in her class. Whenever a Black boy emerged in her teenage circle, pointed questions about the nature of their relationship were asked. It was clear that an interracial romantic relationship was

completely impossible within the family values framework. Another interviewee, Linda, explained that her family was unhappy with her when she moved to a predominantly Black community and had a Black boyfriend.

The notion of a Black boyfriend was completely ridiculous in Maura's world growing up, where Blacks and Whites rarely interacted. This was also true for Laura and Barb. Pam was told that White boys would no longer date her if she ever was seen with a Black boy. Messages that crossing the White zone was deeply frowned upon, were plentiful in their families. Bulkin, Pratt and Smith put it this way: "If we ally ourselves with the other and threaten our folks' self-interest then there is a risk of being thrown out" (1984, p. 21). Lensmire (2010) describes this phenomenon here: "White desire for love and solidarity with people of color is policed and suppressed, resulting in fear and a divided, ambivalent white self" (p. 167, 168). Forming any sort of bond with people who were very different risked alienation from their family. Beth experienced this as an adult when she converted to Islam. When she asked her Trump-loving family how they felt about Trump's policy of banning Muslims from entering the country and that at some point she might fear she could be barred from her homeland, her family simply stated that she would have it coming. She chose to convert to Islam. Their allegiance to her died the day she donned a hajib.

Religious dogma and authoritarianism were also consistent themes revealed in the interviews. Coupling racist tendencies with religious dogma and authoritarianism left many of the interviewees feeling disconnected from their families and communities. A feeling of being a black sheep or a fish out of water infused the conversations I had with

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many of them. It became clear the reason for this disconnect was born from intense curiosity and a penchant for critical analysis. Reading and questioning were two attributes that seemed to work in concert with their learned discomfort with family tendencies of strict religious authoritarianism and racism. The literature seemed mostly silent on this point of inherent curiosity found in progressive-minded people with the only reference to inherent difference discussed as a biological one. Oxley et al. (2008) found that "political attitudes correlate with physiological traits" (p. 1667). Their research revealed that more progressive-thinking people responded with less reaction to physical sensitivities, such as a loud noise or disturbing photo. Conversely, people who showed more of a physiological response to negative stimuli tended to me more conservative in their political ideology.

In addition to the proclivity to be curious, read and analyze, concomitant to this tendency was a rejection of the status quo. Participants seemed to be seeking answers to questions that could not be answered by the ideological frames provided by their families and friends. Sara Ahmed (2017, p. 32) describes it this way:

> We encounter racism and sexism before we have the words that allow us to make sense of what we encounter. Words can then allow us to get closer to our experiences; words can allow us to comprehend what we experience after an event. We become retrospective witnesses of our becoming.

The vocabulary to describe the discomfort with behavior and ideology that produced feelings of being an outsider within their own social circle was not available to many of the participants in this study growing up. Reading and analyzing provided the

opportunity to seek answers outside of what Mezirow termed their "schema of beliefs." It appeared to me that interviewees were describing attempts to seek out disorienting dilemmas that would disrupt the sociolinguistic, psychological and epistemic codes that Mezirow believed family and friends created to form a schema of beliefs they found objectionable in a way they could not articulate. This was an important point gleaned from this research that I believe expands on Mezirow's theory: some people actively seek out disorienting dilemmas, rather than simply stumbling upon them. Further, this research revealed that some people are more predisposed to notice and react to a disorienting dilemma and transform. Others (some of the siblings of the respondents, for example) are happy to find ways to mold a disorienting dilemma into their existing frame of reference and carry on without transformation.

Mezirow defined a disorienting dilemma as some event or interaction that challenges an existing frame of reference and causes a person to critically reflect (or analyze) their prior adherence to their ideology. There are two critically important pieces to elicit a disorienting dilemma which may precipitate a transformational learning event: something occurring that challenges a frame of reference and the ability or willingness to critically analyze the event. Facchini (2016) described the reason for an ideological shift as simply that the cost becomes too high for the person to continue their adherence to the ideology. The participants seemed to be actively seeking disorienting dilemmas outside their own limited social exposure to elicit disorienting dilemmas that would help to form new beliefs that would comport more comfortably with their own conscious. They were looking for reasons to make the cost too high to maintain ideologies with which they felt

discomfort. When they were still living at home, this took the form of reading, challenging ideas and gravitating towards people who were outside their immediate social circle. For example, a young girl accompanying her father on work trips in the city away from her cloistered suburb. Another young girl making friends with outsiders. Another engaged in conversations with Muslim students who were outsiders themselves. Another young woman befriended the only Black student at her elementary school and another with the only mixed-race child. Often coded in language such as outsider or outcast, participants described their attraction to people who seemed to be stricken with the same exclusionary or exceptional status they possessed.

One part of Mezirow's theory did not bear out in the results. Mezirow believed "the severity of the disorienting dilemma is clearly a factor in establishing the probability of a transformation" (Mezirow 1981, p. 7). Most people interviewed did not experience a "dramatic" disorienting dilemma, but rather described their transformation as a series of small, but cumulative events. However, there were three participants who described traumatic or severe events that helped facilitate their transformation: Maura who became physically ill when around a majority Black population for the first time; Linda who watched her Black boyfriend arrested and later found beaten by the police; and Christian who was left by his wife and children because of his White supremacist adherence. However, even with these very significant disorienting dilemmas occurring, the three participants still described their overall transformation as being affected by many different disruptions along the way. They acknowledged these events were more noteworthy, but not cataclysmically affective.

Once the participants had an opportunity to leave home - usually through a college experience - most chose to remove themselves from the environment in which their family and friend circle confined them. Some may have accidentally found themselves outside their comfort zone (or perhaps it was a sub-conscious choice), but the ultimate result was an opportunity for disorienting dilemmas was dramatically increased through new environments, new people and new ideas. Cultural and strategic identification with people with different worldviews most often occur through interaction whereby stereotypes may be undermined, and false narratives debunked. Nicholls, 2011; Daloz et al, 1996; Chaisson, 2004; Raible, 2007; Garner, 2017; McWhorter, 2005; and Young, 1990 also echo the sentiments of the participants contending constructive engagement with people outside of one's usual social circle helps to build bridges between disparate groups. Direct engagement, they contend, is critical in helping curb misunderstandings and dismantling preconceptions of one another. All participants in this study left the comfort zone of their families and friends and interacted with a broader community of difference. Communities are increasingly divided by race, religion, class and ideology in current society, therefore intentional and direct engagement becomes critical.

Interestingly, often interviewees described their family members as being content with the status quo and having not left the social circle they knew growing up. These same family members tended to maintain the same ideology throughout their lifetime. Rachel described how her sister returned home to her segregated White community after a brief foray away in high school. She returned to the same friends and family she had

briefly left behind. Beth's family pretty much stayed within their close social circle. Tina, whose father has moved deeper into a right-wing conservative ideology in the last twenty years said:

> He is still in the same place that he has been. My dad has lived in the same place for fifty years. He had very little exposure to anyone that isn't a Republican Christian. All his friends are from church and they are locked in their communities.

