Whiteness as Experienced by People of Color: An Empirical Phenomenological Study

Darryl Mars

Follow this and additional works at: https://dsc.duq.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
WHITENESS AS EXPERIENCED BY PEOPLE OF COLOR:
AN EMPIRICAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Psychology Department
McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts
Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Darryl J. Mars

Director: Paul Richer, Ph.D.

April 7, 2004
Name: Darryl J. Mars, M.A.

Title: An Empirical Phenomenological Study of Whiteness

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Date: April 7, 2004

APPROVED_____________________________________

Paul Richer, Ph.D., Director

APPROVED_____________________________________

Anthony Barton, Ph.D., Reader

APPROVED_____________________________________

Russell Walsh, Ph.D., Reader

APPROVED_____________________________________

Russell Walsh, Ph.D., Chair, Psychology Department

APPROVED_____________________________________

Constance D. Ramirez, Ph.D., Dean

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts
Abstract

Racism against non-white people continues to be a significant problem as we enter the twenty-first century. While slavery and other objectionable racist practices may be in the past, subtle yet powerful racism against non-white people remains. This study explores racism against non-white people in the present by examining the meanings of the signifier, whiteness, for three people who participated in this study.

The three participants are adults, one male and two females, who responded to a poster requesting non-white people to participate in this study. The participants provided written descriptions of situations in which they encountered whiteness, and they agreed to expand upon their original descriptions in an interview. The written descriptions and the interviews with the three participants constituted the data that was analyzed for this study, using an empirical phenomenological method first outlined by Giorgi (1975). The interview process involved some unexpected difficulties regarding my position as a white person interviewing non-white people, and the possible impact that my whiteness may have had upon them. The difficulties encountered during the interview process are discussed in more detail at the end of the Results Section of this study.
The results show how personal encounters with white people impact the participants in this study by interrupting their attunement with others. These encounters have psychological effects upon the participants, evoking anger, confusion, and fear. When the participants reflected upon these encounters, they described the powerlessness and futility that they experienced. For the participants in this study, moving beyond encounters with people whom they identify as white means becoming hyper-vigilant.

The results of this study are discussed in a dialogue with the theoretical literature on whiteness and with Foucault’s work on the subject and power. The discussion of the results includes a dialogue with psychological literature on anger, futility, resentment, and psychological resistance.
# Table of Contents

Introduction 1  
Literature Review 2  
Method Section 34  
  Locating and Selecting Participants 34  
  Initial Protocols 36  
  Initial Reflection in Preparation for the Interview 37  
  Collaborative Interviews 37  
  Data Analysis 39  
  Steps in the Data Analysis 39  
Results 41  
  Situated Structure #1 41  
  Situated Structure #2 48  
  Situated Structure #3 52  
  General Structure 57  
  Elaborated General Structure 61  
Psychological Themes 74  
  Being Psychologically Oppressed 74  
  Being Resentful 77  
  Being Angry 79  
  Futility 80  
  Hyper-Vigilance 81
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Resistance</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Experience of Whiteness in the Presence of the Participants' Vulnerability</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Section</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Results</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue with the Literature on Whiteness</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteness: The Racial Subject</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteness Terrorizes</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteness Manifested as White Privilege</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteness: a Location of Structural Advantage</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Content of Whiteness</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteness: A Refusal</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteness: A Transcendental Signified</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteness and Power</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue with Extant Literature Relevant to the Psychological Themes</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Themes</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Psychologically Oppressed</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Resentful</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Angry</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futility</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Resistance</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

This is a study of white racism through the signifier whiteness. Whiteness is a term used to signify a location of power and privilege occupied by people who identify themselves as white. Whiteness is both established and perpetuated at the expense of people who identify themselves as non-white, and as a result, it has psychological effects upon them.

Utilizing an empirical-phenomenological approach, the present study explores the lived meanings and psychological effects of whiteness, from the perspective of people who identify themselves as non-white. This empirical phenomenological study is the first to explore the psychological effects of whiteness, as well as the first to empirically examine a topic that has only been studied theoretically.

The Literature Review follows this Introduction, and is designed to familiarize the reader with the topic by reviewing some of the pertinent work on whiteness to date. The Method Section follows the Literature Review, with a detailed description of the qualitative research method utilized for the present study. Then the Results Section describes the psychological effects of whiteness in a narrative format, and is followed by the Psychological Themes taken from the General Narrative.
The Discussion Section follows the Results Section and is divided into four parts. The first part of the Discussion Section includes a summary of the Results Section, which is followed by a discussion of the results in light of the literature on whiteness. Next, the psychological themes from the Results Section are dialogued with relevant literature, and finally the Discussion Section ends with a Conclusion and the Limitations of this Study and Directions for Future Research.

**Literature Review**

In the introduction to their collection of essays and articles entitled Race and Racism, editors Les Back and John Solomos (1999) asserted that whiteness is a topic of discussion that emerged out of a concern with the research on racism within the field of sociology. Back and Solomos’ (1999) argued that earlier research on racism had too much focus upon the effect of racism, with too little attention being directed to the cause. As such, discourse on whiteness emerged as an attempt to shift the focus from the effect to the cause.

Whiteness as a topic emerged as an attempt to examine the responsibility of white people as a group for racism, but whiteness is abstract, and Back and Solomos assert that no one was really sure of what whiteness is. One of the problems with
studying whiteness was its lack of clarity, while racism was more concrete. Some authors (McIntosh, 1988, Dyer, 1997, Frankenberg, 1997,) have discussed whiteness both at theoretical and personal levels in an attempt to make it more concrete. These authors said that being identified as white means not being attuned to how they participate in, embody, and perform whiteness.

In her book, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (1990), Toni Morrison wrote:

My project is an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; the serving to the served (Morrison, 1990, p.90).

Morrison described the turn from the ‘object’ of racism to the ‘subject’, from the “described and imagined” to the “describers and imaginers.” Whiteness signifies the position of the describers and imaginers: white people as a group. As such, the social position of power and influence created and occupied by white people is a taken-for-granted center from which they describe and imagine non-white people. White people describe what they imagined blackness to be, not in itself, but as the opposite of whiteness. Morrison focused upon the position of
white people, which she believed had remained largely unquestioned and invisible as a given. How is a non-white person constituted by the other?

Bell Hooks (1992) approached whiteness from a feminist/race theory perspective. In her essay, “Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination,” Hooks argued that black people have built a store of knowledge about whiteness from a history of association with white people:

Although there has never been any official body of black people in the United States who have gathered as anthropologists and/or ethnographers whose central critical project is the study of whiteness, black folks have, from slavery on, shared with one another in conversations “special” knowledge of whiteness gleaned from close scrutiny of white people (Hooks, 1992, p.165).

While whiteness may have become a topic for discussion in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, Hooks said that black people have been creating their own “unofficial” body of knowledge on whiteness since the time of slavery. According to Hooks, whiteness as a topic has recently become popular because white people are now interested in discussing and examining it.

However, while whiteness may have become a topic of interest
for white people, it has other meanings along with a concrete, historical significance for black people:

For people of color, knowledge of whiteness, in this case as a quality of white people, was and in some cases still is necessary for their survival. Whiteness' recent popularity as a topic is due to the current interest of white people. Whiteness is nothing new for people of color, and it has a very different meaning for them (Hooks, 1992, p.175).

Hooks distinguished between whiteness as a quality of white people and whiteness as a topic of discussion as a signifier. She claimed that the signifier, whiteness, has recently emerged because of the interest of white people in whiteness. In contrast, whiteness as a quality of white people has been recognized and understood by black people since the time of slavery, and in many cases because knowledge of whiteness has been necessary for their very survival. Therefore, whiteness as a recent topic marks white people’s interest in whiteness' meaning for them, while Hooks argued that whiteness as a quality of white people has a very different meaning for black people. How could knowledge of whiteness be necessary for black people’s survival, as Hooks asserted?

The positions of Morrison (1990) and Hooks (1992)
converged on the significance of whiteness for black people. However, their positions diverged with Morrison’s argument that the recent shift to whiteness is important, while Hooks stated that whiteness only became important because of white people’s recent interest in it as a topic.

Morrison and Hooks (1992) wrote about whiteness from a black feminist position, while Peggy McIntosh (1988) wrote from a white feminist perspective and included much of her personal experience in her discussion of whiteness. McIntosh said that whiteness is manifested in the privileges that she and other white people enjoy. Her generic term for these privileges is “white privilege.” McIntosh (1988) compared and contrasted white privilege with male privilege as a way of introducing whiteness.

In her paper, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” (1988) McIntosh said that whiteness manifested itself in privileges held by white people as a group. McIntosh stated that white people tend not to experience their whiteness in a way that approaches how non-white people experience whiteness, according to her non-white colleagues.

I think that whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male
privilege (McIntosh, 1988, p.1).

McIntosh spoke of whiteness as it was manifested as pedagogy for her, claiming that she was taught about how racism placed non-white people at a disadvantage. However, she was not taught to recognize that being white had privileges that put her, as a white woman, at an advantage. She compared white privilege to male privilege, as an unspoken position of superiority that is made available exclusively to males. In contrast, Hooks (1992) argued that whiteness in the form of white privilege is visible to blacks, while McIntosh argued that these privileges are invisible to white people.

However, while white privilege may be invisible to white people, McIntosh (1988) claimed that they are to be used for the benefit of white people even as white people remain oblivious to them:

Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women who they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don’t see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned to oblivion about it since (McIntosh, 1988, p.10).
After being informed of how women of color experience her and other white women as oppressive, McIntosh became personally aware of how she assumed white privilege. McIntosh affirmed that white privilege is offensive to non-white people, precisely because they are offended by it.

McIntosh listed many everyday taken-for-granted ways that her white privilege separates and differentiates her experience from that of non-white people. One of the examples that she used was performing well in a challenging situation, and being certain that no one would complement her for being “a credit to her race” (McIntosh, 1988, p.11). She wrote that she is also certain that she will be asked to speak for everyone in her racial group. The invisibility of her race and the visibility of the other’s race are obvious to her.

Finally, McIntosh used affirmative action as an example of how the experiences of white people are different from those of non-white people. She argued that other employees might assume that she obtained a position because of her gender, but she was sure that they would not suspect that her race was a factor:

...white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in
facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true...many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own (McIntosh, 1988, P. 12).

While McIntosh found white privilege to be elusive and hidden behind the myth of meritocracy, she believed that to be the case with whiteness in general. If we accept that whiteness signifies a social position of dominance and privilege occupied by white people, then previously assumed social ideals such as meritocracy no longer hold, according to McIntosh (1988). If so, then how do non-white people live a position of subordination, relative to white people?

The possibility that whiteness is a central influence upon social reality means that much of what we believe about ourselves rests upon a foundation of power and privilege, not on merit. Meritocracy, or the notion that opportunities and status are merit-based, is a myth if whiteness is accepted as a central influence, as McIntosh believed. I wonder if from a non-white person’s perspective, if being identified as white means more and better opportunities?

Like McIntosh, Richard Dyer (1997) argued that whiteness is an invisible position occupied by people identified as white. Dyer examined the representation of both white and non-white
people's images in art and film and their relationship to whiteness. He said being identified as white means being invisible, un-raced, and "simply human:"

As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people. There is no more powerful position of being "just" human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can't do that—they can only speak for their race. But non-raced people can, for they do not represent the interests of a race (Dyer, 1997, p.2).

Dyer (1997) argued that people who are identified as white do not identify themselves as such, remaining unnamed and racially invisible. As white people they identify themselves as 'just' people, speaking from a location differentiated from others who are identified by race. Dyer argued that this position, unnamed, racially invisible and "just" human, is a position of power precisely because it is invisible and simply given. How is this position of invisibility a position of power, and precisely how may it be visible to a non-white person?

Being identified as white means having a universal
perspective, speaking from a position of commonality with other white, universal subjects. Speaking as such implies a position of authority and power that is largely unavailable to the non-white, racialized ‘object’. According to Dyer (1997), the racialized, non-white other is finite, limited and incapable of transcendence, as opposed to the infinite, unlimited and transcendent qualities of white people. How does a non-white person live being finite and limited in a world with others who construct themselves as infinite and unlimited?

While Dyer explored whiteness in the areas of film, art, and other forms of representation, Ruth Frankenberg (1993, 1997) examined it from the perspective of a social and critical theorist. In her paper entitled, “Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness” Frankenberg (1997) stated:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, or race privilege. Second, it is a “standpoint,” at a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, at society. Third, “whiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices, that are usually unmarked and unnamed (Frankenberg, 1993, p.1).

Frankenberg said whiteness is complex, but it could be described in at least three ways. First, whiteness is a location of
structural advantage based upon race privilege. Frankenberg (1997) argued that people are raced in a way similar to how they are gendered (Frankenberg, 1997, p.6,) and their place or location within society is determined by both race and gender.

Secondly, Frankenburg suggested whiteness is a “standpoint” from which white people view ourselves and others. For the most part, she found white people not acknowledging or recognizing how their perspective is limited to a particular position or standpoint.

Frankenberg’s (1997) notions of location and structural advantage were similar to Husserl’s (1977) phenomenological description of the natural attitude. In the natural attitude, we take our experience as it is prior to reflection, accepting our location or standpoint as given without question. For Husserl, the natural attitude involves many unquestioned preconceptions, including, but not limited to ethnocentric and cultural attitudes. Frankenberg focused on ethnocentric and cultural dimensions of taken-for-granted natural attitudes more than Husserl did, but both believed that implicit ethnocentric and cultural assumptions should be reflected upon, recognized, addressed, and questioned. Reflecting upon our ethnocentric, cultural assumptions can provide insight into how we view others and
ourselves in ways that can lead to misunderstandings and conflict.

As Dyer (1997) stated, the perspective or standpoint taken by white people is both invisible and universal. In other words, white people view themselves, the world, and others from the position of the universal subject. Being white means being a universal subject, amongst other white, universal subjects. White ethnocentric, cultural assumptions are falsely believed to be universal by white people, according to Dyer.

Conversely, being non-white means having a limited perspective on the same world, narrowed by one’s respective racial identity. People identified as white speak for the human race, while people identified as non-white speak only for their race. Therefore, when a non-white person speaks, other white people assume they spoke for their race. However, when a white person speaks, white people assume they are speaking for the human race as a universal subject.

Frankenberg said whiteness also refers to a set of cultural practices. An example of these cultural practices Frankenberg (1997) spoke of was noted by George Yancy (2001), who cited the enslavement of African-Americans as an example of a cultural practice sanctioned by whiteness. Lynching and Jim
Crow laws were two other examples of past cultural practices whiteness sanctioned.

The justification for these practices resided in the ideology asserting the biological inferiority of non-white people in general, and African-Americans specifically. Whiteness remained unmarked and unnamed, as the justification for these practices was based upon 'knowledge' produced by a group of white people. While these practices and the knowledge produced to justify them no longer existed, their effects remain, according to Frankenberg.

Whiteness does have content in as much as it generates norms, ways of understanding history, ways of thinking about self and other, and even ways of thinking about culture itself (Frankenberg, 1993, p.231).

Frankenberg's position was that whiteness has content, meaning whiteness is not purely a concept, construction or ideology. As a socially constructed system of differentiation, whiteness operates as an unspoken norm. Frankenberg (1997) articulated the paradox of whiteness when she described it as an unmarked marker: an invisible norm or standard. How does a non-white person experience whiteness as an invisible norm or standard?
Frankenberg said whiteness affects how people think about the idea of culture itself. If whiteness operates as a standard or norm, then even the meaning of culture must be put into question. All other cultures are judged or measured with whiteness as the standard. Cultural accomplishments, structures, and social practices are critiqued with whiteness signifying the ‘highest’ form of culture, the standard, and/or the norm. Other cultures are judged as ‘deficient’ with whiteness as the standard, for instance. As a group, white people tend to adopt what McIntosh called a “be like us” mentality, making whiteness the implicit standard in any discussion of other cultures and social practices.

Rodriguez (1998) is another author who identified whiteness as a social construction, and he expanded upon Frankenberg’s (1997) argument that whiteness has content. In “Emptying the Content of Whiteness: Toward an Understanding of the Relation between Whiteness and Pedagogy” (Rodriguez, 1998) Rodriguez discussed whiteness from a pedagogical perspective:

I make a dual argument in this chapter. First, “whiteness” has content. While its content changes with context—that is, changes spatially and temporally—mapping terrains of
whiteness and interrogating the spaces and logic of such terrains has become vital. Indeed, “mapping whiteness” has the potential to not only raise consciousness about one’s own possible complicity in supporting oppressive regimes (that is, living whiteness oppressively)…(Rodriguez, 1998, p. 31).

Whiteness is not an intellectual construct because it actually has content. Rodriguez believed mapping whiteness means white people need to examine their own whiteness. Rodriguez' (1998) aim is to raise consciousness of whiteness by examining how white people participate in whiteness and live it oppressively. Rodriguez also followed Frankenberg's (1997) argument that whiteness generates norms:

...that is, making things seem or appear natural and timeless so that people accept situations, as well as particular ideologies, without ever questioning their socially and politically constructed nature. To be sure, whiteness, within this context, dissuades people from interrogating what the literary critic Roland Barthes calls “the falsely obvious” (Rodriguez, 1998, p.32).

Rodriguez said the content of whiteness can be located when it is examined locally by interrogating socially constructed
norms. He also said whiteness has a part in the generation of these socially constructed norms, and whiteness is suspect when these norms are experienced as being oppressive. For instance, like Yancy (2001) who will be discussed later, Rodriguez (1998) argued that whiteness could be located within histories of subjugation. Within these histories of subjugation, the silencing of discourses of the oppressed served to enable whiteness to remain sacrosanct and hide from its part in the oppression of non-white people.

Rodriguez argued for a critical examination of the status quo, and against accepting unquestioned ideologies that are covered over by the hegemony of whiteness. Rodriguez (1998) claimed that whiteness, as a normative discourse, must be countered because the “normativity” it represents could oppress people outside of the dominant culture. However, Rodriguez argued against those who believe whiteness could be abolished. Rodriguez believed whiteness needs to be transformed rather than abolished, and he proposed doing so by reinventing and rearticulating it. How was whiteness lived oppressively, and in what ways could it appear locally? What norms might have appeared when whiteness was “interrogated locally?”

Like Rodriguez (1998), Peter McLaren (1997) examined
whiteness as a social construction. In his paper, “Whiteness Is...The Struggle for Postcolonial Hybridity” (McLaren, 1997), McLaren described whiteness as:

...a socio-historical form of consciousness, given birth at the nexus of capitalism, colonial rule, and the emergent relationships among dominant and subordinate groups. Whiteness constitutes and demarcates ideas, feelings, knowledge, social practices, cultural formations, and systems of intelligibility that are identified with or attributed to white people and are invested in by white people as white (McLaren, 1997, p.66).

McLaren argued that whiteness is a form of consciousness that emerged within the socio-historical context of capitalism and colonial rule. He claimed the subsequent relationships that evolved between white people and subordinate groups were created by the convergence of capitalism and colonialism. As such, McLaren argued that whiteness, as a form of socio-historical consciousness that he attributes to white people, forms and informs all aspects of everyday life.

McLaren argued that whiteness is a central process attributed to a group of people identified as white who are at the center of its emergence. McLaren maintained that whiteness
became identified with white people as a group and that white people invested in whiteness, making it part of their identity. He also said that whiteness was a refusal:

Whiteness is a refusal to acknowledge how white people are implicated in certain social relations of privilege and relations of domination and subordination, a form of social amnesia associated with certain forms of subjectivity within particular social sites considered to be normative (McLaren, 1997, p.66).

McLaren wrote that whiteness signified white people’s refusal to acknowledge their participation in whiteness, and the benefits that are associated with it. He said white people refuse to acknowledge whiteness while they occupy subject positions formed by whiteness. These subject positions are normative within particular social contexts, and their normativity is maintained by white people’s refusal to acknowledge whiteness. Whiteness could only be normative if it remains unacknowledged, so white people’s refusal serves the purpose of obscuring whiteness and allowing it to remain normative.

McLaren (1997) believed white people’s “social amnesia” may not be coincidental.

In order to recognize the position of privilege and its
dependency upon the domination and subordination of others, white people have to take responsibility for the effects of their participation in whiteness. In that case, white peoples' recognition of their participation in whiteness means hearing the voices of non-white people. Hearing the voices of non-white people may lead to white people's bearing some responsibility for the subordinate positions occupied by non-white people in general.

McLaren described whiteness as "an ideological formation that had been transformed into a principle of life and an ensemble of social relations and practices" (McLaren, 1997, p. 66). The effects of whiteness were transformed from an ideological formation into a lived phenomenon. This includes the displacement of specific forms of non-whiteness into signifiers of deviance and criminality. Speculating upon McLaren’s point and grounding it in everyday life, non-white people, specifically non-white males, become embodied signifiers of criminality and deviance. In legal terminology, they became 'suspects', and fall prey to tactics such as racial profiling, for instance, which rest upon whiteness transformed from an ideology into social reality.