Derek, whose family was deeply involved in the White supremacist movement and who was being groomed as the new leader of the family dynasty, described college as his gateway to the cultural synthesis Nicholls' described. If you recall, Derek described college this way:

> College is the closest thing that society has invented that is like what that intervention looks like. You take people and you move them to another state where they are in close quarters with people who are unlike the ones that they lived with before. And then the point is to do reading and be exposed to new ideas and you know, that's the model that you would come up with if you wanted to change people's perspective in the world.

Indeed, college was life altering for Derek. As Mezirow described, Derek was barraged with new people (some of whom his childhood ideology dehumanized) and new ways of thinking that constantly challenged his former schema of beliefs. Derek stated: "I think a relationship with a person whose identity was marginalized by my worldview was a strong factor in the questioning that worldview."

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However, Mezirow spent little time examining the nature of the disruptive dilemmas. Daloz et al (1996) found that constructive engagement with others was critical in building bridges between different people in helping them to challenge the notions of who was "one of them" and who was "one of us" and "tills the ground in which a seed of commitment – not just to me and mine, but to a larger, more inclusive common ground – can be planted" (p. 65). Derek echoes Daloz almost exactly:

> I think it (depends) on how committed you are to the people. Do you
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> consider them your people? Are they within your universe of obligation? Are they
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> people you feel some sort of responsibility to? Because without that, why would
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> you feel any sort of empathy for them and also why would you listen to their
>
> critiques of your world? I think is important to how intentionally and self-
>
> consciously you are challenging your beliefs.

Derek was not alone in his observation of the importance and nature of the association of the people involved in presenting the disruptive dilemma and how meaningful and permanent the transformation will be. Contact Theory asserts that interaction is required to create alliances across difference and it further contends that certain conditions must be met for the contact to be fruitful. The conditions outlined in Contact Theory are a chance for participants to get to know one another, status that is similar amongst participants, a situation that fosters cooperation, support by those in authority, and friendship (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Daloz (1996) agreed it must be a constructive engagement that allows participants to suffer with, and have compassion for, their comrades: "a recognition of a shared capacity for the feelings

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that lie at the core of our essential humanity: fear, joy, yearning, delight, suffering, hope, love." (p. 70)

These sorts of connections are made over time and with continued contact (Daloz et al. 1996; Raible 2007). Rachel attended an integrated school in the south where Black students and White students had a lot of contact. However, the nature of the interaction did not meet any of the conditions outlined by Allport, Pettigrew and Tropp. White students were often segregated into gifted classes and Black students into remedial ones, thereby cementing their status as different and unequal. Black athletes were revered if successful at their sport, but they were kept at arm's length from other players, and even disliked by their White teammates (probably due to the racist view they had an unfair physical advantage simply because they were Black). There seemed to be no attempt by leaders at the school to foster a deeper human connection amongst the students' racial and cultural differences. Physical fights between students of different races were common and left an indelibly traumatic impression on Rachel, feeding into her fear of Black people and the idea they were animal-like, which had been instilled by her parents and church. Nearly all the contact with Black people Rachel experienced was negative and there was no opportunity for her have a meaningful friendship with any people of color. The nature of her contact with Black people, along with her social circle of influence, contributed to racist attitudes she held concomitantly with her reticence of the same views.

When I look back, as much as I could say I had moments all along that I felt uncomfortable, I also had moments where I was completely of that. I was deeply

entrenched in this stuff in Cornwall. It also shows how far I have come, and that

change is possible.

Comparing Rachel's experience to John's, John also attended an integrated

school. His experience playing sports with African American students left a completely

different impression. The coach acted as a role model, encouraging comradery and

modelling behavior that encouraged equity. Friendships grew over the course of the

basketball season and continued past it. John, who eventually became a policymaker on

behalf of marginalized communities, suggested that when people have the chance to

interact with different cultures they ought to jump at the chance. Curtis (2012)

encourages the "self-consciously bringing together across troubled chasms of race and

class to engage in pubic work and bridge social capital" (p. 369).

Raible (2007, 195) agrees that availing oneself to interaction with difference is

critical:

> In order for us to live, work and dance together in a multicultural society that
>
> promotes equity and social justice, it will be necessary for increasing numbers of
>
> individuals to become willing to engage in relationships that cross racial and
>
> cultural lines.

Coaches have the potential to create environments that encourage transformation

or inhibit it. This researcher experienced a coaching situation that fostered community

across difference. Our family sponsored, and my husband coached, a travel club baseball

team. Our roster could have been filled with White and middle to upper class players who

lived in our community. We knew many talented young men in the area through our

association with Little League and the local schools. However, we choose to reach out into neighboring communities of color where young Hispanic players did not have the same opportunities to participate in a competitive club baseball experience due to lack of money (travel club sports teams are very expensive). Friendships blossomed between the players as the team excelled in tournaments. The coach valued all players and they were truly a team. Racial barriers came tumbling down as they worked together towards a similar goal and enjoyed a sport they loved. The transformational experience extended to the families who interacted in the cheering section, learning more about each other as the season progressed. Regular potluck celebratory dinners after each tournament provided a cross-cultural experience where lessons of tolerance were learned without the participants even being aware of it. Some of the Hispanic families were living in a shadow due to their immigration status and this was during a period of time where the Arizona legislature was passing unconstitutional laws permitting law enforcement to demand evidence of citizenship when they suspected someone was in the country illegally. State Bill 1070 (otherwise known as "show me your papers law") was legalized harassment of brown people where suspicion of wrongdoing was based solely on the color of their skin. The fear of White people in the Hispanic community was palpable. Conversely, the misinformation campaign of fearmongering politicians had misled many people living in mostly White communities to be suspicious of Hispanic people and their legal right to be in the country. It was during this tempestuous time our club baseball team flourished by providing the conditions outlined in Contact Theory:  an environment that allowed the

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players to get to know one another and build friendships with similar status, and the fostering of cooperation while being supported by those in authority.

In addition to bonding experiences from such as sports teams, immersion in a community may lead to transformations as well. Curry-Stevens (2005) strongly believed that much of the misunderstandings and oppression stemmed from a lack of connection between people of different economic, class and racial backgrounds, and that "friendships across difference serve an essential function to break down the barriers between people" (p. 219). Recalling Linda's experience when she relocated from her middle-class suburb to a mostly Black and poverty-stricken area, she described a scene where her boyfriend was arrested by police and beaten. When she first began living in the predominantly Black community, she brought with her the schema of beliefs from her childhood. When she viewed the poverty in her adopted community through the lens she knew from childhood, it was one of blame and bootstrap mentality. She felt anger and impatience with the people she saw in her new neighborhood and felt that if they would simply go to school and get a job their life would be better. However, once the people in the community became her friends and she began to be invested in their story, seeing the injustice levied on her boyfriend that evening precipitated a dramatic disorienting dilemma. Arguably, her reaction would have been quite different if her relationship with the young man who was beaten had been casual. The same incident viewed through a bootstrap lens would not likely have had the same lasting transformational effect on her. I imagine that Anne Curry-Stevens would agree with this analysis that many of the misunderstandings and much of the oppression stems from a lack of connection between

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people and that "friendships across difference serve an essential function to break down the barriers between people" (p. 219). Further, Curry-Stevens stated that increasing opportunity for interaction between the privileged and the oppressed is necessary and that without purposeful interaction and intervention, societal issues of oppression would be exacerbated. Curry-Stevens contends that "the primary catalysts toward change have been the students' experience of dissonance with the neoliberal ideal and view of the oppressed" (2008, p. 293).

Interestingly, connections between people's lived experiences is not the only place where a connection might be made for meaningful transformation. Even if the messenger is a professor or teacher (rather than an actual specific event) and the disorienting dilemma takes on a more theoretical lens, a relationship built between messenger and receiver appeared to assist the chances for a transformation. It is possible the interviewees were ripe for new information due to their discomfort with their families' ideology and therefore were more responsive to the professor's information. Mezirow (1991) agrees that access to fresh ideas that free us from our prior notions presents an opportunity for growth and states "emancipation from libidinal, linguistic, epistemic institutional, or environmental forces that limit our options and our rational control over our lives but have been taken for granted (is freeing and) the learner is presented with an alternative way of interpreting feelings" (p. 87-88). Several interviewees shared Mezirow's sentiment of emancipation once they were given the context and the words to describe the lifelong uneasiness they had felt while immersed in the doctrine of their families. Most described having a deeper connection with the

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professors who offered them a new perspective and recalled them in highly favorable terms. Rather than labeling them as ignorant or close-minded, their teachers were highly effective at presenting information in a way that was impactful. Curry-Stevens (2005, p.359) opined teaching privileged learners is fraught with potential problems, but if approached correctly, it had the capacity to facilitate transformations in privileged learners:

> Explicit embrace of social justice goals, abundant connections to social movement practices and an emerging recognition of the needs of the privileged learners (that) offers the possibility to remedy an identity premised upon superiority, recognizing how fully this identity might damage, at a deep level, one's integrity and values.

In addition to transformations occurring due to a specific event, interaction or a mentor influence, in some cases a transformation may occur from intellectual pursuit alone. Diane Ravitch is an example of a person who experienced a transformation during the course of her professional life. Ms. Ravitch is an educational researcher and policy maker. She began her career in the 1960's as an educational researcher and eventually was tapped as the assistant to Ronald Reagan's secretary of education. Ravitch's views on educational reform were in line with President Reagan's vision of privatization of public good and other neoliberal notions of civic life. However, over the course of her sixty-year career of studying educational policy and the impacts of privatization of public education, her views have completely transformed. Where she was once a staunch advocate for school choice, merit pay based on testing and charter schools, she began to

see the devastating effects on public education due to the very policies she once championed. Now Ravitch has dedicated her life to the dismantling of the policies she previously espoused and educating the public on their devastating effects. This dramatic transformation of ideology occurred through her immersion in the work she was doing, however, equally critical to her transformation was her willingness to objectively see the negative results and admit her previous stance was incorrect. Some of the participants in this study found their transformations were more of an intellectual journey like Ravitch's. More than once I heard interviewees utter the phrase: I wish people would just crack a book.

Dhamoon (2010) expressed concern for the lack of historical context in pedagogical attempts, where discussion of colonialism, racism and White privilege are lacking. Many of the participants concurred with Dhamoon's assertion and decried their apparent lack of awareness of historical context that is the foundation for beginning a critical examination of Whiteness. Certainly, their communities, schools and churches did not provide this fundamental knowledge. It was a lack of information and vocabulary that was likely the cause of their frustration as children when they were unable to articulate their dismay at their familial schema of beliefs. However, once it was provided in a new environment by people who had completely different perspectives, they were receptive to the new standpoint. Certainly, the transformations were not always linear and not always comfortable (qualities that Curry-Stevens and Mezirow recognized as typical of transformational learning), however, they were consequential – changing the trajectory of their ideology towards a more progressive and inclusive philosophy.

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It could be said the participants went through a process of conscientizacaon (Freire, 2018). Freire initially described it as a progression whereby the oppressed would understand the nature of their oppression and commit to fighting for liberation through a transformational process. However, Freire also believed conscientizacaon was possible for oppressors, and indeed, necessary for them to have a productive and happy life. Nurenberg (2011) concurred that applying Freirean logic to creating Pedagogy for the Privileged was essential. But what should this pedagogy look like and who should create the curriculum? Both Nurenberg and Freire believed the process should belong to the people because they recognized the most effective methodology to meet their needs. Participants in this study would likely agree. The word "marketing" came up several times in conversations when discussing how to best create moments of disorienting dilemmas and moments of critical reflection. Most suggested that in order to be most successful in reaching White people, creating some sort of natural exposure to people's stories was the most effective strategy. Personal accounts of struggles due to oppression coupled with a soft-handed approach to the delivery of the material was echoed throughout the suggestions. Ideally, the participant in an intervention not knowing the intervention was happening, would promote the most likely opportunity for transformation.

Nurenberg's touchpoints of empathy and creating moments of common identification to help make the curriculum relevant and authentic seems to align with the storytelling strategies suggested by the interviewees. This particular theory was illuminated when the interviewees recalled their own experiences of oppression during

their childhood. Most were victims of oppression based on their class. Some experienced extreme gender oppression that left deep scars that persist today. Others experienced racial intolerance, either directed at them, family members or close friends. Utilizing these empathy touchpoints combined with storytelling suggests an effective intervention strategy that Keating (2013) might call invitational pedagogies – those teaching methods that facilitate movement through oppositional modes.

With the exception of storytelling, most of the intervention strategies suggested by the interviewees center the oppressor when considering how to best educate the oppressor. Garner, 2017; Tanner, 2018; and Curry-Stevens, 2010 caution against the impulse of centering White feelings and marginalizing people of color - the historical building blocks of how systems of oppression were built and continue to be maintained. Allen et al (2009) concurs, suggesting that privileged spaces must have their own pedagogy but suggests further the space must include an analysis of the identity formation of White people.

The discomfort of facing racism, White privilege and one's complicity in its promulgation is a reality faced by those trying to teach the subject, and by those trying to understand it. Several of the interviewees suggested that direct engagement examining their complicity in upholding the hegemony through unearned privilege can be overwhelming and cause White people to simply shut down in response. Jennifer Trainor (2002, p. 634) agreed with this common reaction and stated:

> There is no viable 'whiteness' that can exist within a social justice framework; whiteness is inseparable from power and privilege…essentialist and 'othering'

constructions of whiteness in critical multicultural pedagogies delimit students'

own constructions of identity and help produce the kinds of troubling

conservative rhetoric that so frustrates students.