McLaren summarized his argument on whiteness well: "whiteness constitutes unmarked patriarchal, heterosexist, Euro-
American practices that have negative effects on and consequences for those who do not participate in them” (McLaren, 1997, p.67). What might be the negative effects and consequences for non-white people who do not participate in whiteness? How is whiteness a refusal, and what does that mean?

Earlier, Peggy McIntosh discussed how whiteness was employed in her own early learning experiences. In their essay “Addressing The Crisis of Whiteness: Reconfiguring White Identity in a Pedagogy of Whiteness” (1998, Kincheloe, Steinberg, et.al.), Joel Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg said whiteness plays an insidious part in the educational process. Like McLaren (1998), they believed whiteness is a social construction that can be historically located.

Kincheloe and Steinberg traced the dominant impulse of whiteness to the European Enlightenment and the constructed image of the transcendental white male. Whiteness came to signify the qualities idealized by white males, including the quality of reason. The authors claimed that during this period of transformation, reason was “whitened” and affirmed as the proper exercise of the mind (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998, p.6).
While western reason was a crucial dynamic associated with whiteness over the last three centuries, many other social forces sometimes worked to construct its meaning. Whiteness, thus, is not an unchanging, fixed biological category impervious to its cultural, economic, political and psychological context. There are many ways to be white, as whiteness interacts with class, gender, and a range of other race-related and cultural dynamics (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998, p.8-9).

The authors pointed out that reason is only one of the factors associated with whiteness. Kincheloe and Steinberg stated that whiteness is not an unchanging and fixed category or identity, but rather, a dynamic force, shifting with changing cultural, economic, political and psychological circumstances. Whiteness could be difficult to identify and even invisible, precisely because its mutability keeps it hidden. However, whiteness’ invisibility corresponds with its omnipresence as a dynamic force that adjusts to any given situation. Whiteness appears to be a “trans-historical essence”. As such, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) argued that whiteness’ original status as a social construction faded with time, making it seem like it is part of the “status quo”. Subtly shifting over time, whiteness appears
to be a given, and is taken for granted as such.

The ephemeral nature of whiteness as a social construction begins to reveal itself when we understand that the Irish, Italians, and Jews all have been viewed as non-white in particular places and at specific moments in history (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998, p.9).

Kincheloe and Steinberg believed that whiteness' status as a social construction is further revealed when the positions of different ethnicities were examined. The Irish, Italians, and Jews have been excluded from participating in whiteness as a social structure at one moment but included at other times. These authors gave evidence of the changing nature of whiteness and its socially constructed status with a concrete example of ethnic groups that have been on both sides. As such, they stated that whiteness could not be completely identified with white people since what it means to be white has shifted over time.

However, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) point out the importance in recognizing the emergence of whiteness, and the group of people who are identified as white. While who is included may change, there were many non-white people who have always been excluded. To be excluded means being
denied the privileges bestowed by whiteness, and oppressed solely because of not being white.

Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) used the term "positionality" to describe how individuals are situated within a web of social and political structures that forms their relationships with self, world and other (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998, p. 1). As such, the authors claim positionality is a key factor in developing an understanding of whiteness. This helps to explain why white people tend to be blind to whiteness, and develop what McLaren called, "social amnesia." White people are blind to whiteness because we are born into a world in which being identified as white offers social advantages and privileges.

However, being born into a world of privilege also means taking it for granted, just as living with a non-white identity means being without the social advantages and privileges of being white. Positionality is the key, according to Kincheloe and Steinberg, in determining how an individual is situated and how such an individual subsequently makes sense of their experience in the world. For Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998), positionality determines which side of the socio-political fence an individual originates from, white or non-white, and how individual
perspectives are formed. In turn, this determines which side of the socio-political fence influences the basis for the individual experience of self, world, and other. How do non-white people experience being excluded? How is positionality lived?

In "Behind Blue Eyes: Whiteness and Contemporary US Racial Politics" (Winant, 1997), Howard Winant’s argument was similar to Rodriguez’s (1998), McLaren’s (1998), and Kincheloe and Steinberg’s (1998). For all of these authors, whiteness and its particular ways of knowing and being are recognized as socially constructed. Winant believed naming whiteness as a social construction and not a given, trans-historical essence gives legitimacy to other socially constructed voices not given the status of "master voices," as whiteness is. According to Winant, if whiteness is socially constructed, then it is not a master voice, putting it on a level playing field with all other identities.

Winant (1997) stated that whiteness is a complex phenomenon. For this author, whiteness is not simply a racial identity but an over-determined political and cultural identity based on factors like socio-economic status, religious affiliation, ideologies that revere individualism, opportunity, and nationalism. Like any other complex of beliefs and practices,
whiteness is embedded in a highly articulated social structure and system of signification (Winant, 1997, p.48). According to Winant, whiteness is not an identity that can simply be accepted or rejected due to this fact.

Winant critiqued the "new abolitionist" project, which argued that whiteness must be wholly rejected as an identity rather than transformed. He questioned what he termed the "naïve simplicity" inherent in this position:

They employ it (social construction) chiefly to argue against biologicist conceptions of race, which is fine; but they fail to consider the complexities and rootedness of social construction, or as I would term it, racial formation. Is the social construction of race so flimsy that it can be repudiated by the mere act of political will? (Winant, 1997, p.48)

Winant accepted whiteness as a socially constructed phenomenon and part of what he called "racial formation." As such, Winant argued that whiteness is not rooted in biological arguments about race, and race is not a biological given. However, whiteness and race are social constructions and cannot be repudiated simply by political will. Winant maintained that whiteness and notions of race are complex phenomena,
rooted within everyday social, economic, and psychological life. Following Winant (1997) and accepting whiteness as a social construction means it is not a “master voice”. How does whiteness operate as a master voice?

In his book, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, George Lipsitz (1998) examined whiteness from a socio-economic perspective. He followed Winant (1997) and other authors’ positions by naming whiteness as a social construction. However, Lipsitz argued that white people have an investment in whiteness that encourages their participation in it. In Lipsitz’ (1998) argument, whiteness has a “cash value” measured in economic terms. Therefore, whiteness is more than merely a social construction because it pays dividends to white people:

This book argues that both public policy and private prejudice have created a “possessive investment in whiteness” that is responsible for the racialized hierarchies of our society...Whiteness has a cash value...white Americans are encouraged to invest in whiteness, to remain true to an identity that provides them with resources, power, and opportunity (Lipsitz, 1998, p.1). Lipsitz believed whiteness is perpetuated through public
policy and private prejudice, and by the possessive investment that white people have in it. Expanding upon Lipsitz (1998) argument, the cash value of whiteness is evident in the profits that come with buying properties that appreciate because they are located in neighborhoods desirable to other white people. Real estate values in these neighborhoods increase at much higher rates than values for similar houses located in non-white neighborhoods. As such, profits are made because only white people can afford to buy houses at the higher values in white neighborhoods. The houses in less desirable non-white neighborhoods can only be sold to non-white people, who have less wealth to begin with. The cycle perpetuates itself as white people pass on their wealth to succeeding generations, while non-white people do not earn the profits that create wealth to begin with.

Lipsitz argued that more desirable schools and education systems come with more desirable neighborhoods. Therefore, the children of non-white families attend schools that have far less resources. Having less resources leads to being less prepared for higher education, and being less prepared for higher education limits employment opportunities. “Insider networks,” or white people in positions of power who channel
employment opportunities to friends and relatives, also limit the employment opportunities for non-white people. Non-white children face limited opportunities to begin with and are less prepared for those opportunities due to substandard education. Lipsitz (1998) stated that both past and present racial discrimination is perpetuated by this cycle, as intergenerational transfers of wealth pass on the spoils of discrimination to succeeding generations of white people.

I argue that white American’s are encouraged to invest in whiteness, to remain true to an identity that provides them with resources, power, and opportunity. This whiteness is, of course, a delusion, a scientific and cultural fiction that like all racial identities has no valid foundation in biology or anthropology. Whiteness is, however, a social fact, an identity created and continued with all-to-real consequences for the distribution of wealth, prestige, and opportunity (Lipsitz, 1998, p.vii).

Lipsitz argued that white people are encouraged to participate in whiteness for its structural advantages. By investing in whiteness as an identity and perpetuating it, individual white people gain personal power while empowering white people as a group.
Lipsitz (1998) also argued that social and cultural forces converge to encourage white people to create and re-create whiteness even as they disavow any participation in whiteness or its privileges. However, opposing whiteness is not the same as opposing white people, in contrast to Lipsitz’ other position that links white people and whiteness. And non-white people can become agents of whiteness and passive participants in its hierarchies and rewards. By the same token, white people can choose not to participate in whiteness by becoming antiracist.

Shifting from the socio-economic position of Lipsitz and others, George Yancy (2001) examined whiteness using Foucault’s genealogical approach. Yancy’s believed whiteness was part of a larger project of power, and he examined the effect of whiteness upon black people. As such, whiteness is a “power/knowledge nexus” according to Yancy:

I will explore the structure of whiteness...as a power/knowledge nexus, (and how it) is able to produce new forms of knowledge (in this case about Black people) which are productive of new forms of “subjects”...Black selves and Black bodies...(Yancy 2001, p.1).

Whiteness has a particular structure that can be explored and articulated. As such, that structure can be articulated within
Foucault’s work as a power/knowledge nexus. For Yancy, whiteness operates as a power/knowledge nexus implicitly by disavowing any historical or other measure of finite existence. Yancy (2001) said whiteness, as a power/knowledge nexus, misrepresents itself as a “transcendental signified.” Whiteness misrepresented as a transcendental signified is universal and eternal, omnipresent and a-temporal. Utilizing Foucault’s genealogical approach, Yancy exposes whiteness’ historicity and temporality by describing how black people are subjected to whiteness as a power/knowledge nexus. As a specific example, Yancy described the “middle passage,” when Blacks were taken from Africa to America on slave ships.

Utilizing Foucault, Yancy (2001) argued that whiteness produced new forms of knowledge about black people and justified their treatment as slaves. Yancy believed whiteness, posing as a transcendental signified, is responsible for these “truth claims” and is in fact producing them. Whiteness is an invisible and omnipresent structure represented by white people as a group. As such, white people participate in whiteness with more and/or less recognition of their participation.

There is no deep metaphysical mystery about whiteness which remains to be uncovered...as the embodiment and
production of specific truth claims, claims which are inextricably linked to systems and regimes of truth and modalities of power... (Yancy, 2001, p.1).

Yancy claimed that whiteness is not “beneath or behind” and in need of being uncovered, because whiteness operates through white people as a group. For Yancy (2001), white people are the embodiment of whiteness, part of a project that emerged during the time of slavery.

Whiteness is not a mystery, according to Yancy. In accord with Foucault, developing a broader perspective, rather than looking beneath social practices can locate whiteness. Foucault’s genealogy required an examination of how whiteness, as a power/knowledge nexus, emerged as a socio-historical-temporal system. As such, whiteness is not beneath our immediate lived experience, and it becomes visible when a broader perspective is taken that includes its socio-historical development as a power/knowledge nexus. When “systematic regimes of truth and modalities of power” (Yancy, 2001, p.2) are examined, whiteness emerges as a social structure with a history embedded in specific practices. For Yancy, these practices were most evident when the history of the enslavement of African-American people was explored.
(w)hiteness attempts to hide from its historicity and particularity, which...is a function of how whiteness represents itself as "universal" (Yancy, 2001, p.2).

In order to be a universal, whiteness cannot have an origin: it must be a given which has always existed and always will. Yancy’s (2001) project was to show that whiteness emerged over time and therefore is not a universal, or a transcendental signified. By linking whiteness with slavery and the production of knowledge about African-Americans, Yancy tied whiteness in with particular social practices. Whiteness then is revealed as an emergence within a particular socio-historical context, and identified with particular practices within that context. Yancy (2001) argued that being revealed as an emergence denies whiteness status as a universal.

The Literature Review has expanded on the notion of whiteness by presenting it from different perspectives. All of the authors reviewed believed that whiteness has a powerful influence upon social reality, and most agree that whiteness has a deleterious impact upon non-white people.

These authors have written about whiteness at a theoretical level and described whiteness as it applies to white and non-white people as a group. It is important to understand
whiteness as an idea, but it is also important to understand whiteness concretely, as it is lived and experienced. Exploring whiteness as a lived phenomenon means articulating the conflict, conundrums, and perplexity that emerges both personally and interpersonally for non-white and white people. This phenomenological study adds to the theoretical literature on whiteness by articulating the ambiguity that arises when whiteness is illuminated at a local, personal, and concrete level.

**Method Section**

The Method Section describes the empirical phenomenological method utilized in this study to articulate the participants’ lived experience of whiteness.

**Locating and Selecting Participants**

The participants were located primarily by word of mouth and through posters placed at many locations in the East End of Pittsburgh and at Duquesne University. People who identify themselves as non-white were asked to participate in a study of whiteness by describing situations in which they encountered whiteness. Whiteness was described on the posters as white society and/or white culture in general.

This study explored the lived meanings of whiteness for people who identify themselves as non-white. People who
identify themselves as white were not selected to participate because white people, in general, tend not to be attuned to whiteness as a lived phenomenon, even though they may be familiar with whiteness on a theoretical level. However, being familiar with whiteness as a topic is quite different from living the meanings signified by whiteness.

As McIntosh (1988) and Dyer (1997) said, people who identify themselves as non-white tend to be more attuned to whiteness. As these authors suggest, whiteness signifies a social structure that limits non-white peoples’ possibilities and opportunities. While whiteness may be unspoken and intangible, the participants chosen for this study had little difficulty describing experiences that whiteness signified for them.

John (pseudonym), the first participant chosen for this study, identified himself as an African-American male in his mid forties. He was originally raised in the southern United States and has lived in both the southern and the northeastern United States. At the time of the encounter with whiteness that he described for this study, John was employed as a blue-collar worker.

Mary (pseudonym), the second participant, identified herself as a 20 year-old biracial female from a predominantly
non-white neighborhood. She described feeling accepted in her original neighborhood where race was not a significant issue for her. Whiteness became most explicit for her while she was attending a predominantly white college.

Rene (pseudonym), the third participant in this study, identified herself as a non-white female of Indian heritage (the sub-continent of India) who has lived in the United States her entire life. She was in her mid-thirties, and she described many incidents with white people prior to the encounter that she spoke of for this study. Many of Rene’s previous encounters remain too painful for her to discuss.

Initial Protocols

Once the participants were located and signed an agreement to participate in this study (Appendix B), they were asked to respond in writing to the following question and instructions:

Please describe a situation(s) in which you found yourself effected by “whiteness” (the standards, values, and judgments that you attribute to white people in general or white society in general). Please recall as many details as possible, including your state of mind, and how you felt before and after the situation(s). Describe how you understood the situation at the
time and in the present, and how you would approach the situation in the future. Please be as specific and as comprehensive as possible.

The participants returned their descriptions by regular mail or e-mail to my address.

Initial Reflections on the Participants' Descriptions in Preparation for the Interview

The participants' descriptions were received and reviewed in preparation for a follow up interview. Specific locations within the participants' descriptions were marked so that they could be asked to expand upon their descriptions in the interview. Words with potential psychological import (anger, confronted, fear, anxiety, etc.) were noted for further elaboration by the participants. Other places within the descriptions that were deemed to be open for further elaboration by the participants were also marked. Some locations within the descriptions were noted for the potential significance for the participants as well as for additional details.

Collaborative Interviews

Interviews were conducted with each participant privately and at their convenience. The participants were asked to read their own descriptions before each interview began. I then read
the protocols aloud, stopping at the locations that I had noted for further elaboration or for more details as well as the significance that particular words, sentences or events may have had for the participants. Often, the question asked in the interview process was “Can you say more about that?” This approach was taught in the Duquesne University Doctoral Program in Psychology, and is intended to invite the participants to expand upon their descriptions without being overly suggestive. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and combined with the participants’ original descriptions to form the integrated descriptions. The integrated descriptions are located in Appendix A of this study.

In their initial descriptions, the participants described how their outrage and disappointment arose in encounters with white people. Mary described her experience at college where her non-white racial identity became an issue for her. Initially, Mary said that she had a hard time identifying encounters with whiteness when she first reflected on her experience at college. However, once whiteness became thematic and articulated during the interview, Mary reflected upon how whiteness became thematic in a felt, emotional, unarticulated way at the time it emerged in college. For all three participants, whiteness was thematic when it was articulated during this study, in contrast to being
occasionally thematic in a felt, emotional, and unarticulated manner at the time of the encounters described. At other times, whiteness was present as a horizon in a non-thematic way.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using a phenomenological method developed at Duquesne University. The participants' descriptions were the primary data to be analyzed in accordance with the phenomenological method found in Giorgi’s *Phenomenology and Psychological Research* (1985). Utilizing this method involves a type of reflection discussed by Wertz (1983). Difficulties arose regarding my ability to utilize Wertz’s method, particularly his notion of “empathic immersement,” because of my being a white person. These difficulties are discussed in more detail at the end of the Discussion Section during a final reflection upon the gathering of data and data analysis for this study.

Steps in the Data Analysis

Each description was analyzed individually. In the analysis of each description, the first step was a reading of the entire description in order to get a sense of the participant's overall experience of whiteness. Once a general sense of the individual description was developed, each description was broken down
into smaller segments called “meaning units,” located in Appendix A. The meaning units represented smaller parts of the descriptions that revealed aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. As a researcher, I looked for shifts in meaning for the participants as they described whiteness. Each participant’s experience of whiteness was thematic for me as I located these shifts in meaning.

Once the meaning units were developed for each description, they were rearranged chronologically before being put into a narrative as the second step of the analysis. The meaning units were then edited and written in a narrative format for each participant. The narrative format is called the Situated Structure, and a Situated Structure was developed for each participant. The Situated Structure reflects an interpretation of the personal experience of whiteness for each participant as it emerged from their descriptions and the subsequent interviews.

Once the Situated Structures were completed, a General Structure was developed. The General Structure emerged from a critical analysis of the three Situated Structures as a general description of the lived meanings of whiteness for the participants articulated in a phenomenological discourse. The Elaborated General Structure followed the General Structure,
with quotations from the participants that supported the General Structure. Finally, Psychological Themes that emerged from Situated Structures and the General Structure were elaborated and supported with quotations from the participants.

**Results Section**

**Situated Structure #1**

For John, the lived meanings of whiteness originated in his early childhood. John grew up believing people whom he identified as white had special powers that made them superior. This belief was validated and reinforced in John’s early experiences by his grandfather and others.

However, John did not completely accept notions of white supremacy, and his early resistance to whiteness continued as a necessary way of maintaining his autonomy. John’s resistance limited the impact of whiteness by supporting him in his encounters with whiteness, partially shielding the deleterious effects of insinuations of his inferiority by people whom he identified as white. John’s resistance was also aimed at his grandfather and others who believed in white supremacy. John was determined to prove that they were wrong about the superiority of white people.
The situation described by John for this study occurred at work. While John was new at this location, he had been doing this type of work for some time. Having experience with the typical practices in his field, John was familiar with what could transpire in conversations between the completion of work and the time for signing out for the day. There was a shift from the shared activity of work to an unstructured, open time for conversations and socializing during the few minutes before leaving. John recalled many conversations that began innocently and became contentious and competitive. When this occurred, the conversations typically included the comparison and ranking of John and others by their fellow workers. Conflict between himself and co-workers could arise during this period, and served to close off the possibility of socializing for John.

John was sensitive, vigilant, and suspicious of the conversations between work and his departure for the day. He was alert for the possibility of conversations turning abruptly from innocence to hostility. John identified himself as the only person of color in this particular group, and the absence of other people of color amongst the large group of people whom John identified as white was significant for him.
Whiteness was on the periphery for John when he was involved with a group of people whom he identified as white. In John's experience, white people who participated in whiteness were not always easy for him to pick out. John may have been participating in innocent conversations, and people whom he identified as white suddenly acted maliciously toward him. For John, people whom he identified as white were unaware of their pretense of superiority and the potential effect upon him. John described being in a carefree and jovial mood on the day of the encounter he described for this study. John was not attuned to whiteness, and he refused to be suspicious of all white people. As a result, John was able to freely participate in his work and conversations with his co-workers. However, encounters with people whom he identified as white were ubiquitous for John.

John's encounters with people who incarnated whiteness impacted his relationship with himself and others by thwarting John's expectation of living as an equal human being. In these encounters, John was invisible as a person, and visible only as an object. In his encounters with whiteness, John expected to be recognized as a person, but the people whom he identified as white refused to view him as such. The other's refusal meant
that John was on his own to make sense of the disparity between his expectation of living as a human being and his experience of being existentially invisible.