Trainor believed that by essentializing White identities, we are deploying the

same mechanism we are fighting against and possibly "excluding the very students who,

arguably, we most need to reach" (Trainor, 2002, p. 636). Nurenberg (2011) agrees that

creating teaching materials that cause White guilt may precipitate a missed chance for

true connection. Tina, Rachel, and Maura alluded to feeling unmoored in college when

they were barraged with new information about systemic racism and White privilege.

What they were learning in their college classes challenged the schema of beliefs on

nearly a daily basis. It could have been overwhelming for them, particularly if the

narrative had been infused with narratives of White guilt. However, perhaps a

combination of their curiosity and having good instructors had the effect of a disorienting

dilemma which moved them closer to an understanding of justice issues. Daloz et al

(1996) stated that "it is useful to recognize our patterns of belonging and to assess how

these patterns of affiliation do or do not nourish our capacity for citizenship in the 21$^{st}$

century" (p. 215). The research described here supports this notion but suggests the

learning space may also need to be a nourishing place in order for the assessment of

patterns of affiliation to be effectively vetted. With a heavy-handed, White guilt

approach, perhaps a reactive moment of denial would have occurred instead, thereby

missing an opportunity for meaningful engagement and growth.  It is a fine line, though,

between nourishing and enabling. Davis and Steyn (2012) and Allen et al. (2009)

believed that without challenging conversations and pushback against racist views (inevitably causing pain or discomfort for the leaner), transformation is unlikely.

Derek insisted this was of great import to his transformation. His college community (to which he eventually became emotionally invested in) constantly challenged him on his White supremacist views. Most of his college life was painful and uncomfortable as he unlearned the deeply embedded White supremacist logic he had been steeped in his entire life. Maura became physically ill when confronted with her racism. Linda, while immersed in the Black community, witnessed her boyfriend beaten for being Black. All of these experiences represent profound discomfort. However, alongside the discomfort was a nourishing aspect to the learning process that kept them invested: friendship, love, community and acceptance.

Sandlin and Bey (2006) found that for critical transformation to occur, people need to be bound by the systems and structures within which they enact. Some sort of connection is required in order to initiate an aspiration for new awareness. Tethering new ideas and experiences to something a person can relate to in their own lives is critical for the new information to resonate. Without this social dimension, disorienting dilemmas may not have a transformative effect. Again, this is born out in this research that demonstrates the respondents needed to feel connection with the community in order for change to occur. Derek was very precise about this point. He insisted that without investment in his new college community and a desire to gain approval from them, his dramatic transformation from a White supremacist leader to a social justice advocate would have never happened. John's deeply embedded nature of his work in communities

of color enriched his knowledge and empathy towards their challenges. It permitted him a deep understanding of what was required to make a difference in their communities by engaging in deep and rich conversations about their culture and ways of knowing. Beth, who shifted her religious faith from strict Catholic to practicing Islam, sprung from conversations with people who became very close friends. She trusted them and cared about what they thought. It challenged her to listen more carefully to what they believed – something she would not have done without investment in their community. Leslie, who came from an "ultra-conservative, right wing, Republican, fundamentalist Christian on the intolerant side" (as she described herself), found new faith and understanding in the LGBTQ community. This would not have been possible if she had not immersed herself with new people she cared about (and who cared about her) and became bound to the new systems and structures that made sense to her.

The work of Crenshaw (1991), Hancock (2016), and Chun, Lipsitz and Shin (2013) which speaks to the importance of intersectional analysis of oppressive forces, was not clearly evidenced in the interviews with the participants. Most people seemed to address issues of oppression either through a lens of race or class, but rarely through both simultaneously. Other types of oppressions beyond class and race were seldom spoken of. This may have been a function of the types of questions that were asked, however, an awareness of the effect of multiple intersectional identities which may further complicate one's ability to access fairness and justice did not seem to be at the forefront of their minds. This is clearly an area which requires more attention in reaching a larger audience

as intersectional analysis permits broader alliances which are critical to a social movement.

Critical White Studies was envisaged to address the criticism of White compliance with hegemony. It demands Whites examine the construction of Whiteness to accelerate the process of its deconstruction towards racial equality and contends that social transformation is not possible without inquiries around identity formation of oppressor groups (Tanner, 2019; Bulkin, Pratt and Smith, 1984; McIntosh, 1990; Pease, 2010; Curry-Stevens, 2010; Levine-Rasky, 2000). Critical White Studies calls on White people to do the work and suggests that it is up to them to identify and relinquish privileges that are unfairly conveyed to them. To this end, one of the questions in the qualitative interview of this study directly addressed this issue and asked: Do you think there are ways in which you are reproducing White privilege? It is telling that in a majority of the interviews the participant either paused for a long period of time before answering or asked directly what I meant by the question. In all cases the respondents were aware of what White privilege was, that indeed they possessed it, but lacked a clear idea of how they might be reproducing it.

On its face this may seem disappointing. It could demonstrate a fundamental lack of the ability to grasp how their White identity is created, defined and maintained. Without this ability, can their anti-racist work be meaningful? Lensmire (2013) was concerned about this very possibility suggesting that learning about racism and musing about its implications could stand in the way of actual on the ground anti-racist work. Do privileged people simply acknowledge their advantages but do little to dismantle the

system providing those advantages? This study reveals different commitments to praxis, however, in all cases there is work being done. John works on policy and interacts with marginalized communities to help identify their needs. He also sends his children to a private school, which is often viewed in progressive circles as the new socially acceptable way to segregate schools and chip away at the possibility of better educational opportunities for marginalized communities. Barb works directly with poverty-stricken pregnant mothers, most of who are Hispanic. Barb is White. She is aware that a Hispanic leader would probably relate better to the population, but she has the job. Maura, the woman who became physically ill at the sight of Black people, has dedicated her life to understanding the societal structures that disadvantage marginalized people. Any job that she gets upon completion of her PhD will displace a person of color. Her White appearance, coupled with the opportunity to receive an advanced degree (which is out of reach to many people of color), positions her favorably within the very structure she is trying to tear down. She is painfully aware of this:

> I am in the job market; I am applying for a job and I am framing myself as a
> critical rhetorical scholar who does racial intersectional work. And I have been
> dealing with a lot of anxiety of the reality of that I should not be the person that
> gets hired for any of those positions. With an understanding of how pathetic my
> anxiety is because the structure of higher education is more likely to hire me
> anyway. And I have to sit with that.

Levine-Rasky (2000, p. 281) recognizes the reaction that Maura expresses and states:

> White privilege pedagogy produces affective responses particularly in the
> confession of guilt and shame. It does not contribute to participants working

through these tensions, however, but abandons them at the point of their engagement with White privilege.

However, that isn't what I am hearing in Maura's voice. She is not abandoning the fight. On the contrary, Maura was obviously stricken at the reality of her dilemma and was very much working through the tensions presented by it.

When is enough, enough? Is Maura doing enough? How about John and Barb? Does John supporting a segregated educational system that disadvantages the very people he is trying to help negate his work? How far do we go to demonize people for trying to seek out the best for their own children? Isn't this what Mexican and Central American families are doing when they cross the border illegally into the United States seeking a better life for the children? As progressives, we applaud their determination and grit.