John was concerned when he was ranked and compared by people whom he identified as white, and he had a felt, unarticulated sense of whiteness that made John cautious. The statement, “you're pretty sharp, for a black guy,” immediately followed John’s being compared and ranked and struck painfully at the core of his being. John’s expectation of being treated as an equal human being was thwarted once again by whiteness incarnate. John was angered by the implicit attempt to subjugate him by a fellow worker whom he identified as white. Many of John’s other white co-workers validated and reinforced the statement made about John’s competence. John felt vulnerable and unsupported as the remainder of his fellow workers participated in whiteness.

John worked to resist the insinuations of his inferiority made by the other workers. John voiced his objections, but his words fell upon deaf ears. John made several more attempts to make his voice heard, but was unsuccessful. John was frustrated, and his frustration turned to disbelief when the other
workers responded to his multiple protests by suggesting that John had created a racial incident by voicing his objections.

This situation was even more powerful for John because it came shortly after another familiar person whom he identified as white made a statement insinuating John’s inferiority. The earlier instance also remained unresolved for John because his objections were not heard. John did not understand how white people in general could be so insensitive and oblivious to his objections. John felt that he was invisible in these encounters, and he did not understand why these encounters with whiteness incarnated continued to occur.

The insinuation of his inferiority and the apparent consensus that it was a compliment outraged John. This feeling brought forth many other experiences of whiteness that had occurred throughout his life. John’s anger and pain re-animated the many other attacks upon him, and he began to doubt his own competence. John attempted to restore his dignity in the face of this assault by justifying his competence.

The period between the end of work and departure for home finally ended. John left work without being heard by his co-workers, and his anger increased as it became apparent that his efforts to soften the others’ rigid stance were unsuccessful.
When his co-workers claimed that he was creating the problem by questioning their assumptions and implications of his inferiority, John felt trapped, alone, unsupported and invisible. The harder John tried to explain how he felt, the more invisible and angry he became.

John was incensed as he drove home from work, convinced the identity of many white people was founded upon whiteness as a signifier of domination and supremacy. John was infuriated, and his anger served to keep him from succumbing to whiteness by being resigned to the claims of supremacy implicit in his co-workers' words and actions. John continued to believe it was his co-workers' condescending, demeaning, and belittling attitude toward him that was problematic. He felt his protest was a just response to their unjust insinuations of his inferiority.

John's outrage turned to sadness as he became resigned to how whiteness was so ingrained in many white people. In fact, John was saddened by the apparent inability of many white people to recognize how their very participation in whiteness was malicious and oppressive. In the aftermath of his experience with whiteness, John was struck once again by the regularity and constancy of these encounters. John's futility left him frustrated and exasperated.
John tried to regain hope by making sense of how he could have been visible as a target or object, and invisible as a person at the same time. John continued to try to understand how so many white people could be oblivious to the effect that their participation in whiteness had upon him. Finally, John made sense of his experiences with whiteness by locating the problem within particular people rather than as a quality of white people in general. However, his attempts at making sense of whiteness by localizing it were only partially successful. John continued to lament how so many white people could participate in whiteness.

John returned to work and his bitterness left him distant and defensive toward his co-workers. However, John’s bitterness eventually subsided, and he did not wish to live with animosity and hostility towards his co-workers. John resolved to name whiteness each time that it emerged, and he was determined to challenge people whom he identified as white that blindly participated in acts of hostility towards him. John refused to live with anger aimed at white people in general because living in anger meant submitting to whiteness by reacting to it.

John’s psychological resistance provided protection against future encounters with whiteness incarnate. However, John must remain vigilant, cautious and suspicious of future
encounters with whiteness. John’s psychological preparation for future encounters with whiteness enabled him to resist claims of superiority by white people in general.

Situated Structure #2

Mary grew up in a racially diverse community where she took feeling included for granted. Mary felt accepted as a person without concern for her racial status, in an atmosphere of social responsibility and concern for people in general. Mary reflected fondly upon this time. Since her encounter with whiteness, she no longer takes this atmosphere of inclusion and warmth for granted. Mary grew up feeling included in a community where her race was not a focal issue for her. As a result, prior to her encounter with whiteness, Mary was able to live without being self-conscious of her race.

At first, Mary struggled to recall encounters with whiteness because of the subtle and insidious way in which whiteness impacted her. She remembered being away at school, where people whom she identified as white manifested whiteness in their “attitudes” toward her. Mary was offended when white people in general assumed their perspectives and standards were universal. Mary was caught off guard by the subtle implications of domination spoken and lived by many white
people.

Mary was distressed by the harshness of the judgments made by people whom she identified as white when she was away at school, and she was disturbed by their lack of interest in her perspective. Mary did not feel invited to participate, but rather felt excluded by people whom she identified as white while at school. Mary felt that these people spoke to her as if she was inferior and insignificant.

The hostility and animosity of the people whom Mary identified as white was hidden by the minor significance of the matters being discussed. As a result, whiteness was subtle and more difficult for Mary to identify in her immediate experience. While Mary was left with a sense of emotional and psychological distress after these encounters, she was not able to recognize whiteness behind the apparent insignificance of individual situations until she reflected upon them. For Mary, whiteness was ubiquitous, hidden behind small matters but visible as an overall strategy.

Mary’s experience at college stood in stark contrast to her days growing up in a racially diverse community. “Blackness” took on a personal significance for Mary during her encounters with whiteness, causing a strong connection with other non-white
people. The non-white community at college reminded Mary of home, and became a haven for her in a world dominated by white people as a group.

Mary identified herself as a white person prior to arriving at college, and she felt that she would be identified as white after she arrived. Mary expected to be included by white people as a group while at college. However, upon her arrival Mary found herself excluded from participating by people whom she identified as white. These people treated her differently than she expected, and Mary made sense of this treatment by concluding that she was identified as a non-white person rather than as a white person. Mary described feeling inferior and excluded as a non-white person.

At first, Mary was shocked when people whom she identified as white treated her differently. However, when she reflected upon many of her past experiences, other meanings began to emerge for her. For example, Mary was saddened by the possibility that she may have received awards and the special attention in high school because she was identified as a non-white person. Identifying herself as non-white at college led Mary to a different perspective on her past. Identifying herself as a white person led to making sense of her life from one side of
the racial split signified by whiteness. In college, being identified as a non-white person profoundly shifted how Mary made sense of previous experiences.

Mary became confused during her time in college when others struggled to name her particular non-white identity. When Mary had identified herself as a white person, her racial identity was not in question. However, when she was identified as non-white, her racial identity became an issue for her. For Mary, being identified as non-white meant being confused about her identity as well as being excluded from participation as a member of the dominant racial group.

Race and race relations became more significant for Mary during and after her arrival at college, where she encountered whiteness incarnated for the first time. People whom Mary identified as white comported themselves in a manner that left Mary feeling insignificant. Mary felt ill at ease and she realized that she was not at home there. Mary felt uninvited and unwelcome as an equal member of this community. Being excluded was painful for Mary, juxtaposed with her expectations of being included and accepted as a person who identified herself as white.

However, encountering whiteness and being identified as
non-white meant that Mary experienced herself differently. The feeling of being not-at-home at college led to Mary’s longing for home where she felt a sense of inclusion and connection that she had taken for granted prior to her encounter with whiteness.

Finally, Mary reflected upon her encounter with whiteness after she returned home. Mary chose to leave the college that she had attended, leaving behind the emotional and psychological turmoil that resulted from her encounter with whiteness. While she missed the opportunities and the broader possibilities that she had there, being back at home enabled her to begin to put her traumatic encounter with whiteness in perspective. For Mary, being back at home meant feeling less oppressed by whiteness as it has less of an immediate, daily impact upon her life. Not encountering whiteness on an everyday level, Mary found herself returning to the familiar experience of living harmoniously with others. After her encounter with whiteness, she no longer took it for granted.

Situated Structure # 3

Rene had encounters with whiteness for as long as she could remember. People whom she identified as white have unabashedly assumed their superiority over her by incarnating whiteness in these encounters. For Rene, these encounters have
been random, numerous, and even too painful for her to discuss. The extent to which Rene has been deeply affected by these situations was evident in her vigilance and concern for the potential of hurtful encounters with white people, revealing the psychological impact of past hurtful encounters.

However, being vigilant and careful did not empower Rene and make her feel protected or safe, because she was continuously surprised by the random and unexpected ways in which these encounters emerged. Rene was surprised by the way in which people whom she identified as white acted in these encounters. She struggled to make sense of how she could invite such malicious treatment and be left feeling less than human. Rene also struggled with the unpredictability of these incidents as she went about her everyday living. No matter how hard she tried to determine the precipitating causes of these incidents, she usually was unable to identify anything that would help her to avoid future encounters.

When Rene reflected upon her encounters with whiteness in general, she was shocked when she realized that her presence was the only constant in these encounters. This realization led her to believe that something about her predisposed Rene to reoccurring encounters with whiteness. Not
being identified as a white person made Rene vulnerable to these encounters, and as such, she was unable to completely protect herself from encounters with people who incarnated whiteness. As a result, not being able to prevent future encounters left Rene feeling powerless.

For Rene, whiteness signified horrible lived experiences of being terrorized by people whom she identified as white. In contrast, on a conceptual level, whiteness signified qualities such as purity, cleanliness, innocence and the sacred for her. She was struck by the incongruity between the divine qualities signified by whiteness and her shameful lived experiences with people whom she identified as white.

Rene’s overt experiences of whiteness occurred during antagonistic and hostile experiences with people whom she identified as white. However, she did have many affirming experiences with people whom she identified as white. Even in her positive encounters, however, Rene was attuned to being identified as non-white. In hostile encounters with people whom she identified as white, whiteness signified blatant disregard of her rights as a person and her own subtle attunement to being identified as a non-white person. For Rene, whiteness signified being judged, shamed, and physically harmed by people whom
she identified as white. Not being identified as white has meant Rene felt less than human, visible as a spectacle, a suspect, and as an object of hatred.

Rene's encounters with whiteness have left her fighting intimations that she was sub-human. Rene temporarily recovered from these encounters by developing a perspective that kept subtle insinuations of her inferiority from consuming her. Rene tried to make sense of hostile encounters with people whom she identified as white by taking personal responsibility for her participation. Rene took responsibility for her vulnerability and sensitivity to these encounters.

For Rene, the encounters signified by whiteness left her feeling subordinated and less competent. It also meant being invisible as a subject, but visible and scrutinized as a non-white “thing.” For Rene, being a person of color meant being under suspicion.

Rene felt that she minimized her encounters with whiteness in order to mitigate the affects. Initially, when Rene encountered white people who manifested whiteness by assuming their superiority, she tried to empathize with them and avoid a confrontation. Rene would try to find a way of communicating with white people in these situations, even if she were not
invited to do so. The white person or persons' refusal to communicate with her usually shocked Rene, and she was left to make sense of being rejected after being turned away by the other. For Rene, the other’s refusal to communicate with her was another type of communication, and she was left to decipher the meaning on her own.

In the encounter described by Rene for this study, a man whom she identified as white and lived close by accosted her. In this encounter, Rene found her gaze met by a man whom she identified as white while they were stopped in their vehicles. Rene recalled looking over at the other vehicle, and being shocked when he “gave her the finger.” Rene tried to make sense of the other's hostility towards her when she was only looking blankly in his direction. Rene attempted to minimize the encounter as she hurried to work immediately afterwards. Since the encounter occurred within her apartment complex, it remained significant for her because she was afraid of encountering him again.

During the period after her encounter, while she was consciously avoiding her white antagonist, Rene relived the situation as she drove a vehicle that was similar to the one driven by her antagonist. The incident remained significant for
her while she was vigilant and careful to avoid another potential encounter with this person. Remaining vigilant and careful kept the encounter on the horizon for Rene. She was able to put this encounter in perspective when she resigned herself to being vulnerable to malicious encounters with white people in the future. Rene was hopeful that her past experience would enable her to remain hyper-vigilant, ever watchful for future encounters and hoping to avoid them as much as possible.

**General Structure**

Prior to the encounters described for this study, the participants lived their worlds with others in a relatively harmonious state. This meant that the participants' experienced their worlds as virtually safe and open with the possibility of mutually respectful interactions with others. At the beginning of their reflections, was a horizon for the participants. However, during their reflections, the participants became more attuned to whiteness when they described encounters with people whom they identified as white acting with varying degrees of malice and hostility toward them.

The participants experienced themselves as different from the others whom they encountered, and that difference was signified by whiteness. For the participants, whiteness signified
social encounters with people whom they identified as white instantiating whiteness as a signifier of racial difference. In these encounters, the participants experienced being reduced to objects for people whom they identified as white. Threatening and potentially dangerous encounters with others identified as white disrupted the participants' pre-reflective state of social harmony.

During these malicious and hostile encounters, whiteness became thematic at an unarticulated, felt level the participants when people whom they identified as white imposed an unspoken double standard upon them. The participants' experienced the double standard implicitly, hidden in the malice, hostility, and assumptions made by people whom they identified as white. One of these assumptions was that the participants were less intelligent and less professionally competent. For the participants, consistently having their intelligence and professional competence doubted by people whom they identified as white was demeaning and frustrating.

The participants' protested the double standard imposed upon them by people who they identified as white. They voiced their objections to malicious and hostile treatment, but the people whom they identified as white ignored them. For the
participants, having their objections ignored by people whom they identified as white left them feeling incredulous, outraged, and existentially invisible. In many situations the participants found themselves being held responsible for turning “innocent” encounters into “racial incidents.” The participants were accused simply because they voiced their objections to malicious and hostile treatment.

The participants’ living with others in a relatively harmonious world shifted when they encountered the double standard signified by whiteness. This double standard was symbolized in words such as “minority,” “difference,” “black,” “racial,” “racist,” and “marginalized” as well as in phrases like “expected to act a certain way” and “have no complaints.”

The participants were overwhelmed by their emotions as they became subject to the double standard imposed upon them. For the participants, being subjected to a double standard meant being angered by the hypocrisy between spoken equality and unspoken harsh and unjust treatment. For these participants, being subject to whiteness as the signifier of a double standard meant feeling shame while being stripped of all human dignity and becoming a spectacle.

Being overwhelmed by their emotions led to childhood
memories of whiteness as a signifier of threatening, malicious encounters. In some cases, whiteness lived as a signifier of fear and terror from the participants’ past. Past, present, and the possibility of future malicious and hostile encounters left the participants with a sense of futility. For the participants, having this sense of futility meant being resigned to a lack of power over future encounters.

Being resigned and unable to control the inevitability of future encounters led to hyper-vigilance for the participants. Being hyper-vigilant meant living with the possibility of whiteness instantiated in any encounter with white people, even by people who were familiar to the participants. The participants’ futility and resignation led to a subtle resentment of white people in general.

The participants’ vulnerability and futility shifted to a sense of hope. The participants became hopeful as they reflected upon past encounters and developed strategies to psychologically resist whiteness in the future. The participants’ future possibilities included political resistance. Political resistance strengthened the participants’ resolve to speak if whiteness emerges in the future. The participants were hopeful that they could resist whiteness in the future. By making white people in
general attuned to whiteness, the participants hoped to cut off whiteness’ source of power as an unnamed, unspoken norm.

Throughout their reflections, the participants became more attuned to the impact that encounters with whiteness had upon them. Their reflections also served to reinforce the participants’ psychological and political resistance to whiteness in the future, and the participants returned to living their worlds in relative social harmony.

**Elaborated General Structure**

Prior to the encounters described for this study, the participants lived their worlds with others in a relatively harmonious state. This meant that the participants’ experienced their worlds as virtually safe and open with the possibility of mutually respectful interactions with others.

**Rene** - And because otherwise I feel that I am just one with the other person, I am one of them, we are all together, things like that.

At the beginning of their reflections, whiteness was a horizon for the participants.

**John**- More often than not, that behavior usually started rather innocently, but if it continued long enough feelings were susceptible to being hurt. I recall almost everyone
being in a carefree mood on that day.

Mary- I racked my brain for an academic or intellectual incident - or some kind of dramatic one-on-one encounter with whiteness – but I just can’t think of one.

Rene- And because otherwise I just feel that I am one with the other person, I am one of them, we are all together and there is no difference, things like that... Most of the time, I’m just living my life, with an acceptance of my non-whiteness on the back burner. It’s only when certain events startle me back to my non-white self that I remember that I am not white.

However, during their reflections, the participants became more attuned to whiteness when they described encounters with people whom they identified as white acting with varying degrees of malice and hostility toward them.

John- Anyway, as some of the group began to assess my demonstrated competence, one of the white guys said to me, “You’re pretty sharp, for a black guy.” Needless to say I was not at all happy with what I interpreted as a racist comment. I was one that did not focus on the fact that I was a minority in the crowd... I don’t understand why white people continue to do this. But all the way home, I was
deeply engrossed and enraged by that kind of whites’ attitude. How could they be so ignorant...

Mary- What's funny is now that I'm done, I am thinking of much better and more impressive examples of dealing with whiteness. Everything about College was an encounter with whiteness. - Like incidents were I was confronted with this attitude...I couldn’t believe some of the things they had to say but they really believed it...Mostly it was surprising, sometimes it was offensive, but mostly I couldn’t believe that people actually believed these things.

Rene- When human beings are involved and whiteness is involved, it’s always negative, even though I have lots of experiences with people who are white that are positive. In each instance of whiteness, I feel less than who I am, less than an individual, less than a human being. Less is the key word...I suppose I ought to answer your question more directly by recalling a specific event. I have several, but some are too painful to discuss.

The participants experienced themselves as different from the others whom they encountered, and that difference was signified by whiteness. For the participants, whiteness signified social encounters with people whom they identified as white
instantiating whiteness as a signifier of racial difference. In these encounters, the participants experienced themselves being reduced to objects. Threatening and potentially dangerous encounters with “white” others disrupted the participants’ pre-reflective state of social harmony.

John- Needless to say I was not at all happy with what I interpreted as a racist comment. I was not one to focus upon the fact that I was a minority in the crowd. Again, I don’t think of people as being racists, until a comment like this is made. Then it is like my difference is called out, the white guy points to my difference and somehow assumes that he or they are superior.

Mary- It took a semester of living in a predominantly white setting for me to get in touch with my blackness, all this after years of living with black people!

Rene- Every situation in which I was affected by whiteness is one in which my being non-white had led to at best being unjustly judged or at worst physically harmed. So instead of being treated as good or decent or “white,” I became something of a spectacle and viewed curiously, suspiciously, or hatefully...I felt less than a human being. During these malicious and hostile encounters, whiteness
became thematic at an unarticulated felt level when people whom they identified as white imposed an unspoken double standard upon them. The participants' experienced the double standard implicitly, hidden in the malice, hostility, and assumptions made by people whom they identified as white. One of these assumptions was that the participants were less intelligent and less professionally competent. For the participants, consistently having their intelligence and professional competence doubted by people whom they identified as white was demeaning and frustrating.

**John** - The statement made by this person, which was quickly echoed by a good many of the other white men, made me seem like an aberration: that somehow it was not normal for those of us who were of African-American descent to have and to exhibit intellectual acumen.

**Mary** - I realized that when I was the ten percent, the one minority in a roomful of ten people, I have to act a certain way and so the options are so limited, you can assimilate and it proves to white people that they are right, that their attitude is the universal attitude and they are not doing anything wrong. Because here is a black person and she can tough it out, and she has no complaints...
The participants' protested the double standard imposed upon them by people whom they identified as white. They voiced their objections to malicious and hostile treatment, but the people whom they identified as white ignored them. For the participants, having their objections ignored by people whom they identified as white left them feeling incredulous, outraged, and existentially invisible.

*John*- I don't understand why white people continue to do this. This situation was even more upsetting because another white guy that I knew did the same thing a few months earlier. When I pointed out the fact that he had made a racist comment, he had no idea of what I was talking about...When I tried to explain to the person and the others that such a statement disclosed a racial mentality on their part, they failed to understand how that was so. The focus was on me as the one who was starting trouble, they were just stating how things are, and they were innocent.

In many situations the participants found themselves being held responsible for turning “innocent” encounters into “racial incidents.” The participants were accused simply because they voiced their objections to malicious and hostile treatment.
JOHN- When I tried to explain to this person and others that such a statement disclosed a racial mentality on their part, they failed to understand how that was so. From their perspective, I had just been given a compliment and I was immediately turning it into some kind of a “racial thing.” I did not want to belabor the point. What was sad about that situation was the very real possibility that the guy and his friends meant well. Unfortunately, like so many other well-intentioned white people I had encountered before, racism or whiteness was apparently deeply ingrained into the very fabric of their being.

The participants’ living with others in a relatively harmonious world shifted when they encountered the double standard signified by whiteness. This double standard was symbolized in words such as “minority,” “difference,” “black,” “racial,” “racist, and “marginalized” as well as in phrases like “expected to act a certain way” and “have no complaints”.

John- I was one that did not focus upon the fact that I was a minority in the crowd…Then it is like my difference is called out, the white guy points to my difference and somehow assumes that he/they are superior…Anyway, as some of the group began to assess my demonstrated
competence, one of the white guys said to me, “You’re pretty sharp, for a black guy...” Again, I don’t think of people as racists, until a comment like this is made...such a statement disclosed a racial mentality on their part...I was immediately turning it into some kind of racial thing...I may have naively entertained false thoughts that whites had some kind of preordained rights to exert and exhibit a certain degree of superior attitude toward blacks...

Mary - I realized that when I was the ten percent, the one minority in a roomful of ten people, I have to act a certain way...the most painful part of being from a marginalized group is when you find out that you are marginalized.

The participants' were overwhelmed by their emotions as they became subject to the double standard imposed upon them. For the participants, being subject to a double standard meant being angered by the hypocrisy between spoken equality and unspoken harsh and unjust treatment. For these participants, being subject to whiteness as the signifier of a double standard meant feeling shame while being stripped of all human dignity and becoming a spectacle.

Rene - Every situation in which I was effected by whiteness is one in which my being non-white has led to at best being
unjustly judged or at worst physically harmed. So instead of being treated as good or decent or “white,” I became something of a spectacle and viewed curiously, suspiciously, or hatefully. In each instance of whiteness, I felt less than who I am, less than an individual, less than a human being. Less is the key word... So those times have been shaming personal encounters.

Being overwhelmed by their emotions led to childhood memories of whiteness as a signifier of threatening, malicious encounters. In some cases, whiteness lived as a signifier of fear and terror from the participants’ pasts. Past, present, and the possibility of future malicious and hostile encounters left the participants with a sense of futility. For the participants, having a sense of futility meant being resigned to a lack of power over future encounters.

John- I was angry, not just because of what they said, but because of their racist attitude...When I was young, I went to live with my grandfather. Even if there was not a white person for miles around, my brother and I were not allowed to say anything negative about white people. My grandfather and the others around him believed that white people were superior and omniscient, and would actually
hear what we were saying...Anyway, ever since then I feel that I have been trying to prove to him that all people are equal, that he was wrong about white people's superiority.

Rene- I need to be flexible, but he can continue to be rigid, that's the way it is, that's the way the code goes. You learn these things from when you are really young, and it's been like that forever. Like bullies at school, you just learn who to avoid and who to never be seen talking to, who to never look at. It can play out in so many ways...and past experiences make me sensitive to new ones, like it keeps happening over and over.

Being resigned and unable to control the inevitability of future encounters led to hyper-vigilance for the participants. Being hyper-vigilant meant living with the possibility of whiteness instantiated in any encounter with white people in general, even by people who were familiar to the participants. The participants’ sense of futility and resignation led to a subtle resentment of white people in general.

John- My first inclination was not to mingle with those white guys anymore. I knew I had to work side by side with them, but I would limit my conversation only to that pertaining directly to the job...The situation was even more
upsetting because another white guy that I knew did the same thing a few months earlier. When I pointed out the fact that he had made a racist comment, he had no idea what I was talking about.

Rene- But on the back burner, usually what I am not aware of is that sense that I am not white, like I have half a leg or something. And past experiences make me sensitive to new ones, like it keeps happening over and over. When there is a pattern you have to wonder about a common thread, and it's who? It's me! How is it that I continue to evoke these things? There is a total hyper-vigilance, and sometimes the antennae are way up and sometimes they are not, but they are there...When human beings are involved and whiteness is involved, it's always negative, even though I have lots of experiences with people who are white that are positive...It's usually they are white, and I am not.

The participants' vulnerability and futility shifted to a sense of hope. The participants became hopeful as they reflected upon encounters with people whom they identified as white and developed strategies to psychologically resist instantiations of whiteness in the future.
John - Though I was to encounter many more situations in which whites exhibited their false sense of superiority, I resolve not to allow it get the best of me. I still do not like it; in fact I sorely detest it. In my youth I may have naively entertained false thoughts that whites had some kind of pre-ordained rights to exert and exhibit a certain degree of superior attitude towards blacks, but maturation, an adequate level of intelligence, and simple common sense have long taught me that nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, can be further from the truth.

Rene- Well, a lot of it is the fact that I am not white and I don't have control over that, but a lot of it is the situation I put myself in and I must be careful of that...I am trying not to blame myself, but I am trying not to blame the other...These situations leave me struggling with how much of this was me, how much of it was them, well I know it was me and them. What could I do differently, how could I have avoided this?

The participants' future possibilities included political resistance. Political resistance strengthened the participants' resolve to speak if whiteness emerges in the future. The participants hoped they would be able to resist whiteness in the
future. By making white people in general attuned to whiteness, the participants hoped to cut off whiteness’ source of power as an unnamed, unspoken norm.

**John**- My resolve was to speak out at every opportunity against their blatant and subtle demonstration of pseudo-superiority of whiteness over those of us who are not white. And I reckoned that if the perpetrators of that type of behavior were peddling their poison in ignorance, then I would call them out and challenge them to think about the ignorance with which their perceptions and judgments are clouded.

**John**- So that’s why I had to be myself, when white people would say things that had racist overtones I would not let them off the hook just because they don’t know what they are saying.

Throughout their reflections, the participants became more attuned to the impact that encounters with whiteness had upon them. Their reflections also served to reinforce the participants’ psychological and political resistance against whiteness in the future, and the participants returned to living their worlds in relative social harmony.
John- Like I said, I really like people and I wasn't about to change my attitude because of them. I was always affable and I was not about to allow myself to become derailed and withdrawn by that horrid social disease.

Rene- I don't want to blame whiteness for my negative feelings. I know that I must have brought some of that feeling less to the situations. The instances of whiteness just brought that feeling to the fore and maybe magnified it...There is a tendency to want to minimize these instances, to not feel that powerless, like it doesn't happen all that often, the good times are better than the bad...This was difficult to write about...I hadn't made some of these issues explicit before.

Psychological Themes

The Results continue with psychological themes that emerged from the participants' descriptions of whiteness. The psychological themes were developed from the Situated Structures and the General Structure, which are located at the beginning of the Results Section.

Being Psychologically Oppressed

For these participants, psychological oppression resulted from ongoing and relentless assumptions and insinuations of
their inferiority as human beings by others whom the participants identified as white. To be psychologically oppressed meant that the participants felt they were having an inferior identity imposed upon them, which served to reinforce the narrative of self-supremacy constructed by many white people.

The psychological effects of having an inferior identity imposed by the other included living a constricted existence. Living a constricted existence meant that the participants experienced themselves being blocked from un-self consciously participating in the world. To be blocked in this way meant that the participants were not free to create and establish an autonomous identity and they were refused the right to self-determination. Subsequently, the participants were left with no alternative but to develop a narrative that included the negative identity imposed upon them.

John described how he felt implicated in the narrative of others whom he identified as white. In a situation involving a group of people whom he identified as white, John described how his “difference” was “called out” as a “minority in the crowd”. For John, being different and a minority in the crowd meant that his freedom to create his own narrative was blocked. The inferior identity imposed upon John by people whom he identified
as white called forth similar incidents from his past.

**John** – I was one who did not focus upon the fact that I was a minority in the crowd...then it’s like my difference is called out the white guy points to my difference, and somehow assumes that he is superior.

The participants felt that they were forced to participate in the other’s narrative when norms or standards were imposed upon them. For Mary, being forced to participate in the other’s narrative meant being expected to meet others’ beauty standards. Mary felt that she was “looked down upon” for not meeting the beauty standards imposed by people whom she identified as white. The standards for beauty represented one of the many ways that Mary felt that she could be judged as inferior, and were for her part of the general message that she was not equal to white girls in general.

**Mary** – Not compete for boys, but compete in terms of being recognized as their equal. I automatically felt that they were looking down on me so I didn’t want to give them any reasons to support their view if I could help it.

For Rene, being forced to participate in the other’s narrative meant “being unjustly judged” and “physically harmed”. To be part of the other’s narrative also meant that Rene felt “less
than human” and “something of a spectacle”.

Rene - …my being non-white has led to, at best, being unjustly judged or, at worst, physically harmed...I become something of a spectacle and viewed curiously, suspiciously, or hatefully. In each instance of whiteness, I felt less than who I am, less than an individual, less than a human being. Less is the key word.

For the participants, whiteness is a systematic, unspoken, and largely unnamed project that results in being psychologically oppressed, and bearing the weight of intimations of their inferiority. One of the signs of psychological oppression was the participants’ ongoing self-doubt, which arose when their lived identity was challenged by the inferior identity imposed upon them by the other’s narrative. The pervasiveness of the other’s narrative made it natural and unalterable, adding to the participants’ self-doubt.

Being Resentful

Prior to encountering whiteness incarnated, the participants lived with the expectation of continuing their projects without interruption. However, people whom they identified as white blocked these projects by infringing upon the participants freedom, imposing a narrative of white superiority upon them.
Psychological oppression resulted from these encounters with whiteness for the participants, and the participants experienced the white other's infringement upon their freedom as a painful violation of their unspoken right to self-determination.

**John** - The focus was on me as the one starting trouble, they were just somehow stating how things are, they were innocent...their behavior (was) condescending, demeaning and belittling. Such was my experience on that day.

**Mary** - I couldn't believe it at first, I didn't know how to react, I didn't know how I was supposed to react...it was like a blow to the stomach or something.

The participants became resentful when their projects were blocked by the other's infringement upon their freedom. This infringement was in stark contrast to the participants' expectations of continuing their projects without interruption.

**Rene** - Most of the time, I'm just living my life with an acceptance of my non-whiteness on the back burner. It's more pre-conscious than conscious. It's only when certain events startle me back to my non-white self that I remember that I am not white...I got attacked with a profane gesture...my living or my way of being was hindered as a result of this person's whiteness.
Being Angry

The participants' resentment turned to anger when their attempts to articulate a sense of violation were met with the other's failure to hear their protests. When the other failed to understand, the participants' anger closed them off from further communication, and past experiences of similar violations emerged for the participants.

John - When I tried to explain to the person and the others that such a statement disclosed a racial mentality on their part, they failed to understand how that was so. This situation was even more upsetting because another white guy that I knew did the same thing a few months earlier. I was angry, not just because of what they said, but that they could not understand their racist attitude.

The participants attempted to transform their situations by avoiding the others who violated them, locating the cause of the problem within the other.

John – My first inclination was not to mingle with those white guys anymore... there would be no extraneous talk. I would be silent and aloof...I was reminded of something I've heard ever since I was a young boy, “Whatever is in a person is what will come out of the person.” Well, I
thought, I guess it’s true.

Moving beyond the situation of being infringed upon partially diffused the participants’ anger, but they remained unrecognized and unsatisfied by the white other’s lack of concern.

**Futility**

After moving beyond the situation, the participants experienced futility, which arose when the possibility of escape from the recurrence of malicious and hostile encounters was closed off to them. Futility meant being vulnerable, hopeless and powerless to change or control the inevitable encounters with white people that incarnated whiteness. Consequently, the participants experienced their futures as blocked, finding themselves stuck, and felt some responsibility for their circumstances.

**Rene** – But on the back burner, usually what I am not aware of is the sense that I am not white, like I have half a leg or something. And past experiences make me sensitive to new ones, like it keeps happening over and over. When there is a pattern, you have to wonder about a common thread, and it’s who? It’s me! How is it that I continue to evoke these things?
Hyper-vigilance

For the participants, futility led to hyper-vigilance for the possibility of recurring malicious encounters with people who incarnated whiteness. The participants were watchful for the possibility of having their freedom infringed upon by malevolent people whom they identified as white. Already having a history of encounters that extended from childhood to the present, the participants became pre-occupied with doubt and mistrust of white people as a group.

The participants were distrustful and suspicious because of the trauma of past painful experiences, and past trauma served as a reason for their hyper-vigilance. Past injuries, insults, and slights were so demeaning and belittling that the participants persistently held grudges against many people whom they identified as white.

Rene – How is it that I continue to evoke these things? Well, a lot of it is the fact that I am not white and I don’t have control over that, but a lot of it is the situation I put myself in and I must be careful of that. There is a total hyper-vigilance, and sometimes the antennae are way up and sometimes they are not, but they are there...even though I have lots of experiences with people who are
white that are positive...But I am just not aware that they are white, and they are being nice. It's usually they are white and I am not.

**Psychological Resistance**

Finally, the participants' hyper-vigilance for led to psychological resistance against having whiteness imposed upon them. Psychological resistance arose as part of a strategy to thwart the conspiracy aimed at rendering them existentially insignificant. Psychological resistance was part of the participants' willful opposition to malicious attacks and other infringements upon their personal freedom.

Psychological resistance was also part of the participants' efforts to retain a sense of autonomy and freedom. Being autonomous meant being free to choose their identity, and reject the subordinate identity signified by whiteness. For these participants, psychological resistance served as a necessary defense against the malice and hostility that intruded upon their everyday worlds.

**John** – My resolve was to speak out at every opportunity against their blatant and subtle demonstration of pseudo superiority of whiteness over those of us not white. And I reckoned that if the perpetrators of that type of behavior
were peddling their poison in ignorance, then I would call them out and challenge them to think about the ignorance with which their perceptions and judgments are clouded. MARY – So that’s why I had to be myself. When white people would say things that had racist overtones I would not let them off the hook just because they do not know what they are doing.

**My Experience of Whiteness in the Presence of the Participants’ Vulnerability**

During the interview phase of this study, my presence as a white person became problematic when I was reluctant to ask the participants to speak further about whiteness. Reflecting upon this experience, I was struck by how uncomfortable I felt about being direct with the participants at the time. My discomfort arose when I sensed the participants’ vulnerability to whiteness because of the anger, confusion, and fear that it signified for them. Consequently, I reflected upon my position as a white person exploring non-white people’s experiences of whiteness, and I became uncomfortable with the possibility that I may have been instantiating whiteness by asking the participants to speak further about their anger, confusion, and fear. In other
words, my position as a white person interviewing non-white people became problematic for me.

Making my whiteness thematic made me more sensitive to my impact upon the participants. As a result, I felt responsible for how my whiteness may have been impacting them. Even though I may not have intended any harm, I realized how my whiteness could have had an impact.

Prior to this study, I presupposed that my responsibility as a researcher was limited to my intentions. If my intentions were to illuminate the phenomenon of whiteness in order to better my understanding of non-white people’s experience of it, then I would have felt that any discomfort on the part of the participants would have been their responsibility and not mine. However, when the participants had stronger reactions to whiteness than I anticipated (John reacted with anger, Mary reacted with confusion, and Rene was fearful), I questioned my presupposition that my responsibility was limited to my intentions.

If my whiteness had an impact upon the participants regardless of my intentions, then it was possible that my responsibility went beyond my intentions to the impact my whiteness was having on the participants. When I sensed this
possibility, I became hypersensitive to how my being a white person could have been impacting the participants in ways that I did not understand.

Examples from the interviews that supported the impact of my whiteness upon the participants included John’s comment, “I can’t understand why so many white people can be so ignorant,” and Mary’s statement, “out of politeness to the white person, you don’t want to talk about them when they are there.” Rene said, “when human beings are involved and whiteness is involved, it’s always negative, even though I have lots of experiences with people who are white that are positive…it’s usually they are white and I am not.” In each of these examples, the participants provided indirect communication signifying their caution and concern because I am white. My being white was impacting them in a subtle and indirect way, and I became sensitive to how I may have been impacting them.

The dynamic between the participants and myself was evident in the participants’ response to my whiteness during the interview process. For instance, in the General Structure, I described how the participants remained vigilant and careful to avoid whiteness in encounters with white people. My impact upon the participants could have resulted in their vigilance and
care while I was interviewing them. In addition, the participants described the assumptions made by white people about them, which may have been in response to assumptions that they felt I was making as a white person about them. This entire project was based upon my assumption that the participants were psychologically affected by whiteness, and Rene's efforts to avoid being labeled a victim by taking responsibility for these encounters may have been in response to my assumption that she was powerless in the face of whiteness. I assumed Rene was deeply impacted by whiteness, and she was making it clear that she was not powerless and that she could overcome it.

When I became uncomfortable during the interviews, my preconception that I could “Bracket” my whiteness and relate to the participants at a fundamental, human level was shattered. I was overwhelmed by my concern for the possibility that I may have been instantiating whiteness, simply by my being a white person imploring the participants to speak about how they were affected by whiteness. Ironically, the impossibility of putting aside my racial difference made my whiteness problematic for me, and I became concerned with the possibility of offending the participants by asking them to continue to speak. Whiteness was impacting me on a personal level by making me
uncomfortable, even though how I may have been participating in whiteness was obscure to me. In other words, I was affected by whiteness because I was concerned with how I may have been instantiating it, but I was unable to identify how I may have been instantiating whiteness, or even if I was instantiating it at all.

Each interview was dominated by a theme that served to reinforce my discomfort and resulted in my reticence to ask the participants to elaborate further. In my interview with John, the dominant theme was his anger with white people who continued to make racist statements to him without understanding how he was hurt by these statements. When he discussed these encounters during the interview, his anger escalated quickly when he described his futility after his objections were rejected by the others involved. Reflecting upon the interview with John, I felt that if I had asked him to speak further about his anger, my request could have been misinterpreted as a sign that I did not understand how hurt he was by statements made to him by other white people. I felt that asking him to elaborate further could have been interpreted as a lack of empathy on my part and because of my discomfort with my position as a white person, I chose not to ask him to speak further.
The dominant theme in my interview with Mary was confusion. She discussed how confused she was by the number of white people who made racist statements to her. Mary was also confused by the lack of understanding of the effect that many white people’s assumptions regarding white superiority had upon her. Once again, I was concerned with my position as a white person. I felt that if I asked Mary to elaborate further on her being confused by how white people could make assumptions about white superiority without regard for the impact upon her, I could have been misunderstood as lacking empathy. I did not want to put myself in the position of being a white person who did not empathize with Mary by asking her to continue to speak. I felt that she was confused by white people’s lack of understanding and empathy for how she was affected by their assumptions of white people’s superiority, and I felt that asking her to continue to speak could be interpreted as a sign that I did not understand or empathize with how she may have been impacted.

In the interview with Rene, I was struck by her fear and efforts to avoid discussing encounters with white people that were too painful for her. I felt that whiteness signified encounters that could be physically threatening for her, and I
sensed her vulnerability. Her statement that some encounters with whiteness were too painful to discuss made her vulnerability come alive for me, and I was very careful not to ask her to elaborate further in sensitive areas. Once again, found myself in an awkward position as a white person studying the effects of whiteness on non-white people. I felt responsible for how I may have impacted Rene, and my concern resulted in my reluctance to ask her to speak further about whiteness. I felt that asking her to do so put both of us in uncomfortable positions. I would have been uncomfortable as a white person who may have been oppressive by asking her to speak further about situations which she already said evoked fear, and in some cases were too painful for her to discuss. I felt that Rene would have been put in an uncomfortable position by being asked to speak further after she had made it clear that these situations evoked painful emotions for her.

Being unable to ask the participants to continue to speak made this project more difficult and influenced how I interpreted the data. First, being unable to implore the participants to continue to speak limited the data available for my analysis. Secondly, my concern with the possibility of instantiating whiteness and the participants' vulnerability led to a more
sympathetic interpretation of the data. My interpretation was that the participants were always vulnerable to whiteness when they were in situations with white people, even if the white people who were involved have innocent or helpful intentions, as I did. Being vulnerable to whiteness through encounters with white people impacted the participants in their daily living. Whiteness’ effect upon these participants could be interpreted from their vulnerability and the measures that they took to try and protect themselves from the inevitable next encounter.

**Discussion Section**

The Discussion Section is divided into four parts. First, the results are expanded in the Summary of the Results, followed by a dialogue with the literature on whiteness reviewed earlier. Then there will be a dialogue with literature relevant to the psychological themes taken from the results of this study. The Discussion Section concludes with a discussion of the Limitations of this Study and Possible Directions for Future Research.

**Summary of the Results**

The participants identified themselves as non-white people in order to make sense of their hostile and malicious encounters with people whom they identified as white. In most cases, these
encounters have been occurring since the participants were very young. These encounters are continuous, and the participants have experienced varying degrees of hostility and malice directed at them.

By identifying themselves as non-white people and identifying the perpetrators as white, the participants responded to being objectified by objectifying those who acted with malice toward them. The participants were able to lessen the personal impact of these encounters by identifying their adversaries as carriers of “a horrid social disease,” as described by John. Attributing these encounters to a social malady afflicting particular white people enabled the participants to make sense of the randomness and the unjust nature of instantiations of whiteness.

Objectifying the other as deviant was one strategy that enabled the participants to return to living their everyday worlds in a relatively harmonious state with others. Making sense of the other’s hostility and malice as part of “the unwritten social code,” as Rene did, was another way for the participants to put these encounters in perspective and move on. These strategies made sense of the other’s random, unjust and hostile comportment toward the participants. As a result the participants became less
attuned to whiteness, but it was present as a horizon.

However, the participants decried the amount of effort that was necessary to move beyond these encounters, and they were unable to make sense of why many people whom they identified as white continued to act with malice and hostility toward them. The participants were frustrated by their powerlessness and the futility that came with having to endure instantiations of whiteness.