Other people who participated in the study are doing less active advocacy work in the community. However, Kate, for example, has access to power and wealth. She is charitable with her money and supports organizations controlled by people of color. Kate also uses her influence within the White community to challenge their misconceptions and prejudices.

Is this enough? Who ultimately judges Lensmire's continuum of what is enough? It seems to me that people in this study (who may represent the general White population who is making their way through this awakening) are in different stages of their development. Critical to this point is not exactly where they are on the continuum, but to keep them on the continuum. If we browbeat people and have no concern whatsoever for so-called White fragility, they might likely abandon the journey all together. And that

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would be a shame. Discarding the progress in pursuit of perfection seems counter-productive.

Another perspective to consider when discussing manifestation of privilege is Coston and Kimmel's (2017) view. They rejected the dichotomizing of oppressor and oppressed groups. Instead, they suggested privilege is not uniform and unchanging, but rather distributed unevenly. Recognizing there is a continuum not only of praxis, but also of experience with oppressive realities, is imperative.

Theoretical musings, at times, may call for purity of intent and result. Theories, after all, demand we reach for something better…something profound. However, praxis tends to be messier. The subjects before me are clearly imperfect. Their attempts at recognizing and shedding their privilege are intermittent and probably unsatisfying to the marginalized folks who are tired of waiting for the wheels of justice to grind through the centuries of mistreatment to create some semblance of fairness. This takes one to a juncture: abandon any hope of meaningful alliance with White people or forge ahead and work with imperfect humans who are trying to grow.

Stotsky (2000) stated: "…the premise underlying much progressive politics is that only the oppressed can address oppression. Many writers have portrayed the oppressor as being incapable of either personal change or activism in relation to social change" (p. 326). Stotsky goes on to state what I believe to be true: while work from the bottom-up is paramount, work from the top down is also required. Curry-Stevens agrees: "As people from privileged groups join the struggle, it increases the critical mass needed to effect change." (Curry-Stevens, 2005, p. 32) While far from complete, perfect or even adequate,

the work must begin somewhere. The subjects of this study have begun the work, and in some cases, have translated it into meaningful anti-racist results. It is from this that hope springs.

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

When I set out to do this research, I had some ideas of what I would find. I expected that in order for people to change their mind about something, they would need to get out of their social circle and meet people who had different experiences from them. This would cause disorienting dilemmas, as Jack Mezirow described, causing an ideological shift. I imagined that places like college, moving to new locations, volunteer opportunities and meeting different types of people, would be the impetus for their change of perspectives. My predictions were correct, and I found all these factors were part of the stories told during the interviews with the participants of this study. I was surprised by how few people talked about travel being a factor. I expected this to be a recurring theme and only a couple of people mentioned it, and then only briefly with it having a mild effect. But otherwise, the transitions generally included interaction with new places and new people as predicted.

Several themes I had not anticipated emerged. Most notably, the fact that nearly all the respondents expressed similar interconnected personality traits of curiosity, questioning and critical thinking. They loved to read and challenge ideas and resist the status quo. I never asked specific questions such as: "Were you a curious child? Did you like to read? Do you consider yourself a critical thinker?" I believe if you asked these types of questions directly, most people will feel compelled to say "yes". I believe few people would respond: "No, I was not curious as a child. I did not think critically. I just went along with what everyone else was doing." Instead, what occurred during the interviews when I asked them generally to describe their childhood, was that themes of

curiosity and rebelliousness arose over and over again. This rebellious and questioning nature was accompanied by a gnawing feeling that something wasn't right. Their family, their friends, their church, and their community values did not feel right. Something was off. When your world extends to only those within your small social circle, it is all you know. However, it is like the participants were born knowing something different but were unable to articulate it without the experience and words to do so. Concurrent to these personality traits described was also a tendency for the participants to be drawn to those who were on the outside of the acceptable social realm – people who were a different race, a different class, or in some other way excluded.

The results caused me to wonder about the nature of disorienting dilemmas and the potential of accessibility to them. What I mean by this is, the subjects of this study mostly were curious and seeking resolution to their feeling of being a fish out water in their familial surroundings. Since they were curious and seeking, were they possibly more susceptible to the disorienting dilemmas they encountered? Put another way, if a sibling who tended to be satisfied with the status quo and unquestioning of the assumptions of the family value system was exposed to the exact same potential disorienting dilemmas, would they have the same effect on them? I think we have a few clues as to the answer to this question from this research. For example, Rachel described how her sister also attended the boarding high school away from her hometown and was exposed to the same liberal arts education she was. Notably, once Rachel graduated, she felt she could never go back to live amongst familial surroundings again. Her sister, on the other hand, happily returned to the family fold. Apparently, the constant barrage of

disorienting dilemmas Rachel experienced during her boarding year schools had such a dramatic effect on her way of thinking that returning back to the racist fold she left behind was simply out of the question. However, her sister returned with enthusiasm. Mezirow (1994, p. 229) addresses this phenomenon here:

> One can leave home and simply become assimilated in a new subculture on a college campus and go on to graduate and move into a new work culture, procreate, and die without critical awareness of one's premises anywhere along the way. For another person, leaving the parental home may evoke deep critical self-reflection on beliefs, relationships and identity.

> This is an area that demands further study. Understanding how siblings raised in the same family can end up with such dramatically different ideologies would be an interesting addition to this research.

A corollary of this line of questioning is: what if the respondents had not been exposed to disorienting dilemmas? I had assumed - and the literature seemed to point to this – that exposure to disorienting dilemmas is random. The results of this study point to another possibility: some people look for them. It is worth asking: how many possess the innate curiosity and disdain for the status quo but have not had exposure to disorienting dilemmas that give context and vocabulary to articulate what it is they are feeling? It seemed that most were actively seeking them out, but what if Rachel, for example, had not gotten into the high school that blew up her world (in a good way). What if the participants had not had a college experience? What if they had not been able to work in a different state for a summer? What would have happened if their world had stayed

small and local with only their tight social circle informing their schema of beliefs? These are the questions this research has elicited, but it has also elicited hope. Perhaps many more people are reachable and transformable if given the opportunity to be exposed to new ways of thinking and to people who they do not know, nor understand. The opposite of this point is that there may be people who simply do not have the inclination to change their belief schema no matter what disorienting dilemmas they encounter. Time and energy spent trying to transform their way of thinking may be in vain.

One further area of study that might help to grasp (or possibly complicate) the causes of ideological shifts would be to interview folks who have moved from a progressive view towards a more conservative view. What were the factors precipitating that shift? What sort of work are they doing to make the world a better place? I think it is likely that one might find some meaningful positive impact on social justice in this population even if their schema of beliefs is wildly different than a classically imaged social activist warrior. It might also illuminate comment touchpoints of empathy that could facilitate understanding across difference.