The participants became less attuned to their frustration when they focused upon the other's deviance or unspoken social norms. However, by identifying themselves as non-white, the participants also became more attuned to their physical characteristics. Being identified as non-white meant that the participants were pre-disposed by physical characteristics to random and continuous encounters with hostile and malicious people whom they identified as white.

The participants' strategies for making sense of encounters with people whom they identified as white had limited effectiveness because of the effort required to sustain them. The participants were overwhelmed by the possibility of future encounters. Making sense of these encounters as social and resulting from the other's deviance did not enable the
participants to overcome the personal cost of ongoing encounters with whiteness. Making sense of these experiences as part of an unjust social process enabled the participants to return to living their everyday worlds in a relatively harmonious state with others. However, whiteness remained on the horizon, and the participants' lived hyper-vigilantly preparing for the next encounter.

**Dialogue with the Literature on Whiteness**

**Whiteness: The Racial Subject**

The results of this study supported the argument that whiteness signified a focus upon the racial subject (Morrison, 1991). For these participants, people whom they identified as white embodied whiteness, as the racial subject(s) who constituted the participants as racial objects. People whom the participants identified as white represented “individual freedom,” in stark contrast to the participants’ lived experience of “devastating racial oppression” (Morrison, 1991).

This study supported Morrison's (1990) argument that we live in a “wholly racialized society.” The participants became more attuned to whiteness as a signifier of racial difference in encounters with people whom they identified as white. In contrast, when the participants were in situations with other
people whom they identified as non-white, whiteness and their racial identity receded to the horizon.

For example, Mary lived in a community of people that she identified as non-white. While living there she had not identified herself as non-white but rather identified herself as “closer to white.” She saw herself this way until she entered a situation predominated by white people. It was then that Mary identified herself as non-white in order to make sense of the hostility and malice that she experienced in the new and unfamiliar world into which she had entered. In this new and unfamiliar world, she found opportunities to escape to a “haven” with other people whom she identified as non-white. Mary escaped the pain and frustration of being a “marginalized” person around people whom she identified as white, in order to feel connected to other people once again.

The results of this study reinforced Morrison’s argument that language can “powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive othering” (Morrison, 1991, p.x). The participants described their encounters with people whom they identified as white with language implicating whiteness as a signifier of racial superiority and cultural hegemony. Some examples of the words used were
“difference,” “minority,” and “black,” and phrases like “less than human,” and “having no complaints.”

**Whiteness Terrorizes**

Bell Hooks (1992) argued, “whiteness makes its presence felt in black life, most often as terrorizing imposition: a power that wounds, hurts, tortures...” (Hooks, 1992, p. 168). This study fully supported Hooks' argument, as all three participants described how they had been hurt by whiteness as a terrorizing imposition. For example, John described his anger and frustration in response to his encounters signified by whiteness, and Rene described her many experiences with whiteness that “were too painful to discuss.”

The results of this study supported Hooks’ (1992) arguments that whiteness signified an expectation of passive submission on the part of the participants. Remaining invisible was one way that the participants were passively submissive. For example, Rene described not looking directly at or making eye contact with people whom she identified as white.

Continuing on the notion of passive submission, Hooks stated that, “To look directly was an assertion of subjectivity, equality. Safety resided in the pretense of invisibility” (Hooks, 1992, p.168). Hooks also said, “it was important to recognize
the power of whiteness, even to fear it, and to avoid encountering it” (Hooks, 1992, p. 175). In her description of encountering whiteness, Rene recalled how she learned early on about being passive and recognizing the power of whiteness by knowing “who to avoid, and who to never be seen talking to, who never to look at.”

Hooks describes how many black people felt when they returned home to the familiarity of black neighborhoods from spaces where they were “surrounded by whiteness” (Hooks, 1992, p.175). This highlights the contrast between the “sweetness” of “homecoming” and the “bitterness of the journey” which was a “constant reminder of white power and control.” (Hooks, 1992, p. 175). This findings of this study supported Hooks description of the contrast between a journey away from home, surrounded by whiteness, and the sweetness of homecoming. Mary described her sense that “something was missing” and “something was different from home” when she journeyed away to college. She described feeling like she received a “blow to the stomach” when she encountered whiteness at College, and she missed “the comfort” of being around black people at home.

Another point made by Hooks and supported by this study
was the use of resistance to “conquer the terror” (Hooks, 1992, p. 176). Each of the participants resisted having whiteness imposed upon them. John resisted whiteness by voicing his objections the racism of many people whom he identified as white. Mary resisted whiteness by speaking out against assumptions and beliefs of people whom she identified as white. Rene resisted whiteness by developing a strategy based upon avoiding future encounters with people that incarnated whiteness.

Hooks stated that “black people still feel the terror, still associate it with whiteness, but are rarely able to articulate the varied ways we are terrorized because it is easy to silence by accusations of reverse racism” (Hooks, 1992, p. 176). John’s description provided an example of reverse racism. He recalled a time when he voiced his objections to co-workers whom he identified as white and they immediately accused John of turning an innocent situation into “a racial thing.”

**Whiteness Manifested as White Privilege**

Peggy McIntosh (1988) described how whiteness was manifested in the privileges held by white people as a group. McIntosh based her descriptions of white privilege upon feedback from people whom she identified as non-white as well
as from her own experience. McIntosh contrasted her experience as a person who identifies herself as white, with the feedback that she received from people who identify themselves as non-white.

McIntosh (1988) believed whiteness signifies “license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant, and destructive” and manifests in white privilege as “a pattern of assumptions which were passed on” to white people in general (McIntosh, 1988, p.11). McIntosh described how whiteness protects her “from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was subtly being trained to visit upon people of color” (McIntosh, 1988, p.11).

This results of this study supported McIntosh’s argument that whiteness signifies the license to be hostile and malicious, and make assumptions about occupying a position of superiority. Since this study focused upon the experience of people who identified themselves as non-white, there was not clear evidence that white people in general are trained to visit hostility and distress upon people who they identify as non-white. However, as John and Rene described in their encounters with whiteness, the people whom they identified as white acted maliciously toward them repeatedly, and apparently without remorse. In light of McIntosh’s (1988) argument that being identified as white
means being subtly trained to act with malice toward non-white people, John and Rene’s descriptions were interpreted as malicious acts, justified and acceptable to the perpetrators. The interpretation of these acts as justified and acceptable was made based upon the participants’ descriptions of the perpetrators lack of concern for how the participants were impacted in these situations. Interpreting malevolent acts through the participants experience revealed whiteness as a systematic form of domination that is rationalized and supported. As Rene put it, “Because it seems like the white person who does that just continues to do it, and there is not much reflection, like they are not doing anything wrong.”

**Whiteness: A Location of Structural Advantage**

Ruth Frankenberg (1997) stated, “whiteness was a location of structural advantage, of race privilege.” She also said whiteness, “was a place from which white people looked at ourselves, at others, at society,” and “whiteness is an “unmarked marker” (Frankenberg, 1993, p.1).

At first glance, Frankenberg’s theoretical argument did not appear to be relevant to the present study. Frankenberg (1997) examined whiteness from a sociological perspective and her results offered an overview of whiteness. She also studied
whiteness from the perspective of people who identified themselves as white, while the present study examined the lived meanings of whiteness for people who identified themselves as non-white.

While the present study and Frankenberg’s study are based upon different perspectives, there may be some common ground. For example, Frankenberg (1997) said whiteness is a location of structural advantage and race privilege, occupied by white people as a group. According to Frankenberg, people who have the opportunity to identify themselves as white live with advantages that are predetermined within society based upon racial identity. For the most part, these advantages remain unexamined while the focus is upon the circumstances of non-white people. The focus upon non-white people is based upon an assumption that they are personally and individually responsible for their social and economic disadvantages in comparison to white people.

Naming whiteness as a position of structural advantage shifts the focus to white people’s circumstances. Before the shift of focus, whiteness operated as an unspoken norm, along with assumptions of personal and individual responsibility for those circumstances. Naming whiteness as a location of
structural advantage calls the position of white people into question as well as the assumptions of personal and individual responsibility. Rather than placing blame upon non-white people for their circumstances, naming whiteness as a location of structural advantage shifts the focus to the predetermined advantages and privileges that white people have access to.

The results of this study showed the participants experiencing whiteness through people whom they identified as white, in accord with Frankenberg's (1997) assertion that whiteness was a location of structural advantage occupied by white people. While the participants often experienced whiteness in hostile and malicious encounters, they described everyday encounters with people whom the participants identified as white. In these everyday encounters, the participants experience more subtle implications of whiteness, where whiteness is more prevalent and influential, as Frankenberg argued. These subtle implications come in the form of attitudes or beliefs, as Mary described, or simply in the participants' recognition of not being “white,” as Rene stated. Not being white is significant for the participants, supporting Frankenberg’s (1997) argument that whiteness is a location of structural advantage occupied by white people.
The hostile and malicious encounters described by the participants stood out for them because of the impact and psychological trauma that resulted. However, everyday instances involving more subtle implications of whiteness, as a signifier of the participants' structural disadvantage and racial privation, may have a cumulative effect that the participants' are only partially attuned to. Taking Frankeenberg's (1997) argument and turning it around by viewing it from the participants' perspectives sheds light upon the subtle and cumulative effects of whiteness. These effects result from the participants being at a structural disadvantage because of their racial identity.

Frankeenberg also said that, "whiteness is a place from which we looked at ourselves, at society, and at others" (Frankeenberg, 1993, p.1). As a person who identified herself as white, Frankeenberg (1993) described the natural tendency for people who identified themselves as white to adopt a perspective upon themselves, the world, and others based on white people's assumptions and beliefs.

First, it is a natural tendency for most human beings to adopt a perspective upon the self, world, and others based upon our own assumptions and beliefs. However, fixed and closed perspectives are imposed upon others because they are
“universal” (Dyer 1997) and become problematic. Consequently, whiteness signifies the perspective of many people who identify themselves as white, and implicitly rank others and ourselves like us superior to people identified as non-white.

The results of this study described how the participants experienced the position of superiority implicitly assumed by people whom they identified as white. All three participants described their surprise, anger, frustration and futility when people whom they identified as white refused to hear their concerns regarding the implicit assumptions of superiority that implied the participants' inferiority. The assumed superiority of white people and the implied inferiority of the participants signified whiteness as an implicit, homogenous set of assumptions and beliefs of white superiority, imposed upon the participants as if they are given.

Frankenberg’s description of whiteness as a position or perspective held by white people as a group was supported by the results of this study. The participants experience whiteness as a perspective held by others who assume that non-white people are inferior. When the participants objected to the superior/inferior double standard imposed upon them, the people whom they identified as white were unable to understand their
objections. The results of this study suggested that whiteness signifies the right of people who identify themselves as white to impose their standards upon others without concern, consideration, or responsibility for the effects.

Frankenberg’s third point was that whiteness operated as an unmarked marker (Frankenberg, 1993), which means that whiteness is a historical phenomenon. However, in order to locate whiteness within a historical context, it had to be discovered because it was unmarked. Frankenberg argued that whiteness is unmarked because it has been normalized, and only when norms and standards are examined can whiteness be located, historically or otherwise. For example, Mary had difficulty describing encounters with whiteness initially, because she did not have overtly hostile or malicious experiences. Yet, when she reflected upon more subtle instantiations of whiteness, she was overwhelmed by how frequently whiteness emerged in apparently benign, everyday situations.

Frankenberg described whiteness as an unmarked marker in a historical and theoretical context. The results of this study showed that whiteness is not unmarked for the participants because it emerged for them in hostile and malicious encounters with people whom they identified as white. However, when the
participants reflected further on whiteness, they became more attuned to whiteness’ subtle impact as a standard imposed by white people. Therefore, the results of the present study revealed how whiteness remained at least partially unmarked and unnamed for the participants. The subtle impact of whiteness was overshadowed by malicious and hostile encounters with people whom the participants identified as white. Thus, the overall impact was hidden or unmarked behind individual encounters, and only upon reflection was whiteness revealed as a pervasive phenomenon.

The Content of Whiteness

Nelson Rodriguez (1998) believed whiteness has content and must be interrogated. The content arises differently based upon the context, making whiteness difficult to identify but making the project of “mapping whiteness” vital (Rodriguez, 1998, p. 31). Whiteness is made concrete by having content, and is not an abstract concept or ideology. Rodriguez (1998) followed Frankenberg (1997), saying that examining whiteness is about examining the content of the normative, including both its history and its consequences. In order to reduce the impact of whiteness, whiteness must be delimited and localized (Frankenberg, 1993, p.231).
The content of whiteness can be located by questioning the normative, as Frankenberg stated. Rodriguez argued that the first place to be examined is normative discourses that oppress people, especially those people who fall outside the dominant culture (Rodriguez, 1998, p.31). Rodriguez believed that "whiteness maintains its visibility by not being questioned, mapped, interrogated" and that there are ramifications for keeping whiteness silent (Rodriguez, 1998, p.38). Rodriguez offered to map whiteness as a normative discourse that oppressed people by examining the ways that whiteness remains unchecked in everyday social interaction (Rodriguez, 1998, p. 44). Thus, the content of whiteness can be made visible, and whiteness will no longer operate in silence.

Rodriguez' work focused upon how whiteness emerges and how it can be interrogated in relation to pedagogy. Rodriguez' followed Frankenberg (1997), approaching whiteness on a theoretical level. However, many points that Rodriguez made are relevant to the results of the present study. The aim of this study was to examine whiteness from the perspective of people who identified themselves as non-white. Thus, the results of this study illuminated whiteness from the position of the oppressed, a position that Rodriguez did not focus upon in his examination of
whiteness.

The results of this study supported the notion that whiteness has content, as Rodriguez argued. They also represent an attempt to reduce whiteness' power by delimiting and localizing it. Whiteness operates as an unspoken norm or standard, and naming it on a local basis reduces its power. Once again, the participants had little or no problem identifying whiteness. Initially, whiteness signified hostile and malicious encounters with people whom they identified as white. However, further reflection on whiteness led the participants to question its ubiquity. For example, John became angry as he decried how many white seem to be ignorant of how they “live whiteness oppressively” as Rodriguez stated. Mary echoed a similar sentiment when she lamented whiteness’ omnipresence in the beliefs and attitudes of people whom she identified as white.

The results of this study mapped whiteness by identifying how it was lived by the participants, and how whiteness became concrete in their experience.

The normativity of whiteness was apparent for the participants in this study. John grew up challenging and being challenged by whiteness and Rene described being surrounded by and steeped in whiteness, yet not of it. She described being
hyper-vigilant for whiteness manifested by white people for as far back as she can remember. Whiteness is normative for the participants as something to fear, avoid, and distrust. Thus whiteness is formative because of its omnipresence, and it causes the participants to be hyper-vigilant for the possibility of being terrorized, as Hooks (1992) described. For the participants, being hyper-vigilant for encounters with whiteness pointed to its omnipresence and whiteness' power to negatively impact their lives.

The present study attempted to map whiteness by describing how it is lived by people who identified themselves as non-white and by illuminating its psychological effects upon them. Thus, this study was in accord with what Rodriguez described as an attempt to map whiteness in order to make it visible, and discontinue its reign as an oppressive force. The results of this study also highlight what Rodriguez described as whiteness' imprint, which he took from Hooks description of being affected by whiteness in her youth. Rodriguez described whiteness' imprint as something that carried on into adult life. Whiteness' imprint was in constant dialogue with the present, and in phenomenological terms, whiteness still lived for the participants by informing their living in the present.
**Whiteness: A Refusal**

Peter McLaren (1998) examined whiteness in a historical context, as it rose out of colonialism. Once again, his approach was theoretical, but there were several points made by McLaren that could be understood in light of the present study. First, McLaren (1998) believed whiteness operates in acts of discrimination by situating people in hierarchies as superior or inferior based upon difference. These acts are continuous, serving to universalize and naturalize the differences constructed by the hierarchies situated by whiteness (McLaren, 1998, p.64).

The results of this study offered vivid examples of the discriminatory acts described by McLaren, while providing evidence of the repetitiveness of these acts. This study has shed light upon whiteness’ effort to construct a hierarchy based upon superiority and inferiority. The participants, however, resisted the efforts by people whom they identified as white to inscribe or construct a position of inferiority upon them. In the encounters described by the participants, people whom they identified as white assumed positions of superiority that were both universal and natural.

McLaren said, “whiteness functions through practices of
assimilation and cultural homogenization" (McLaren, 1998, p.65). This point contrasted with the experience of the participants. The participants described their sense of being excluded, and the results showed that encounters with whiteness served to make the participants more attuned to their differences. However, reading McLaren (1998) differently, if whiteness functions through practices of assimilation and cultural homogenization, then people who are identified as non-white can be identified as fundamentally different and not capable of being assimilated. Thus, whiteness operates by assimilating only similar people who can be homogenized.

McLaren’s main point was whiteness “is a refusal to acknowledge how white people are implicated in certain social relations of domination and subordination” (McLaren, 1998, p.66). His use of the word refusal indicated a sense of agency on the part of white people in their participation in social relations of domination and subordination. Refusal can also mean that white people who participate in social relations of domination do not act as agents in these social relations. However, even when their actions are brought to their attention they refuse to acknowledge their participation. McLaren (1998) called the lack of ownership in participation in social relations of
domination and subordination by white people “social amnesia.” Refusing to acknowledge their participation in these types of social relations constitutes social amnesia for white people who refuse. By refusing to acknowledge their participation in whiteness as a form of social domination and subordination, white people reinforce the normativity of dominant social relations.

The results of this study showed people whom the participants identified as white refusing to acknowledge their instantiations of whiteness as they occurred. The participants were struck by how people whom they identified as white acted maliciously toward them and did not seem to be affected by their malevolence. Rene was shocked by how people whom she identified as white acted without any conscience, suggesting the normativity of these types of encounters and of white domination that permeated these situations for her. John described his frustration with people whom he identified as white that not only acted as if white supremacy was a norm but also refused to hear his protests against their assumed superiority.

McLaren stated that whiteness “represents a regime of differences that produces and racializes an abject other” (McLaren, 1998, p.67). The production and racialization of the
other serves a purpose, and McLaren (1998) argued that whiteness' purpose is to establish stability for those who existed at its center, white people. Thus, marginalizing the other serves to fortify the central location occupied by people who identify themselves as white, and makes the excluded essential for the identity of the included. McLaren believed that it is impossible to separate the identities of both oppressor and oppressed because they are interdependent.

The results of this study were in accord with McLaren's (1998) position that the production and racialization of an "other" is central to whiteness. The participants described being constantly surprised by encounters with whiteness and the apparent project to name their racial difference. McLaren believed individual white people establish a collective position for themselves and others who identify themselves as white. In so far as individuals are intertwined with their collective identity, the white people involved in these encounters are establishing a position of domination for themselves by stabilizing the position of white people as a group.

Whiteness: A Transcendental Signified

George Yancy (2001) stated that whiteness misrepresents itself as a transcendental signified, or a universal center of
power that is a historical given. Whiteness is maintained by denying its historicity, and Yancy endeavored to expose whiteness as a misrepresentation. Yancy (2001) utilized Foucault’s genealogical method to accomplish his task by examining how whiteness, with the complicity of a group of white people, operates as a power/knowledge nexus. As a power/knowledge nexus, whiteness produces knowledge about non-white people that rationalizes their subordinate position as if it was part of the natural order. Thus, white people assume that their superiority is pre-ordained, and do not take any responsibility for how they instantiated whiteness and produce and maintain white domination.

Yancy’s (2001) work was theoretical, as was the vast majority of literature on whiteness. His position required an abstraction from the concrete, everyday lived world. The results of this study pointed to the participants’ encounters with white people in general as indicators of whiteness manifested in everyday experience. However, there were places where the participants pointed to a more global significance of whiteness, in accord with Yancy. For instance, John described his frustration with continual encounters with white people who incarnated whiteness. After reflecting upon whiteness, Mary
described how whiteness can be identified in universal notions of beauty and as an ideal for everyone, white or non-white, to aspire to. Rene described whiteness as a signifier of purity and goodness, but since she was not identified as white she was not pure or good.

The results of this study pointed to whiteness as a universal signifier that the participants were more attuned to in some moments and less in others. The participants avoided whiteness as a universal signifier by developing strategies of resistance in some cases. Whereas Yancy (2001) discussed the importance of resistance on the political level, in contrast, the results of this study shed light upon psychological resistance. This study found that the participants' psychological resistance limited the psychological impact of whiteness as a universal or global phenomenon.

The participants' psychological resistance signified the impact that whiteness had upon the participants. Whiteness subtly effected the participants in ways that they were not attuned to, and when they encountered “whiteness incarnated” the subtle psychological effects of whiteness combined with the immediate, overt encounter. The subtle, invisible insinuations that whiteness signified became more visible in the presence of
a person whom the participants identified as white.

Yancy (2001) used the fictional character Pecola Breedlove from Toni Morrison's (1990) Beloved as an example of how a non-white person was impacted by whiteness. Yancy suggested that Pecola seek psychotherapy to address her personal suffering, in addition to developing her political resistance, as a prescription for restoring her psychological health. Re-examining Pecola’s situation in light of the results of this study, rather than exploring and addressing her personal suffering, a psychotherapeutic approach that develops her psychological resistance would serve to reconstruct the meanings of whiteness for her and enable her to resist both subtle and overt instantiations of whiteness.

**Whiteness and Power**

Yancy (2001) utilized Foucault’s notion of a power/knowledge nexus to explore whiteness. Following Yancy, I will continue a dialogue with Foucault, comparing what Foucault had to say about power with the results of this study on whiteness.

Power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms...for it, secrecy is not in
the nature of an abuse, it is indispensable to its operation (Foucault, 1990, p.86).

Foucault's description of power concurred with the results of the present study of whiteness. Whiteness is partially masked in the encounters described by the participants. For John, whiteness is masked by the refusal of others to hear his protests to what he described as their racist statements. For Mary, whiteness is hidden in the assumptions and beliefs of many white people. As Frankenberg (1997) said, whiteness operates as an unspoken norm or standard, and thus it masks itself by being what Winant called, “the falsely obvious” (Winant, 1997). For Rene, whiteness is masked behind ongoing hostile encounters with people who seem to be unconcerned by their hostility toward her, as if their hostility was “normal” given the situation.

Foucault described power “as a pure limit set on freedom” as the general form it took to be socially acceptable (Foucault, 1990, p. 86). The participants in this study described their anger and frustration as their living was determined by whiteness incarnated in words, actions, beliefs, and assumptions. This manifested itself as limits set on the participants' freedom through being forced to act a certain way, protesting, and
avoiding situations because of how others may act. The participants' limited freedom was also highlighted by their attunement to the fact that people whom they identified as white did not seem to have the same limits upon their freedom. Rene attributed the double standard of privilege and disadvantage, manifested here by freedom without limits versus limited freedom, to the “unwritten social code.”

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth upon him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects...subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge (Foucault, 1983, p.212).

Once again, Foucault’s description of power concurred with the results of this study. Whiteness applies itself to everyday life as white people as a group manifest it. Yet, it also seemed to be true for people whom the participants identified as white who acted without conscious intent in these incidents. Furthermore, the participants described how white people embody whiteness, as a signifier of the participants' otherness,
simply by being white.

Both the participants and people whom they identified as white were marked by their identity, but have whiteness imposed upon them in different ways. Both become subjects, in the sense of being subject to someone else, the white other by dependence and the participants by control. The white other is dependent upon the participants for validation of white supremacy, while the participants are subject to the white other’s power over their very existence.

Foucault’s description of what characterized power “is that it brings into play relations between individuals (and between groups).” The results of this study affirmed that whiteness brings both individual and group relations into play. Power is always relational for Foucault, and power relations are “rooted deep in the social nexus, not constituted “above” society as a supplemental structure whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of” (Foucault, 1983, p.222). These power relations are not held together by some overarching structure, but rather by the relations rooted deep in daily social life.

Did the participants describe encounters with white people on an everyday basis because these everyday encounters were what constituted whiteness for them? If “power exists only when
it is put into action" (Foucault, 1982, p.219) and if whiteness can be understood as a form of power, then it lives through its everyday manifestations. The signifier, whiteness, may transcend the encounters with people whom the participants identified as white, but these encounters make whiteness concrete for the participants.

In such struggles people criticize instances of power which are the closest to them, those which exercise their actions on individuals. They do not look for the “chief enemy,” but for the immediate enemy (Foucault, 1982, p.211).

Foucault’s comments on power described the participants’ focus upon their immediate encounters with whiteness incarnated by people whom they identified as white. Whiteness may have currency as a signifier discussed theoretically, but the participants in this study are largely attuned to whiteness and the actions exercised by people whom they identify as white, “(their) immediate enemy.”

Dialogue with Extant Literature Relevant to the Psychological Themes

In this section, the results of this study will be expanded in a dialogue with literature relevant to the psychological themes
that were developed in the Results Section. Literature not introduced in the Literature Review will be discussed here.

**Being Psychologically Oppressed**

Sarah Lee Bartky (1990) examined psychological oppression. Bartky argued that people can be oppressed in ways “that need not involve physical deprivation, legal inequality, nor economic exploitation; one can be oppressed psychologically” (Bartky, 1990, p.23).

Bartky said being psychologically oppressed means that human beings can be “weighed down by having others exercise harsh dominion over (their) self esteem” (Bartky, 1990, p.23). Being psychologically oppressed leads the oppressed to “exercise harsh dominion over their (own) self-esteem” (Bartky, 1990, p.23). Bartky described how the oppressed self-perpetuate psychological oppression through the “internalization of intimations of inferiority” (Bartky, p.23).

The results of this study showed subtle reminders of inferiority and blatant encounters with others who reinforce unspoken social structures, resulting in psychological oppression for the participants. However, the results did not directly show how the participants “came to exercise harsh dominion over their own self-esteem,” as Bartky (1990) suggested. Rather, the
results of this study showed the effects of psychological oppression in the participants' self-doubt. For the participants in this study, self-doubt typically occurs when people whom they identify as white reinforce assumptions of the participants' inferiority. Consequently, the unspoken social structures are replenished when myths of the racial superiority of white people are perpetuated.

Bartky (1997) said the oppressed “internalized intimations of inferiority,” and she believed something happened “inside” the oppressed person. The results of this study showed the participants are unaffected by “intimations of inferiority” until they are imposed by people whom they identified as white in subtle or blatant encounters. For example, Rene described feeling that she “is one with the other person, I am one of them, we are all together and there is no difference.” After recalling the encounter described in the previous sentence, Rene stated, “I am startled... and realize that I am not white”. Rene was not attuned to her race until an encounter with a person whom she identified as white.

The results of this study showed that the participants are effected by the ubiquity of whiteness, as a signifier of white racial superiority, found in the media, advertising, literature, etc.
While the level of attunement to whiteness shifts based upon the situation, the results of this study did not point to an activation of any internal mechanism by psychological oppression, as Bartky (1997) argued.

The results of this study showed how whiteness operates by creating psychological oppression through regular and constant encounters with people whom the participants identify as white. For these participants, whiteness operates through a social dynamic between the participants and white people rather than through internalization, as Bartky (1997) argued.

While the results of this study did not support Bartky’s argument for internalization of intimations of inferiority, Bartky’s description of how psychological oppression emerges and is perpetuated is supported. First, Bartky (1990) believed psychological oppression had to be institutionalized and systematic in order to be effective. Domination on a large scale broke “the spirit of the dominated and renders them incapable of understanding the nature of those agencies responsible for their subjugation” (Bartky, 1990, p.23). Subsequently, the dominated benefited from the established order of things and legitimized their ascendancy. In addition, when domination became a pervasive feature of a culture and remained uncontested, it
appeared to be natural and unalterable (Bartky, 1990, p.25).
Bartky stated that while systematic domination made it difficult to identify who was responsible, there were people who benefited from it (Bartky, 1990, p.23).

The participants in this study had an implicit or tacit understanding of who was responsible for their subjugation. While the people who incarnated whiteness for them were not part of a general conspiracy, they were invested in the subjugation of the participants and benefited from it.

Bartky stated, "Fragmentation and mystification are present in each mode of psychological oppression" (Bartky, 1990, p.23). She defined fragmentation as "the splitting of the whole person into parts" and into a "true and false self." Bartky referred to mystification as "the systematic obscuring of both the reality and agencies of psychological oppression so that its intended effect, the depreciated self, is lived out as destiny, guilt, or neurosis"(Bartky, 1990, p.23).

Bartky’s argument for a splitting into a true and false self was not in line with the results of this study. The results of this study showed how the participants struggled to come to terms with the inferior identity imposed upon them by the other, in contrast to Bartky’s (1990) notion of a self splitting into parts.
The participants’ selves were not split, but showed a distinct temporal contrast between the self experienced prior to the encounter, and the self during and after the other’s transgression.

**Being Resentful**

In his dissertation entitled *The Persistent Character of Being Resentful: An Empirical Phenomenological Investigation* (1992), John Petrou described the general structure of being resentful. He said that a person became resentful when they experienced another committing a transgression against them, which prevented the realization of a desired project. Prior to becoming resentful, the person expected to have the project fulfilled (Petrou, 1992, p.107). The expectation was founded upon a larger, taken-for-granted cultural context. Petrou also found being resentful became explicit when the person denied what he or she felt they deserved. In the initial phase of being resentful, the person experienced being denied as a “shocking, painful rupture in their understanding," and as a bodily wound (Petrou, 1992, p.108). For Petrou, the immediate, overwhelming pain was never exhausted and elicited the inevitable return of the resentment in the future (Petrou, 1992, p.103).
The results of this study concurred with Petrou's (1992) findings when the participants' personal projects were denied. The participants believed they were entitled to complete their projects based upon participating in a cultural context that affirmed their human status. However, the participants' encounters with whiteness were experienced in transgressions that blocked them from completing their projects. At that moment, the participants felt they had been denied their culturally affirmed human rights. Bartky (1990) described the double bind of being affirmed and denied as a factor in being psychologically oppressed.

The findings of this study showed the participants in the initial phase of being infringed upon, blocked by the other, which resulted in a painful rupture in the participants' understanding. In this instance, understanding was not just personal for the participants. John described his need to justify his competence to himself, and he had a desire to have the others understand how they had wronged and hurt him. Mary described her encounter with whiteness as "a blow to the stomach or something," feeling the rupture in understanding at a bodily level.
The initial overwhelming pain served as a reservoir for the participants' resentment to return in the future. When the situations remained unresolved, the resentment remained latent until the participants' experienced another transgression against them. In phenomenological terms, the incidents lived for the participants and the overwhelming pain that remained unresolved fueled the return of the earlier resentment.

If the person was unable to overcome or abandon being resentful, then he or she attempted to transform the worsening situation (Petrou, 1992, p.109). According to Petrou, transforming the situation involved restricting possible encounters with the resented other, or devaluing the other and experiencing them as inferior. Even though the attempts to transform the situation may have temporarily relieved the person's pain, their resentment remained. Future encounters with the resented other or reminders of the experience called forth the resentment that remained unresolved (Petrou, 1992, p.109).

In this study, the participants attempted to transform the worsening situation in different ways. John initially decided to avoid the resented others by distancing himself from them: “there would be no extraneous talk. I would be silent and aloof.”
John attempted to devalue the others and experienced them as inferior by locating the problem within them, due to “that horrid social disease”. However, the pain that remained led to the re-emergence of past transgressions from John’s early childhood.

Petrou said the person who was resentful may have questioned their understanding and entertained alternative ways to comprehend the situation. Revisiting the situation in this way led to understanding and empathy for the resented other. However, even though an alternative understanding and empathy may have been preferred, the person was pulled back to a resentful comprehension by the original transgressive pain. The sense of violation lingered because of the person’s entitlement to respectful treatment, and the resentment persisted (Petrou, 1992, p.109).

John attempted to entertain a more empathic understanding of the situation when he said, “what was sad about that situation was the very real possibility that the guy and his friends meant well.” Rene tried to develop an alternative understanding by empathizing with the person whom she encountered, “In some cultures, eye contact, especially prolonged eye contact, is disrespectful, not deferential, and seen
as a way to intimidate. I guess he felt that I was out of line by looking at him and he saw it that way?"

Both John and Rene were pulled back to their resentful understandings by the pain of the prior transgressions against them. John shifted to a superior position and articulated his pain, "many whites, due to their attitudes about themselves and their often errant, negative presuppositions about blacks, fail to appreciate and/or comprehend the fact that often their behavior towards those who are non-white is condescending, demeaning, and belittling." Rene's resentful understanding of the situation appeared when she criticized others who had transgressed against her: "because it seems like the white person who does that just continues to do it, and there is not much reflection, like they are not doing anything wrong."

Finally, Petrou (1992) found that resentment was partially diffused when the person moved beyond the situation and attempted to resume relations with the resented other. However, the effects of resentment persisted as the wound survived in the person's memory, making the person vulnerable to activations of past resentment. Inevitably, the person encountered reminders that exposed the wound and re-activated acute resentment,
including the same rage and sense of helplessness experienced before (Petrou, 1992, p.110).

John struggled with overcoming his resentment after the incident he described in his protocol. After expressing his desire to distance himself from the others who transgressed against him, John’s resentment was partially diffused when he shifted from being “silent and aloof” to being himself, “always affable and...not about to allow myself to become derailed and withdrawn.” Mary’s resentment was partially diffused when she shifted from speaking against instantiations of whiteness to being empathetic with the other. Mary said, “White people don’t question the universality of their culture, which is not their fault because they are not taught to”.

Rene expressed how the pain of past experiences lived for her. The wound from the past was “on the back burner...like I have half a leg or something”. She described how past encounters made her vulnerable to new ones: “past experiences make me sensitive to new ones, like it keeps happening over and over”. Then Rene expressed her feelings of helplessness: “the only way I could have had more clout, short of changing my race, was if I had more white people with me”.

Of course, Petrou’s findings were descriptive of the general
structure of being resentful. The results of this study articulated the particular experience of individuals in their socio-historical cultural context as people who identified themselves as non-white. Their resentment stemmed from being caught in a double bind: being denied the right to their culturally affirmed human status.

**Being Angry**

In her dissertation entitled, *The Phenomenology of Being Angry: An Empirical Approach From the Perspective of Self and Other*, Cynthia Frankel (1982) articulated her findings by describing the phases of becoming and being angry. She began with the subject, or participant, who experienced being wronged or treated unfairly and had an issue with the other who was responsible for that treatment. The issue could have emerged for the participant in the past, which Frankel (1982) described as a re-occurrence. Consequently, the participant felt that he or she wanted to act to confront the other who was both responsible and the object of his or her anger. However, the participant felt stuck or caught, and silently or partially addressed the issue inadequately (Frankel, 1985, p. 183).

The results of this study showed how the participants experienced anger in encounters with whiteness. For example, in
John described being wronged and treated unfairly by a group of his co-workers whom he identified as white. This same issue emerged for John in both the immediate and recent past, and he felt that he had to act by confronting the other. John did address the issue, but his anger continued when the other refused to acknowledge his concern. John did his best to address the issue, but his effort was inadequate because it did not serve to assuage his anger.

In the next section of Frankel’s (1982) findings, she stated that anger arose in a situation where the participant found an impediment to their progress. The impediment was constituted by the other who remained unresponsive to the participants’ efforts to communicate their concerns, and was yet another in a series of similar historical situations. According to Frankel, the participant experienced the impediment to their progress as an unfair violation and as an effort to devalue them as a person. As a result, the participant was mobilized to change the situation because they were negatively affected (hurt, disappointed, frustrated, tense) by it (Frankel, 1985, p. 184).

The results of this study were more personal than Frankel’s (1982) more general findings. Rather than having his progress blocked, John’s status as an equal and free person was denied
by the other whose unresponsiveness was significant for John; another slight in a long series of violations. Each of these violations included an other who failed to understand John’s grievances. John’s experience of the other’s attempt to devalue him as a person fit with Frankel’s findings. John was negatively affected by the other’s refusal, which resulted in pain and disappointment, but mobilized him to act.

Frankel believed that even if the participants made persistent and intensified efforts to voice their concerns, the other refused to yield or even acknowledge their concerns. The participants in this study remained stuck and unable to act effectively, while continuing to feel a sense of urgency to act. Frankel called the felt sense of urgency “a reflective knowing” that something must be done. According to Frankel (1982), the participant experienced an embodied transformation, involving a straining, tense and heated presence to the situation. Moving from a more private experience to a breakthrough into the public sphere left the participant suddenly overwhelmed by their feelings. Then the participant was no longer just angry, but furious (Frankel, 1982, p. 184).

Finally, Frankel described the participant as he or she emotionally confronted the other. The participant was finally
communicating effectively by attributing blame and demanding redress. Doing so moved the participant out of an inferior and helpless position relative to the other, leaving the participant feeling relieved, more at ease, and less concerned with the situation. The situation emerged as closed and in the past, and may be recalled and reflected upon by the participant (Frankel, 1985, p. 184).

For John, demanding that the other both hear his protest and see the effects of their devaluation of him as a person was an attempt to move him out of an inferior position relative to the other. However, his relief was by no means complete, and while the situation became less immediate, his concern did not. John's reflection upon the situation resulted in his sense that he act both in the present situation, and be prepared for future encounters with whiteness. The situation did move from the present into the past, but it was not closed for John, as Frankel described in her results.

Frankel summarized her results in the essential structure of being angry:

(T)he intending of an embodied consciousness mobilized and straining to free itself from the subordinate position in which it finds itself unfairly caught, violated and rendered
ineffective by another who is expected, able and ought to
treat the (participant) with greater consideration. Angriness
strives to adequately express itself through a public
attribution of blame and demand for redress of the
experienced wrong. Through this anger may reach its
telos, which consists in the experience of being understood
by the angering other (Frankel, 1985, p.185).

The findings of this study, through John’s experience, were
similar to Frankel’s (1982) until she described anger’s telos,
or ultimate end. For Frankel, the participants’ reached a
conclusion to their anger when they were eventually understood
by the angering other. In contrast, the situation remained open
for John, and other issues emerged as a result of his not being
understood by the other. The anger continues to live for him,
along with his anger from similar situations in the past that
remain unresolved. The results of this study described how the
participants responded to not eventually being understood by the
angering other. Not being understood made the situation
ambiguous and more complex, compared to Frankel’s description
of anger and its telos.
Futility

In her dissertation, *A Trip Through Futility: A First Exploration of the Experience of Futility*, Susan Spillman (1974) articulated the experience of futility. In her structural description of futility, Spillman found that futility “emerges in a specific kind of relationship between the participants and the world” (Spillman, 1974, p. 76). She described the participants’ involvement in a dialectical relationship between self and world, while moving towards a specific future. The participants’ futures were concretely embodied in particular projects such as work, obtaining a college degree, etc. Spillman said the participants’ ability to accomplish their projects was largely taken for granted, and lived unreflectively by them.

When their participation in the chosen projects was blocked or interrupted, Spillman believed the participants experienced the situation as causing the problem (Spillman, 1974, p. 76). Spillman said the participants attributed power to the situation, as if the outcome of the situation would stand as a judgment of their value and validate the participants’ worth. In contrast, failure put their value and worth in doubt. As a result, Spillman said others became the means to confirm the participants’ worth as human beings (Spillman, 1974, p. 76).
When the outcome of the situation was other than what the participants expected, futility ensued, according to Spillman. Their taken for granted future was closed off and the participants could not imagine an alternative. As a result, the participants became vulnerable, insecure, hopeless, powerless, and unable to influence the situation. The participants waited for a magical solution or hoped that an outside force would change the situation (Spillman, 1974, p. 76).

The results of this study converged with Spillman’s findings regarding the participants’ inability to influence the situation. When Rene reflected upon the situation that she was involved in, she felt only way the situation could have turned out differently was if she “had some white people with her”. This was an example of what Spillman (1974) meant by hoping that an outside force would change the situation, and was an indication of how powerless Rene felt to change the outcome.

Spillman said the participants must protect themselves in profound states of futility. The results of this study showed how unresolved anger or resentment brought on profound states of futility for the participants. Spillman (1974) found that the participants remained stuck in the dialectic between feeling hopeless and powerless, and they believed they must work
through the situation. The participants’ temporal existence was transformed in the experience of futility, and they were no longer moving forward. As Spillman (1974) described and as the findings of this study showed, the future disappeared from the horizon when the participants remained stuck in their intolerable situations. In the end, Spillman found that intolerance of the situation impelled the participants to resolve it in some way (Spillman, 1974, p. 77). In the present study, the participants’ reflections upon their situations led to a transformation from futility to hyper-vigilance for future encounters with people whom they identified as white. However, the situation remained unresolved, and the participants’ future possibilities were narrowed by their hyper-vigilance for others who might commit transgressions against them. Future transgressions can bring forth the unresolved issues and unsettled emotions that live for the participants through their recollection of past encounters.

**Psychological Resistance**

The discussion will now turn to Foucault’s (1982) work on power, which was introduced earlier in the Literature Review. Foucault described resistance as a location of opposition that could be a sign of a power struggle between adversaries. Foucault wrote, “in order to understand what power relations are
about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts to dissociate these relations” (Foucault, 1982, p. 211). In the case of this study, the participants’ resistance implicated whiteness as a form of power to be opposed. While Foucault described political resistance, this study found resistance operating at a psychological level for the participants.

The findings of this study showed the importance of psychological resistance in the participants’ experience of whiteness, in contrast to the belief that psychological resistance was an impediment that needed to be overcome in psychotherapy. Psychological resistance enabled the participants to transcend the restricted possibilities resulting of hyper-vigilance, and served as a necessary defense in their threatening world.