Another part of this research that was somewhat surprising was the effect a job can have on one's ideology. Whether it was a summer internship in the mountains where one of the participants met people from other regions of the country, or another participant whose job took them to communities of color they would have likely never explored on their own, the one-on-one interaction permitted the interviewees a rare glimpse into the world of someone very different than themselves. Although it is not entirely clear to me (nor to the interviewees) which happened first: did the job inform the

ideology change or did the ideology inform the job choice? In other words, was there an unconscious need to understand and be involved in social justice issues and this steered their career towards choices that would permit this to happen? Or was it just by chance? A few of the respondents came to the conclusion during the course of our interview that they were predisposed towards their career choice, however, they had never considered it before. This would be an interesting area of research to explore further: what is the connection between ideological shift and career choice?

The previous paragraphs represent an explanation of the conclusions I came to from examining the results. I believe the information is illuminating and thought provoking. However, I must confess that other messier conclusions, or perhaps I should say questions, emerged from the results as I considered them. It is reflected in the comments made to me by one of my respondents when I explained to her the purpose of my study. Her response was that she didn't think I would find an easy answer that could be articulated and implemented. Although I had a feeling going into the research that she was correct in her assessment, I could not anticipate the complexity of intersecting issues that would arise from conversations I had with the participants.

In this study, I considered White hegemony to be an umbrella phenomenon that encompasses all forms of oppression. I believe the historical context I provided in the literature review, as well as the overview of the current state of White hegemony, supports this notion. In order to make a meaningful social transformation towards a more just and equitable society, White hegemony must be dismantled, and it is probably necessary to utilize the inherent power in Whiteness to help accomplish this undertaking.

Crossely (2003) agrees with Bourdieu that the White educated middle class may have access to more resources of influence in the public sphere. Curry-Stevens (2005) adds: "As people from privileged groups join the struggle, it increases the critical mass needed to effect change" (p. 32).

Complicating the mission is the reality that White fragility and centering White voices have been the norm since the founding of this country. Marginalized people have been leading the way towards a more equitable world, dragging White people along the way who often prefer to cling to the status quo that serves them. Lopez (2006, p. 157) suggests there are three steps required to dismantle Whiteness: rejecting naturalization and transparency of race, accept the consequences of rejecting White identity and daily refusing to choose Whiteness. Allen (et al. 2009) demand that deconstructing White identity formation is paramount in critical pedagogy and Raible (2007) believes that one must learn to own and embrace their Whiteness. I return to these definitions because I am ten years into my journey of studying social justice, with a master's degree in the field as well as hoping to complete my doctorate in justice studies with this work, and I still struggle with what exactly this means and how to accomplish what Lopez, Raible and Allen demand.

Tanner (2018) seems to concur with my bewilderment and regrets that propensity for White privilege pedagogy to be "transmissive, deficit based, and leaves White people without anyway to engage anti-racism – it does not allow for transformation or generative discussion" (p. 3). Of course, dismantling Whiteness is an on-going process. However, simply stating these goals with little practical guidance may leave potential allies feeling

unmoored at best, and helpless at worst. Dismantling Whiteness means to reject White hegemony, and even if the goal of dismantling the hegemony was reached, Whiteness would still exist. This could be another area of study for scholars, perhaps with the help of everyday people they are trying to reach, to come up with some sort of strategy and praxis for these goals that offers more practical guidance in its realization.

My suggestion brings up another concern. The movement from the margins to the center in politics and in leadership is a battle fought every day by minority populations. Should we give up on White people as a source of potential alignment in the fight for justice? Shedding themselves of the power they possess is likely not appealing to most White people (who often don't believe there is a problem to begin with). What is the transformational potential of that segment of the population, and is it worth pursuing?

Maura, who if you recall, grew up in a segregated nearly all White southern town and had an extreme physical reaction to her first encounter with majority Black people at a mall. She represents a shining example of someone who had a major transformation once she was exposed to new ideas. She said this to me:

I think my primary lens that I have and how I move through the world is understanding the distinction between liberal and radical. A liberal approach to social justice, in my view, is very individualized. It is not conversations about racism but rather the racist. It is not how can we collectively tear down these structures that are racist, but how can we open up the space so that that person of color gets the job or the promotion. It is very individualized. And it keeps the

current structures intact. Versus the radical approach, which would be burn the

whole fucking thing down.

This quote eloquently demonstrates Maura's deep engagement with social justice work. It

also is a testament to how far she has come and demonstrates the potential of White

allies.

Tapping this potential may involve some dimensions that are inconvenient to

discuss and uncomfortable to embrace. One of the advantages I have as a researcher is

my broad base of friends, colleagues and experiences. This comes partly from my age

and partly from the vastly different worlds my life has intersected with: from a middle

class upbringing in Canada, to an educator in a rural community, to a successful small

business owner, to non-profit environmental work, and finally as a social justice activist.

In sharing my research with different people in my lives, one person I spoke to – a dear

friend of over forty years –insisted that people's ugly behavior is rooted in trauma. As a

trained trauma therapist, she is able to recognize trauma like I can recognize privilege.

While her clients are often dealing with trauma triggered from abuse or abandonment, the

signs are the same in people regardless of the source of trauma. In her view, racist

patriarchal hegemonic White rage is a concealment of trauma. Trauma that may be

overcome by the same strategy employed to overcome any sort of trauma – making the

person feel safe and heard.

Howard (1993) opined that some Europeans remember the marginalization they

experienced as they came to America and did not easily assimilate. Transitioning to the

dominant culture was difficult and once they reached the point of ethnic invisibility, they

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expected everyone else to do the same. Critically analyzing White privilege is profoundly uncomfortable when they have only just begun to sense they belong and they feel "that their own history of suffering from prejudice and incrimination has not been adequately addressed" (Howard 1993, p. 37). This is an apt description of my father's heart when he resisted any association with his own heritage and culture. Rather, he embraced becoming Canadian, which to him meant blending in with the dominant culture and squashing any remnant of what caused him embarrassment and pain as a child growing up not speaking English and being viewed a less than his more assimilated peers.

On the other end of the perspective are my social justice colleagues. They might suggest that to compare the trauma my father experienced as a European immigrant to the historical trauma imposed on African Americans and Native Americans is objectionable. The prevailing White Critical Studies wisdom suggests coddling White people is an outdated practice. They might say that White fragility is something they cannot abide and as a student of historical injustice and one who moves through the world White, I cannot disagree. But maybe, just maybe, there is a touchpoint of empathy that should not be ignored.

White men still hold the power in America, and they are afraid. They won't give up the power tthey hold easily or happily. Perhaps we need a two-prong approach to dismantling White hegemony. One that is suggested in this research (meaningful and intentional exposure to difference), and also recognizing and working through the fear and trauma that breeds White supremacy. Conceivably, if we can reach that place of trauma, rather than ignoring it and forging ahead blindly while looking away from the

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elephant in the room, meaningful interactions may lead to disorienting dilemmas that ultimately cause a transformation.