In his article, “The Wisdom of Resistance,” Rich Hycner (1996) examined psychological resistance, utilizing Martin Buber’s notion of “the between,” or the space between self and other. Hycner’s main premise was “resistance is the residue of an attempted dialogue cut short in mid-sentence” (Hycner, 1991, p. 347). For Hycner, resistance signifies an interpersonal relationship and is a product of an interaction between self and other.
The findings of this study showed how the participants' shift from hyper-vigilance to psychological resistance after their dialogue was cut short by others. Thus, their resistance was understood as a direct response to not being heard by the other. Psychological resistance in this context was not a pathological response, but signified a shift away from living the restricted possibilities of hyper-vigilance to a more self and life-affirming position.

Hycner argued that resistance is an essential form of self-protection, or an announcement of the person’s vulnerability due to past experiences. Resistance is a wall that enclosed early and involves deeply felt wounds, and must be made more permeable in order for the person to be open to more-alive possibilities. However, while resistance protects the person from the re-emergence of old wounds, it cuts off a dialogue with the world (Hycner, 1991, p.348).

The results of this study showed that resistance did serve as protection in the non-utopian world lived by the participants, where it was necessary for them to protect themselves. Contrary to Hycner, the results of this study also suggested that psychological resistance served as a foundation or ground from which the participants can begin a dialogue with the world and
others. Psychological resistance to whiteness serves to empower the participants by challenging the false assumptions and beliefs that whiteness signifies for them.

Conclusion

Although whiteness is largely invisible to me as a white person, this study showed that it could be identified as a cause through its psychological effects upon non-white people. Articulating whiteness' psychological effects makes the personal impact that it has upon the participants in this study thematic for me as a white person. Understanding whiteness and its effects upon non-white people in general enables me to have some insight into the participants' experience and to have empathy for their struggle.

However, on a personal level my whiteness remains mostly invisible to me. Immersing myself in the participants' descriptions and experience of whiteness allowed me to be empathetic and articulate their experience, but I can only guess or assume how I may have impacted the participants as a white person. For example, when I sensed the participants' vulnerability during the interviews, I was responding to my concern over how I could have been impacting them and chose not to continue to ask the participants to speak.
I began this study with the presupposition that increasing my understanding of the participants’ experience of whiteness by having them speak about it would be beneficial for the participants and myself. I ended this study with a better understanding of whiteness as a concept and its psychological effects upon the participants. However, I am left questioning the value of having the participants speak about whiteness, in part because I am largely unawares of how I personally instantiate it, and in part because of the anger, confusion, and fear that whiteness signifies for the participants.

My experience as a white researcher illuminates the interpersonal dynamics that whiteness signifies. While I can empathize with the effect that whiteness in general has upon a non-white person, it is difficult for me to get any concrete sense of how I personally instantiate whiteness for them in particular situations.

My experience as a white researcher also illuminates a more general dilemma. When I urged non-white people to speak about whiteness so that I could understand how to fight against it as a social injustice, whiteness at the same time became thematic for me as something that is an inescapable part of my own identity. At first glance, I may not have actively participated
in whiteness, but upon reflection I find whiteness at the core of my being, a part of my identity as a white researcher and as a white person.

Limitations of This Study, Directions for Future Research

The present study focused upon whiteness through the experience of people who identified themselves as non-white. Whiteness, as a signifier, was examined in the participants’ concrete experience in encounters with people who incarnated whiteness for them. The research question and the follow-up interviews focused upon the participants’ concrete experience. The focus was here because the researcher believed that the issue of white racism signified by whiteness becomes concrete in interpersonal encounters between white and non-white people. This point of access to the phenomenon represented only one possibility, while other approaches may illuminate the lived meanings of whiteness for non-white people differently, and may result in a different understanding of the phenomenon.

For example, Rene began her description of whiteness by articulating the lived meanings that whiteness signifies for her apart from interpersonal encounters with people whom she identified as white. She discussed connotations of whiteness
such as cleanliness, and how her not being white implies her embodiment of the opposite connotations.

Mary described how whiteness was portrayed in advertising as well as the media in general, and she discussed the lack of understanding of other cultures that is inherent in representations of whiteness as a norm or standard. These representations and meanings of whiteness deeply affected the participants. While the results of the present study showed that these meanings and representations serve to intensify the participants’ reactions to whiteness incarnated, a research question and follow-up interview designed to address these areas specifically could more fully articulate this critical aspect of whiteness. Whiteness as a signifier of the other’s norm or standard as well as its subtle yet powerful imposition in manifold cultural representations may be more fully articulated in an approach aimed specifically at this important element.

It may also be possible to utilize a different method of phenomenological research to access the representations of whiteness more fully. For example, the interplay of cultural representations and psychological experience may be better articulated by using a cultural-historical analysis of whiteness as a lived phenomenon. What have been the lived meanings of
whiteness for different non-white people in different historical periods? This issue has been explored from a sociological perspective by Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998), but not from a phenomenological perspective.

The participants in this study described how the lived meanings of whiteness have changed for them over time. For example, John described actually believing that whiteness signified the omniscience and superiority of people whom he identified as white when he was a young boy. He described how he later became aware of the inaccuracy of this belief as he matured and began to be able to think for himself. A longitudinal study might highlight turning points or significant moments in people’s lives where the lived experience of whiteness shifted or was transformed by events, maturity, changes in belief, etc.

This study illuminated some of the complexity and uncertainty that whiteness signifies at a lived, personal level. For the participants, whiteness signified troubling encounters with white people. The participants could have been asked to consider other factors that were involved and how they participated in understanding these situations purely as instantiations of whiteness. Rene began to address this possibility: “I know that some of this is me and some of this is
them...I know that I brought some of that feeling less to the situation.” It would be interesting to follow the notion of the participants’ personal responsibility further.

A study that addresses the question of how non-white participants are impacted by a white researcher may serve to illuminate how the participants perceive a white person in a position of power. The impact of a white researcher could be made thematic and explored in depth. Studying the impact of a white researcher upon non-white participants would take this study one step further. Exploring the non-white participant/white researcher relationship may also shed more light on how race, racism, and racial difference are intertwined in interpersonal encounters and in the research process.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
Poster

WHITENESS

- Participants are needed for a study on "whiteness" (the standards, values and judgments of "white" people in general or "white" society in general).
- The study will focus on the effects of whiteness upon individuals who are identified as non-white (African-American, African, Asian-American, Asian, Native American, etc.).
- The study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph. D. in psychology at Duquesne University and does not offer compensation.

Participants will be asked to do the following:
- write a description of a situation in which you were effected by "whiteness"
- participate in an interview(s) to clarify and expand upon your written description
- review the results of the study and comment on them, with your comments included in the final results
- sign a consent form that outlines the steps taken to insure confidentiality and your right to terminate your participation in the study at any time.

Please contact Darryl at (412) 719-7724 if you wish to participate in this study.
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: An Interpretive, Empirical Phenomenological Study of Whiteness

INVESTIGATOR: Darryl J. Mars
6951 Willard Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15208
Phone: (412-719-7724)

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in psychology at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the phenomenon of whiteness (the standards, values or judgments of white people in general or white society in general). You will be asked to provide a written description of an experience of whiteness. In addition I will request to interview you in order to clarify and expand upon your written description of whiteness. The interviews will be taped and transcribed. You will also be given the opportunity to respond to the results of this study, and your response will be included (anonymously) in the final part of the paper. The response to the results of this study is optional, and one attempt will be made to contact you by phone to arrange for a meeting in order for you to respond.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There is a potential risk involved due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter that is being investigated. If necessary, counseling and/or psychotherapy will be available for the participant through the Duquesne University Psychology Clinic by calling (412-396-6520).

COMPENSATION: The participants will not be compensated for participating in this project, and participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. An envelope is provided for the return of your description to the investigator.

Initials: _____ Date: _____
APPENDIX B

Page 2 of 2

CONFIDENTIALITY: All written materials, tape recordings, and consent forms will be kept in a secure and locked place. The tape recordings will be transcribed by the investigator and all personal identifying information will be removed. All written materials and consent forms will be stored in a locked file in a secure place. The tape recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the research.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: You are under no obligation to participate in this study, and you are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: You will have an opportunity to respond to the results of this research as mentioned on page 1. A summary of the results of this research will be supplied upon your request at no cost.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project. I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Dr. Mary de Chesnay, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (412-396-6553).

Participant’s Signature ______________________________ Date ________________

Investigator’s Signature ______________________________ Date ________________

Initials: _____ Date: ________

Page 2 of 2
APPENDIX C

Protocol #1

I was working at the time at a Naval Submarine Base in a military town called Kings Bay, Georgia. Kings Bay was a small coastal town, located in the southeast part of the state, right at the Florida State line. Anyway, I had not worked on the base for more than perhaps a couple of months.

I remember it was very near the end of our shift, and we usually finished with our paper work about a half-hour early and waited for the four o'clock hour to leave. During that time we actively engaged in all manners of conversations: politics, religion, race matters, and other social and sometimes personal issues. On that particular afternoon, while waiting to leave work, we found ourselves talking/arguing about whom among us were the best HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) journeymen and who were not.

At any rate, that group was of no exception. More often than not, that behavior usually started rather innocently, but if it continued long enough feelings were susceptible to being hurt. It usually started out this way, and eventually things were said that someone didn't like. However, I recall almost everyone being in
a somewhat jovial and carefree mood on that day. Since I had not been there all that long, I wisely withheld from full participation.

Suddenly, the conversation took a turn and centered on me. I failed to mention that I was only one of two African Americans that worked in the HVAC department. The other one had worked at the base going on ten years at the time and was in charge of preventative maintenance. The HVAC department consisted of approximately thirty journeymen.

Anyway, as some of the group began to assess my demonstrated competence, one of the white guys said to me, “You’re pretty sharp, for a black guy.” Needless to say I was not at all happy with what I interpreted as a racist comment. I was one that did not focus on the fact that I was a minority in the crowd and I certainly did not think that due to some act of law or pity did I find myself in the position I was in. Like most of the guys there, I had received technical training in HVAC and had had the privilege of working for five years with a thirty-five year master journeyman.

The statement made by this person, which was quickly echoed by a good many other of the white men, made me seem like an aberration; that somehow it was not normal for those of
us who were of African American descent to have and to exhibit intellectual acumen. When I tried to explain to the person and the others that such a statement disclosed a racial mentality on their part, they failed to understand how that was so. From their perspective, I had just been given a compliment and I was immediately turning it into some kind of a "racial thing."

I did not want to belabor the point. What was sad about that situation was the very real possibility that the guy and his friends meant well. Unfortunately, like so many other well-intentioned white people I had encountered before, racism or whiteness was apparently deeply ingrained into the very fabric of their being.

I was angry, not so much at the person who initially made the comment, but at the very fact that many whites, due to their attitudes about themselves and their often errant negative presuppositions about blacks, fail to appreciate and/or comprehend the fact that often their behavior towards those who are non-white is condescending, demeaning, and belittling. Such was truly my experience on that day. Fortunately, it was time to leave so I did not have to stay around and feel the mounting tension that was rapidly developing between the whites and myself. But all the way home I was deeply engrossed and
enraged by that kind of whites’ attitude. How could they be so ignorant, I thought, to think that they were complimenting someone when, in fact, what they were actually doing was manifesting their prejudices, biases, racism?

I was reminded of something I’d heard ever since I was a young boy, “Whatever is in a person is what will come out of the person.” Well, I thought, I guess it’s true. My first inclination was not to mingle with those white guys anymore. I knew I had to work side by side with them, but I would limit my conversation only to that pertaining directly to the job. There would be no extraneous talk. I would be silent and aloof. But that was not my nature. I was always affable and I was not about to allow myself to become derailed and withdrawn by that horrid social disease.

To distance myself from it was not the way to combat and defeat it. My resolve was to speak out at every opportunity against their blatant and subtle demonstration of pseudo superiority of whiteness over those of us not white. And I reckoned that if the perpetrators of that type of behavior were peddling their poison in ignorance, then I would call them out and challenge them to think about the ignorance with which their perceptions and judgments are clouded.
Though I was to encounter many more situations, in which whites exhibited their false air of superiority, I resolve to not allow it to get the best of me. I still do not like it; in fact I sorely detest it. In my youth I may have naively entertained false thoughts that whites had some kind of preordained rights to exert and exhibit a certain degree of superior attitude toward blacks, but maturation, an adequate level of intelligence, and simple common sense have long taught me that nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, can be further from the truth.

Interview

I was working at the time at a Naval Submarine Base in a military town called Kings Bay, Georgia. Kings Bay was a small coastal town, located in the southeast part of the state, right at the Florida State line.

R- Was the location significant?

_No, I don’t think that the location had anything to do with it. I have had the same experience elsewhere, even in Pittsburgh. It wasn’t because it was in the south.

Anyway, I had not worked on the base for more than perhaps a couple of months._

R- Did the fact that you were new mean anything?
I was new, but this kind of thing happened at other places, we worked together for 40 hours per week or more, and the new guys would be included in the conversation, they would be compared and their competence would be judged.

I remember it was very near the end of our shift, and we usually finished with our paper work about a half-hour early and waited for the four o’clock hour to leave. During that time we actively engaged in all manners of conversations: politics, religion, race matters, and other social and sometimes personal issues. On that particular afternoon, while waiting to leave work, we found ourselves talking/arguing about whom among us were the best HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) journeymen and who were not.

R- Was talking and arguing during this period unusual?

Again, this was the status quo. The field was very competitive and new guys were ranked based on their competence. Having at that times a number of years in the field, I was well aware of the competitive nature of those in the occupation.

At any rate, that group was of no exception. More often than not, that behavior usually started rather innocently, but if it continued long enough feelings were susceptible to being hurt It usually started out this way, and eventually things were said that
someone didn’t like. However, I recall almost everyone being in
a somewhat jovial and carefree mood on that day.

R- Can you say more about your mood?

*I like being around people, I try not to think about things like
this; I usually try not to focus my attention on the whiteness of
white people. Anyway, I think it is this whiteness that is the
principal agent responsible for the onset of racism.*

Since I had not been there all that long, I wisely withheld from
full participation.

R- Can you say more about that?

Having experience in the field left me knowing better, however
being quiet doesn’t mean that eventually the conversation won’t
turn to you.

Suddenly, the conversation took a turn and centered on me. I
failed to mention that I was only one of two African Americans
that worked in the HVAC department. The other one had worked
at the base going on ten years at the time and was in charge of
preventative maintenance. The HVAC department consisted of
approximately thirty journeymen.

R- Can you say more about that?
I do not think of people as white or black, or whatever . . . I really don’t until something like this comes up.

Anyway, as some of the group began to assess my demonstrated competence, one of the white guys said to me, “You’re pretty sharp, for a black guy.” Needless to say I was not at all happy with what I interpreted as a racist comment. I was one that did not focus on the fact that I was a minority in the crowd.

**R- Can you say more about that?**

Again, I don’t think of people as being racists, until a comment like this is made. Then its like my difference is called out, the white guy points to my difference and somehow assumes that he/they are superior.

I don’t understand why white people continue to do this. This situation was even more upsetting because another white guy that I knew did the same thing a few months earlier. When I pointed out the fact that he had made a racist comment, he had no idea what I was talking about. And I certainly did not think that due to some act of law or pity did I find myself in the position I was in.

**R- Can you say more about that?**
I felt like the guy complemented me by saying that I was pretty good, but then the second part of that statement was like a knife in the back.

Like most of the guys there, I had received technical training in HVAC and had had the privilege of working for five years with a thirty-five year master journeyman. The statement made by this person, which was quickly echoed by a good many other of the white men, made me seem like an aberration; that somehow it was not normal for those of us who were of African American descent to have and to exhibit intellectual acumen. When I tried to explain to the person and the others that such a statement disclosed a racial mentality on their part, they failed to understand how that was so. From their perspective, I had just been given a compliment and I was immediately turning it into some kind of a “racial thing.”

R- Can you say more about that?

The focus was on me as the one who was starting trouble, they were just somehow stating how things are, and they were innocent.

I did not want to belabor the point. What was sad about that situation was the very real possibility that the guy and his friends meant well. Unfortunately, like so many other well-intentioned
white people I had encountered before, racism or whiteness was apparently deeply ingrained into the very fabric of their being. I was angry, not so much at the person who initially made the comment, but at the very fact that many whites, due to their attitudes about themselves and their often errant negative presuppositions about blacks, fail to appreciate and/or comprehend the fact that often their behavior towards those who are non-white is condescending, demeaning, and belittling. Such was truly my experience on that day. Fortunately, it was time to leave so I did not have to stay around and feel the mounting tension that was rapidly developing between the whites and myself.

R- Can you say more about that?

I was angry, not just because of what they said, but that they could not understand their racist attitude, which again is made possible by their attitude of whiteness, and that they assumed that I had a problem because I developed an attitude because of what they said.

But all the way home I was deeply engrossed and enraged by that kind of whites' attitude. How could they be so ignorant, I thought, to think that they were complimenting someone when, in fact, what they were actually doing was manifesting their
prejudices, biases, racism? I was reminded of something I’d heard ever since I was a young boy, “Whatever is in a person is what will come out of the person.” Well, I thought, I guess it’s true.

R- Can you say more about that?

I truly believe that not all white people are like that, but I can’t understand how so many white people can be so ignorant. I like people, and I refuse to change my attitude because of them.

My first inclination was not to mingle with those white guys anymore. I knew I had to work side by side with them, but I would limit my conversation only to that pertaining directly to the job.

R- Can you say more about that?

I did try this for a while, but like I said I really like people and I wasn’t about to change my attitude because of them.

There would be no extraneous talk. I would be silent and aloof. But that was not my nature. I was always affable and I was not about to allow myself to become derailed and withdrawn by that horrid social disease. To distance myself from it was not the way to combat and defeat it. My resolve was to speak out at every opportunity against their blatant and subtle demonstration of pseudo superiority of whiteness over those of us not white. And I
reckoned that if the perpetrators of that type of behavior were peddling their poison in ignorance, then I would call them out and challenge them to think about the ignorance with which their perceptions and judgments are clouded. Though I was to encounter many more situations, in which whites exhibited their false air of superiority, I resolve to not allow it to get the best of me. I still do not like it; in fact I sorely detest it. In my youth I may have naively entertained false thoughts that whites had some kind of preordained rights to exert and exhibit a certain degree of superior attitude toward blacks, but maturation, an adequate level of intelligence, and simple common sense have long taught me that nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, can be further from the truth.

R- Can you say more about that?

When I was young, I went to live with my grandfather. Even if there was not a white person for miles around, my brother and I were not allowed to say anything negative about white people. My grandfather and the others around him believed that white people were superior and omniscient, and would actually hear what we were saying! This started when I was young, and when I was a teenager I would get really angry with my grandfather. One time that I remember specifically was when a local teenager
called my grandfather ‘boy’, and my grandfather responded with “yes sir,” never taking issue with being called ‘boy’! I guess this has something to do with my family having been from South Carolina before moving north to New Jersey, I don’t know. Anyway, ever since then I feel that I have been trying to prove to him that all people are equal, that he was wrong about white people’s superiority.

Meaning Units

Regular font- P’s Original protocol

Bold font- Interview questions

Italic- P’s interview response

Bold Italics- Meaning units

I was working at the time at a Naval Submarine Base in a military town called Kings Bay, Georgia. Kings Bay was a small coastal town, located in the southeast part of the state, right at the Florida State line

R- Was the location significant?

No, I don’t think that the location had anything to do with it. I have had the same experience elsewhere, even in Pittsburgh. It wasn’t because it was in the south.

P encountered whiteness while at work. He has experienced whiteness in many locations, regardless of the historical
significance it may have had for racism.

Anyway, I had not worked on the base for more than perhaps a couple of months.

R- Did the fact that you were new mean anything?

I was new, but this kind of thing happened at other places, we worked together for 40 hours per week or more, and the new guys would be included in the conversation, they would be compared and their competence would be judged.

While P was new at this location, he was familiar with conversations that included the comparison and ranking of workers.

I remember it was very near the end of our shift, and we usually finished with our paper work about a half-hour early and waited for the four o’clock hour to leave. During that time we actively engaged in all manners of conversations: politics, religion, race matters, and other social and sometimes personal issues. On that particular afternoon, while waiting to leave work, we found ourselves talking/arguing about whom among us were the best HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) journeymen and who were not.

R- Talking and arguing during this period were not unusual?
Again, this was the status quo, the field was very competitive and new guys were ranked based on their competence. Having at that times a number of years in the field, I was well aware of the competitive nature of those in the occupation.

*P was familiar with the topics of these conversations while waiting to leave, and he was aware that these conversations could become personal and competitive.*

At any rate, that group was of no exception. More often than not, that behavior usually started rather innocently, but if it continued long enough feelings were susceptible to being hurt. It usually started out this way, and eventually things were said that someone didn’t like.

*P was sensitive and vigilant, recognizing the possibility that conversations like this could shift abruptly from innocence to aggression.*

However, I recall almost everyone being in a somewhat jovial and carefree mood on that day.