Reviewing the trajectory of the title formation of this dissertation exposes the unexpected complexity revealed in the research. At first, the working title for this study was: *From Oppressor to Activist – Examining the Factors that Precipitate a Paradigmatic Ideological Shift*. Then the title was changed to: *From White Hegemonic Adherent to Emerging Justice Advocate: Examining the Factors that Precipitate a Fundamental Ideological Shift.* Note that the current title is: *Transformative Learning and Ideological Shifts: Implications for Pedagogy for the Privileged.* Why the change?

The first modification was the removal of the word paradigmatic. This term in social justice movement tends to denote a seismic societal shift over a long period of time that results in a complete systemic change. Paradigmatic seemed inappropriate when dealing with an individual and also an overreach in terms of defining any one person's transformation.

The second issue that arose with the title was the implied dichotomy of oppressor and activist. Also, it was difficult to settle on a universal definition of what an oppressor and activist is. To some, everyone may be an oppressor, depending on the circumstance and the power dynamic. To others, oppressor is a very distinct category that should be reserved for overt acts of racist behavior rarely tolerated by general society. For most, the definition falls somewhere in between. Without an agreed upon definition or parameter, this term becomes either meaningless or loaded.

The word activist has some of the same problematic issues. How does one define an activist? How do you know if someone has arrived at that designation? bell hooks (1994, p. 27) said of activists:

> In retrospect, I see in the last twenty years I have encountered many folks who say they are committed to freedom and justice for all even though the way they live, the values and habits of being they institutionalize daily, in public and private rituals, help maintain the culture of domination, help create an unfree world.

I agree with Dr. hooks, however, I would like to give an example from this research that illustrates the slippery nature of arriving at a definition of activist. One of my subjects, Rachel, has dedicated her adult life to educating herself and others on White hegemony. She has written extensively on the subject and has educated young adults on its insidious nature and effects. Rachel attends conferences with other great minds on the subject and has collaborated on projects dedicated to social justice advancement. Undoubtedly, her life's work has had meaningful impact on making the world a more just place. In most academic circles there would be agreement: she is an "activist". Also, Rachel's starting place was one steeped in racism, classism and everyday oppressive acts. Her journey represents, objectively, a major shift in ideology.

Considering a second subject of the study, John would likely not be viewed by Rachel's peers as an activist, nor someone who has experienced a major ideological shift. John was born into a Christian family who took to heart Jesus' message of charity and of treating people the way you would like to be treated regardless of class, skin color or any other social constructions of worth. He was taught a strong work ethic and demanded it of

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himself and those close to him. He is financially successful, and his children have enjoyed the best education for their needs (private Catholic school). He lives in a mostly White community with mostly White friends. His jobs over the last couple of decades have been very important and influential positions. He has not attended rallies or carried a protest sign. He might appear to be a man who enjoys his privilege without much self-reflecting on the significance of the advantages he has enjoyed as a cisgender, wealthy, straight White man. For people in the trenches of the social activist world, John would not represent a poster child for hegemonic destruction.

However, John's entire career has been quietly and effectively working from within to level the playing field for people who are often trampled by a system that forgets they matter. The system is still wildly imperfect, even after John's life's work, and for some, they might view his work as too compromising in nature and not going far enough. What he did accomplish, quietly and behind the scenes, was putting to work the Golden Rule he was raised with. He was instrumental in helping to advocate and implement policy that was game changing for real people suffering in often forgotten communities. And he did it in concert and with guidance from the community he was serving. He may have had to compromise in a million ways that might be viewed as problematic, but he was getting the work done.

I bring up these two examples, not to pit one type of "activist" against the other to try and decide whose work is more worthy. I bring up these two examples to illustrate the messy nature of defining an activist and social transformation. How does one define who has "evolved" from one ideology to another, and what is considered a transformation? In

some problematic and definitive ways, John could be defined as an "oppressor". However, over the course of his career he has undoubtedly made a real positive difference in the lives of many oppressed people.

I have a lot of books on my bookshelf theorizing what is to be done about the persistent justice and wealth divide between the races. These manuscripts are a wealth of information and theoretical musings on how we got here and where we need to go. They offer a framework to understand why racial injustice persists and that framework is invaluable. However, it is mostly academic people reading the books and sharing the ideas at conferences and in journals. It is probably not John and Pam and Laura reading them. They are in the community, working to enact these theories (likely unaware of them) and putting into action ideals that lead us to a more just world. And yet, ironically, when asked what sort of activist work they are currently involved in, their answer is usually something along the lines of: I don't really consider myself an activist. And likely the people in the social justice world would not necessarily recognize them as social justice activists either.

Conversely, I would guess that most of the theorists and academics in the social justice realm would describe themselves as activists. And, of course, they are. The point is that activism takes many forms, and while some of the people I interviewed may not have a completely nuanced understanding of White privilege and how to dismantle it, ironically, they are actively doing so every day.

Critical White theorists are often frustrated by the perceived inaction of progressive White activists who they accuse of substituting musings for praxis.

Meanwhile, many overlooked foot soldiers are getting their hands dirty and doing the work of dismantling the apparatus that upholds White hegemony. The work may be imperfect. As Dr. hooks described, in some ways the foot soldiers take a step forward in their community work and then a step back in their personal life; retreating to White communities, choosing schools that offer the best educational preparation for college (which typically exclude marginalized students) and mingling in comfortable White circles. Similarly, the argument could be made that the theorists and academics may be ensconced in so called "ivory towers" and part of a capitalistic "new American" university model built upon neo-conservative values hardly conducive to social justice activism. Standing atop our individual mountains and judging who is the real warrior misses the point. Trainor said that by essentializing White identities we are deploying the same mechanism that we are fighting against and possibly "excluding the very students who, arguably, we most need to reach" (Trainor, 2002, pg. 636) Trainor was speaking specifically about students, but I think we could extend her argument to all people interested in dismantling the hegemony. I would concur it is conceivable that potential allies could shut down if the approach to their efforts is dismissive.

This research suggests some people seem to be born curious and may be actively seeking out disorienting dilemmas that will disrupt their schema of beliefs. This permits their innate sense of justice and values to be more in line with their newly formed perspective. If my conclusion is correct, it is imperative that somehow people who have that potential to transform (and are arguably looking for a way to make that happen) have access to information, experiences and interactions with other's ways of thinking that will

permit a transformation to occur. It is also vital their efforts are not stymied by demands of perfection.

Humans are creative problem-solvers. It is time to put the energy into figuring out how to create meaningful interactive possibilities in a world that is increasingly siloed and segregated. Without intention, our common humanity will be continually fragmented until it is no longer recognizable.

CHAPTER 12: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND PRACTICE

As discussed in the conclusion of this dissertation, there are several areas that may require further study. First, I believe that it would be helpful to understand how ideologies shift in the opposite direction from what was considered here. How do people who have become less progressive over the course of their lifetime come to their new schema of belief? Are some of the same mechanisms in place, such as immersion with a new environment and new people who thought differently than they did? Is there a change in economic standing? Have they pursued continuing education? Have they stayed in the same area where they grew up or have they moved to a new location? Do they describe themselves as curious and as critical thinkers? Do they seem to be content with status quo? How do their answers compare to those in this study?

I think it would be helpful to continue the exploration that was started here and ask more people who have had a dramatic ideological shift from more conservative thinking to more progressive thinking. A richer base of data would be helpful to confirm (or challenge) the conclusions drawn here.

Following the trajectory of siblings whose paths have taken opposite directions would be an excellent way to triangulate the findings in this study and a study of an ideological shift in the opposite direction. How is it that two children raised in the same environment can end up with diametrically opposed schema of beliefs? This would be both fascinating and illuminating.

Another interesting aspect raised in this research that requires more inquiry is the connection between occupation and transformation. It was unclear in the minds of the

participants in this study whether their jobs led them to a transformation, or if they were predetermined to lean towards a career that would help with their transformation. Learning more about this dynamic would lead to a better understanding of the potential for transformation through career choice.

Perhaps the most important finding of this research is the inherent nature the participants possessed to be curious and discontented with the status quo. Most were not able to formulate a new perspective until they left home. However, critically, most described that having some accurate historical and current information about racial injustice (usually in a college setting) was an impetus to their change. One must wonder about those who possess this innate curiosity but have no opportunity to venture outside their social circle, nor attend college. Their opportunity to stumble upon (or even seek out) disorienting dilemmas would be stymied. Therefore, I believe it is imperative that a policy change occur in public schools to demand the teaching of accurate, inclusive and truthful history of the United States. Furthermore, students ought to graduate with an understanding of the current manifestations of racial inequity and their role in maintaining it, as well as providing tools for dismantling it. Students who possess a curious nature and who are not receiving the information in their homes will begin to start their journey towards dismantling White privilege sooner and in larger numbers. Interesting, and exciting, is the notion that perhaps this racial awakening will become status quo thus bringing along all people who tend to follow the status quo. Status quo will demand an understanding and sensitivity to justice issues in a way that currently the status quo is to ignore or deny it.

It is not enough to begin this education and stop once students graduate. Churches and other community organizations should carry on this work. As we learned in this research, all the churches the participants attended were racially segregated. Churches, and other community organizations, must continue the work of educating people on systemic racism and employ its influence to help dismantle it. Community organizations must model deep engagement across different communities and foster cross-cultural understanding.

Perfection must not be the enemy of good. Scholars and leaders who advocate for social justice must foster praxis free of judgement and jargon. As people learn to work together, we must be patient with one another as we learn the language and acts of inclusion and tolerance. Respecting people's different ways of engaging while helping them become better advocates ought to happen simultaneously. Discovering touchpoints of humanity is critical to foster meaningful connection.

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APPENDIX A

SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Some of you may know that I am working on my PhD in Justice Studies and I am currently seeking volunteers to be part of a research study at Arizona State University. My research asks the question: what factors cause an ideological shift in one's thinking from very conservative to very liberal resulting in work in racial activism.

Therefore, I am looking to interview people who grew up thinking that racism was a thing of the past and were ensconced in notions of "bootstrap" mentality etc., but who now view the world through a social justice lens and are working to help dismantle racial injustice. A one-one-one interview will occur, which should take between 60 and 90 minutes to complete. There is also a possibility of a follow-up interview that will take between 30 to 60 minutes. A master list of names linking surveys to follow-up interviews will be maintained. Of course, it is voluntary, and you may decide you do not wish to participate at any point during the interview. You must be 18 years old or older in order to participate.

The purpose of my inquiry is to try and cobble together the factors that influenced people so that those factors may be harnessed to create programs (educational for example) that might shift others' ways of thinking.

If you think you might be a person that would fit my research proposal and would be interested in being part of my research, please private message me, or even message here. Also, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. I can be contacted through Facebook message or at my email: wkolomy@asu.edu

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Transformative Learning and Ideological Shifts:

Implications for Pedagogy for the Privileged


I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Jennifer Sandlin in the

Justice Studies Department in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State

University.  I am conducting a research study to attempt to document the factors that

cause a person to dramatically shift their ideology from very conservative to very

progressive over their lifetime. I seek to answer the question: what influenced a shift and

informed a new way of seeing injustice in the world and one's place in it?

I am inviting your participation in a one-one-one interview which should take between 60

and 90 minutes. There is also a possibility of a follow-up interview that will take between

30 – 60 minutes. A master list of names linking surveys to follow-up interviews will be

maintained. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at

any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary.  If you choose not to participate or to

withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty or consequences. You must

be 18 years or older in order to participate.

Participants will get the opportunity to reflect on their lives and tell their own stories

about becoming social activists. Many people haven't had the opportunity to share their

stories and find this process helpful and valuable. Additionally, the information provided

by the participants may help educators create materials that may assist other people in

making a similar ideological shift. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Your responses will be confidential with only the researcher and her committee members having access to the data. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will not be used.

I would like to audio record this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do <u>not</u> want the interview to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: wkolomy@asu.edu or Jennifer Sandlin at jsandlin@asu.edu . If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1. Tell me about your childhood, generally, not necessarily related to the topic of race of politics. (From this initial question I would try to find out the following: how happy it was, how stable it was (financially and emotionally), what sorts of things the family did together – general family information).

2. What was your socio-economic situation?

3. Could you describe your neighborhood(s) that you grew up in?

4. What were the schools like that you attended?

5. How would you describe your religious affiliation or non-affiliation?

6. How did religion affect the way you thought about race?

7. What sort of interactions did you have with people who were different from you (in terms of race, religion, socioeconomic status)?

8. Who were the principal people who informed your opinions about race and class as you grew up?

9. When did you begin to question the way you viewed race, class and gender/sexuality? And why?

10. Can you describe some of the moments that made you question your way of thinking? (Disorienting dilemmas)

11. Was there one particular situation or experience that stand outs to you as a pivotal moment of change? Or would you describe your transformation as more a series of indistinguishable events?

12. How would you describe your involvement in advocacy work today?

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL FOR HUMAN SUBJECT TESTING

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Jennifer Sandlin
CLAS-SS: Social Transformation, School of (SST) -
Jennifer.Sandlin@asu.edu

Dear Jennifer Sandlin:
On 8/7/2019 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

| Type of Review: | Initial Study |
|---|---|
| Title: | FROM OPPRESSOR TO ACTIVIST: EXAMINING THE FACTORS THAT PRECIPITATE A PARADIGMATIC IDEOLOGICAL SHIFT |
| Investigator: | Jennifer Sandlin |
| IRB ID: | STUDY00010419 |
| Funding: | None |
| Grant Title: | None |
| Grant ID: | None |
| Documents Reviewed: | • Paradigmatic Shift, Category: IRB Protocol; <br> • Paradigmatic Shift Consent Form, Category: Consent Form; <br> • Paradigmatic Shift Social Media Recruitment Script, Category: Recruitment Materials; <br><br> • Survey Questions, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); |

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 8/7/2019.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Wanda Kolomyjec Jennifer Sandlin