**R- Can you say more about your mood?**

*I like being around people, I try not to think about things like this; I usually try not to focus my attention on the whiteness of white people. Anyway, I think it is this whiteness that is the principal agent responsible for the onset of racism.*
P remembers being in a carefree and jovial mood that day. P was hopeful that harmony would prevail even though whiteness and acts of aggression against him were possible amongst white people whom he did not know well.

Since I had not been there all that long, I wisely withheld from full participation.

R- Can you say more about that?

Having experience in the field left me knowing better, however being quiet doesn't mean that eventually the conversation won't turn to you.

P's experience with white people in his profession alerted him to the presence of whiteness and he found himself being hyper-vigilant, guarded and suspicious.

Suddenly, the conversation took a turn and centered on me. I failed to mention that I was only one of two African Americans that worked in the HVAC department. The other one had worked at the base going on ten years at the time and was in charge of preventative maintenance. The HVAC department consisted of approximately thirty journeymen.

R- Can you say more about that?
I do not think of people as white or black, or whatever . . . I really don’t until something like this comes up.

*P's racial status and his lack of support from other people of color left him feeling vulnerable to aggressive actions by some of the white people present.*

Anyway, as some of the group began to assess my demonstrated competence, one of the white guys said to me, “You’re pretty sharp, for a black guy.” Needless to say I was not at all happy with what I interpreted as a racist comment.

*P’s project for racial equality was disrupted when he was ranked by some of the white men that he worked with. The racist comment that followed struck painfully at the core of P’s being.*

I was one that did not focus on the fact that I was a minority in the crowd

**R- Can you say more about that?**

Again, I don’t think of people as being racists, until a comment like this is made. Then its like my difference is called out, the white guy points to my difference and somehow assumes that he/they are superior.

*P’s project of being visible as a person was blocked by the opposing project of white domination and supremacy.* The
white people present participated in whiteness through their project of oppression against P.

I don’t understand why white people continue to do this. This situation was even more upsetting because another white guy that I knew did the same thing a few months earlier. When I pointed out the fact that he had made a racist comment, he had no idea what I was talking about.

P resisted the white persons’ project of domination and oppression by trying to point out how the racist comment had affected him. This particular encounter was even more distressing for P because it came a short time after another encounter with a white person familiar to P. P could not understand why the white people responsible for these acts can be so insensitive and apparently oblivious to the affect that these encounters have upon him.

And I certainly did not think that due to some act of law or pity did I find myself in the position I was in

R- Can you say more about that?

I felt like the guy complemented me by saying that I was pretty good, but then the second part of that statement was like a knife in the back.
Like most of the guys there, I had received technical training in HVAC and had had the privilege of working for five years with a thirty-five year master journeyman.

*P was angry and hurt after being ranked and targeted by a racist comment, and he tried to restore his lost dignity by justifying his competence.*

The statement made by this person, which was quickly echoed by a good many other of the white men, made me seem like an aberration; that somehow it was not normal for those of us who were of African American descent to have and to exhibit intellectual acumen.

*P’s ranking and the racial slur that followed were validated by many of the white workers, deepening its painful affect upon him. P was overwhelmed by other experiences of prejudice and racism that he had endured because of the color of his skin.*

When I tried to explain to the person and the others that such a statement disclosed a racial mentality on their part, they failed to understand how that was so. From their perspective, I had just been given a compliment and I was immediately turning it into some kind of a “racial thing.”

*R- Can you say more about that?*
The focus was on me as the one who was starting trouble, they were just somehow stating how things are, and they were innocent.

Once again, P attempted to have his protest heard by the white workers and once again his appeal fell upon deaf ears. In fact, the white workers claimed that P was trying to turn their compliment into a racial incident. The white workers were blind to their participation in whiteness and deaf to any protests against their projects that perpetuate white supremacy.

I did not want to belabor the point. What was sad about that situation was the very real possibility that the guy and his friends meant well. Unfortunately, like so many other well-intentioned white people I had encountered before, racism or whiteness was apparently deeply ingrained into the very fabric of their being.

P was resigned to the fact that whiteness is part of the identity of white people and that racism is a product of that identity. His project of racial equality was frustrated by the inability of many white people to recognize that their identity is founded upon the domination and oppression of him as a person of color.
I was angry, not so much at the person who initially made the comment, but at the very fact that many whites, due to their attitudes about themselves and their often errant negative presuppositions about blacks, fail to appreciate and/or comprehend the fact that often their behavior towards those who are non white is condescending, demeaning, and belittling. Such was truly my experience on that day.

\textit{P’s frustration turns to anger as he articulates the project of many white people as one of domination and supremacy over him as a person of color. P resisted succumbing to whiteness by pointing out how many white people impose their projects of domination and supremacy through their condescending, demeaning, and belittling behavior toward him.}

Fortunately, it was time to leave so I did not have to stay around and feel the mounting tension that was rapidly developing between the whites and myself.

\textbf{R- Can you say more about that?}

I was angry, not just because of what they said, but that they could not understand their racist attitude, which again is made possible by their attitude of whiteness, and that they assumed
that I had a problem because I developed an attitude because of what they said.

_P left without being heard and felt invisible as his anger escalated. When his co-workers pointed to him as the problem, P felt trapped, and the more he attempted to explain the more invisible and the angrier he became._ Anger and physically aggressive posturing are stereotypes of people of color perpetuated by white people, and P would only validate these stereotypes if he stayed.

But all the way home I was deeply engrossed and enraged by that kind of whites’ attitude. How could they be so ignorant, I thought, to think that they were complimenting someone when, in fact, what they were actually doing was manifesting their prejudices, biases, racism?

_P tried to come to terms with how he could be so invisible as a person and how white people could be so oblivious to the affects of whiteness upon him._

I was reminded of something I’d heard ever since I was a young boy, “Whatever is in a person is what will come out of the person.” Well, I thought, I guess it’s true.

_R- Can you say more about that?_
I truly believe that not all white people are like that, but I can’t understand how so many white people can be so ignorant. I like people, and I refuse to change my attitude because of them.

*P rationalized his experiences of whiteness by locating whiteness in particular white people who expressed prejudice and racism against him and other persons of color. However, P continued to agonize over how so many white people could participate in the prejudice and racism of whiteness.*

My first inclination was not to mingle with those white guys anymore. I knew I had to work side by side with them, but I would limit my conversation only to that pertaining directly to the job.

**R- Can you say more about that?**

*I did try this for a while, but like I said I really like people and I wasn’t about to change my attitude because of them.*

There would be no extraneous talk. I would be silent and aloof. But that was not my nature. I was always affable and I was not about to allow myself to become derailed and withdrawn by that horrid social disease.

*P tried to adopt a distant and defensive stance with the white people who perpetrated the aggression and racism against*
him. However, after his bitterness subsided, P refused to live with animosity and hostility toward others. He resisted whiteness by naming its emergence in experiences of prejudice and racism perpetuated by white people. As such, his project for racial equality continued, and he refused to be defeated by the projects of domination and white supremacy of white people. Living with anger and hostility towards all white people would allow whiteness to dictate how he lived his life and it would also validate white stereotypes of him as a person of color.

To distance myself from it was not the way to combat and defeat it. My resolve was to speak out at every opportunity against their blatant and subtle demonstration of pseudo superiority of whiteness over those of us not white. And I reckoned that if the perpetrators of that type of behavior were peddling their poison in ignorance, then I would call them out and challenge them to think about the ignorance with which their perceptions and judgments are clouded.

\( P \) returned to his project for racial equality by resolving to name whiteness by pointing out white people who participate in projects that aim to dominate and oppress him as a person of color. \( P \) vowed to resist whiteness by fighting
attempts to subjugate him and refusing to internalize the myths about his inferiority as a person of color. By naming acts of aggression and domination aimed at him in the future, P will shift the focus back to whiteness by calling attention to the white people who are the aggressors and away from himself as the aggrieved person of color.

Though I was to encounter many more situations, in which whites exhibited their false air of superiority, I resolve to not allow it to get the best of me. I still do not like it; in fact I sorely detest it. In my youth I may have naively entertained false thoughts that whites had some kind of preordained rights to exert and exhibit a certain degree of superior attitude toward blacks, but maturation, an adequate level of intelligence, and simple common sense have long taught me that nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, can be further from the truth.

R- Can you say more about that?

When I was young, I went to live with my grandfather. Even if there was not a white person for miles around, my brother and I were not allowed to say anything negative about white people. My grandfather and the others around him believed that white people were superior and omniscient, and would actually hear what we were saying! This started when I was young, and when
I was a teenager I would get really angry with my grandfather. One time that I remember specifically was when a local teenager called my grandfather ‘boy’, and my grandfather responded with “yes sir,” never taking issue with being called ‘boy’! I guess this has something to do with my family having been from South Carolina before moving north to New Jersey, I don’t know. Anyway, ever since then I feel that I have been trying to prove to him that all people are equal, that he was wrong about white people’s superiority.

P’s project for racial equality was rooted in encounters with whiteness in his early childhood. P grew up believing that white people were superior and had ‘special powers’ that they used to oppress and dominate people of color. The superiority and special powers attributed to white people were validated and reinforced by significant others in P’s early years. P’s project for racial equality has developed from these early experiences. Whenever he encountered whiteness through white people’s projects that aim to dominate and oppress him as a person of color, P’s aim was to prove that he was equal and that his elders were wrong about the superiority of white people.
APPENDIX D

Protocol #2

I racked my brains for an academic or intellectual incident – or some kind of dramatic one-on-one encounter with whiteness – but I just can’t think of one. That doesn't mean one never happened but I hope this will be enough for your study. It’s about dating. I finished two years at a college which is 4% black. I didn’t look at these numbers when I applied to the school or accepted, but that is pretty low. Most large schools seem to be somewhere between 6-10% black. I’m biracial so at first that didn’t matter to me at all, but when I got there I felt entirely out of place.

I went to the public magnet schools in my hometown, which make a point of being integrated, and I grew up in a black neighborhood, so there have been black people around my whole life. I never even used to think about them or race relations seriously or in-depth – you don’t really have to when black people are all over the place.

And it’s funny, too, because when I first went to college as a freshman, as soon as I started walking around the campus I knew that something was missing. Something was different than
home. I knew that there wouldn't be many minorities when I accepted but I didn't think what that would mean. Really, the most painful part of being from a marginalized group is when you find out that you're marginalized.

Anyone who wants to say that blacks and whites are culturally the same is plain wrong. College and home are like two different worlds to me – everything is different between them. Hairstyles, slang, music preference, attitudes, cleanliness, even the brand names that people wear – these things may seem small but I had become accustomed to one world, so when I got to this new, academic world it was like a blow to the stomach or something.

At first, I had this existential dilemma – which is the real world? The protected, isolated school setting or the urban, poorer, predominantly black inner city? Of course, that depends upon the viewpoint. A Latino or Asian would argue with both of my options.

But anyway, dating. In had boyfriends in high school and I had become used to attention from males. Things were different in college. I had non-white friends at college, and they were like a haven. We used to talk about white people all the time. That was another difference that I noticed – I wouldn't have
contributed to a conversation like that before because I’m half-white. But that distinction, half-white, is sort of a luxury one can have when surrounded by non-whites. White people just lump everyone together by skin tone.

It’s ironic almost. It took a semester of living in a predominantly white setting for me to get in touch with my blackness, all this after years of living with black people! Please don’t think of me as vain, but I wasn’t really used to paucity of attention from boys. And that got me to thinking about differences in beauty standards. White girls are unlucky in the sense that there are very strict definitions of what is beautiful. Thinness is pivotal. For blacks and Latinos, the body shape is not so important. A girl can be thin or full-figured, and it doesn’t really matter so much. A rounder ass is important, and physiologically a large ass equals large thighs. That image is in complete contradiction with the beauty standards of white girls. Unfortunately, white people usually don’t question the universality of their culture, which is not their fault because they aren’t taught to. They just assume.

So black and Latina girls are inundated with beauty standards that don’t apply to them, and not to mention black and Latino boys. On the flip side, many black women are overweight.
This is not purely a racial thing because many lower-class white women are overweight as well. Joining a gym is expensive but I was faced with these new standards. I joined the gym and I began eating healthier. I began taking more interest in the tiny details of my personal appearance (nails, waxing, etc.), all of which led to a lifestyle change. This sounds superficial as hell, I know. Still, a large part of this change was due to white girls and trying to compete with them. Not compete for boys, but compete in terms of being recognized as their equal. I automatically felt that they were looking down on me so I didn’t want to give them any reasons to support their view if I could help it. What’s funny is now that I’m done, I’m thinking of much better and more impressive examples of dealing with whiteness. Everything about college was an encounter with whiteness. But remind me when we have this interview.

Interview

I racked my brains for an academic or intellectual incident – or some kind of dramatic one-on-one encounter with whiteness – but I just can’t think of one.

R- Can you say more now?

When I thought about it, there were some other things I could have said. Like incidents were I was confronted with this
attitude...like wait a minute...I couldn't believe some of the
things they had to say but they really believed it. I'm trying to
think of some examples. Sometimes it would be little things, like
with bodies: this is fat and this is skinny. There are a variety of
shapes and I would be surprised when they would say that.
Mostly it was surprising, sometimes it was offensive, but mostly I
couldn't believe that people actually believed these things.

R- Can you say more?

Sometimes I don't believe that there can be a mainstream view
in our society, but there is one, so they would follow the
mainstream view. I grew up in Hometown and there are so many
different views. Like in high school, there were black people
who listened to hip hop, and there where punks, and there were
mainstream students, but there weren't that many of them. So I
never realized that they were the mainstream of society and they
were deciding things and it was there attitudes that constituted
American attitudes.

R- Can you say more?

When I went to college I did meet a lot of different ethnicities, for
instance Latinos and West Indians, but they were such a small
percentage of the population of the college's student body.
That doesn't mean one never happened but I hope this will be
enough for your study. It’s about dating. I finished two years at college which is 4% black. I didn’t look at these numbers when I applied to the school or accepted, but that is pretty low. Most large schools seem to be somewhere between 6-10% black. I’m biracial so at first that didn’t matter to me at all, but when I got there I felt entirely out of place.

R- Can you say more?

I never really considered myself black...they needed star students, not that I am a star student but when they had a good student in high school they would send them places, they would prostitute them in order to give the school a better name. So I would get these things but I was always uncomfortable receiving the attention because I knew that it was because I was part black, black enough to satisfy the requirement, so I felt bad.

So when I went to college I thought that it wouldn’t really matter because I was part white. Like for a long time I always felt white, like I wasn’t black at all and that I was closer to white, but when I got to college and everyone was white and there were no black people at all. I realized that when they said that there were 10% minorities, if I was in a room of ten people, I was the minority, the 10%! And so when people looked at me they would see black or Hispanic, they always got confused.
I went to the public magnet schools at home, which make a point of being integrated, and I grew up in a black neighborhood, so there have been black people around my whole life. I never even used to think about them or race relations seriously or in-depth — you don’t really have to when black people are all over the place.

R- Can you say more?

Because it didn’t seem that they had a problem, it was hard to see them as a minority because they were all over the place, there are so many of them around. But again that’s an attitude thing...so when I go grocery shopping I catch a jitney home because I don’t have a car and they are rich you know, jitneys have a lot of money. They would tell me about their children and the great things that they are doing. But when a mainstream person looks at a jitney or a numbers man, they see them as deviants, poor, or lower class but they are really not, they are just not making money in the typical way. I looked at these people and thought that they did not have a problem, but I went to college and there were these white people who did things the traditional way. If your father wasn’t a doctor or lawyer...if your father was a numbers man that didn’t count towards anything.

Now there are lots of black doctors and lawyers, but it is hard for
the average black person to reach those heights.

And it's funny, too, because when I first went to college as a freshman, as soon as I started walking around the campus I knew that something was missing. Something was different than home. I knew that there wouldn't be many minorities when I accepted but I didn't think what that would mean. Really, the most painful part of being from a marginalized group is when you find out that you're marginalized.

R- Can you say more?

I never knew that black people...well I knew of course from school from black history and black politics. I knew but it was only when I went where I could see that black people were a minority, 4% of the population that I learned about a lot of things. You know they gloss over lynching in school and then I learned about these things. You know they gloss over slavery and give it a political slant, slavery wasn’t that bad. Then I learned how painful the history of blacks in America was. It really started to hurt because I realize that people look at the fake version that they teach in school and they would take that and compare it to the images they see of black people and they would say, “well this is the way that black people act.” But that's not really true; there is no justification for the way that
they are today, mostly poor or wild.

R- How do you identify yourself?

Well, people would have no problems if I were to say “As a black person we need to do this...” but if I were to say, “As a white person, I feel this way...” I think there would be some problems there.

R- Do you identify yourself as black?

Sort of... superficially, but sometimes I feel like with black girls there is such a difference. A lot of the black female bonding has to do with hair, and I never relaxed my hair or anything like that and you know my mother is white. I don’t feel uncomfortable with black people and I don’t feel uncomfortable with white people but sometimes we can’t really relate. I feel different from black girls and I feel very different from most white girls so when it comes to developing intimate friendships it comes with others.

One of my closest friends is African. She’s black but not black American. And another one of my close friends is half Native American and half white. I think that black people tend to be more open to interracial relationships or biracial people than white people because there are so many light skinned black people that black people include them as part of the family. It might be different for the biracial person because they feel part
of two different worlds, but black people tend to be a little more open. When it comes to walking down the street or doing something public like that but maybe when it comes to developing a close relationship... so I think that white people look at a biracial person as being unique. For instance television shows the difficulties of being a biracial person, “the tragic mulatto,” that’s really not true, but because they have the dominant perspective that becomes true. Sometimes it gets a little hard, but it’s not tragic!

Anyone who wants to say that blacks and whites are culturally the same is plain wrong. College and home are like two different worlds to me, everything is different between them. Hairstyles, slang, music preference, attitudes, cleanliness, even the brand names that people wear; these things may seem small but I had become accustomed to one world, so when I got to this new, academic world it was like a blow to the stomach or something.

R- Can you say more?

I couldn’t believe it at first, I didn’t know how to react, and I didn’t know how I was supposed to react. I realized that when I was the 10%, the one minority in a roomful of ten people, I have to act a certain way and so the options are so limited. You can
assimilate and it proves to white people that they are right, that their attitude is the universal attitude in that they are not doing anything wrong because here is a black person and she can tough it out, and she has no complaints. Or I can go to the other extreme and turn into an African queen. I can sympathize with Afro-centricity and I have no problem with an Afro-centric world-view, but because I am biracial, it just doesn’t work.

So that’s why I had to be myself. When white people would say things that had racist overtones I would not let them off the hook just because they don’t know what they are saying. I would tell them that what they were doing was wrong, and when you act a certain way that, maybe this is too vague, I am a literature major and there is this whole idea of universality. I read that they told this to Toni Morrison, that your experience shouldn’t be black.

When people read your book they shouldn’t know that you are black. When you read a book by Stephen King however, it is obvious that he is a white person. They think that the white experience is a universal experience and nothing should deviate from that experience. If it does, then it is bad literature. Too ethnic, or something like that, and that is ridiculous. When you come to a book from someone from a different culture, you should just read it and take something out of it. Maybe that’s
true, but there is also a sect that says you should know
something about the culture before you read the book and then
you'll be able to take more out of it. People are writing from their
own experience. And it was funny, the book was even Russian
and it was about Central Asiatic people and there was an
argument about not understanding it. And that was because they
did not know about the Asiatic people! I read articles about their
culture and their religion, and now I understand why they write in
Arabic! They (other students) did not want to do that, not only
because it was more work for them, but also it would have meant
admitting that their view was not universal. And they would have
to go outside of themselves to get something from people from
another background. And even though black people are part of
American society, they are sort of a distinct group. When you
read an article by an African-American it helps to be familiar
with the things that they are dealing with. When you read a Toni
Morrison novel, and I don't even like Toni Morrison, it is helpful
to be familiar with the black community and the things that they
are facing, but they don't want to do that.

At first, I had this existential dilemma – which is the real world?

R- Can you say more about that?

I remember asking my friend, “Which world is real?” And she
said that you are on an academic track so for you this is the real world but for the cashier or bus driver back home, that is their world. Again, were do I fit in? I grew up in my hometown but now I’m at college and this is moving up. I could have gone to Pitt, or Howard, but instead I went to College. This is a step up, the Ivy League, even though I didn’t feel that it was jumping from one place to another place. I miss college, I miss some of my classes, I miss my teachers, I miss the type of students who I could be friends with but being there I miss black people, black people are funny, you know being in the city, I miss the comfort of having them around. Sometimes at college they would have dance hall nights featuring hip hop and you would see all these black people, and I wondered where they all came from? It was a shock, but I don’t like that it has to be a shock, because now there are black people all over the place and I’m not shocked. I wish that it could be one way.

The protected, isolated school setting or the urban, poorer, predominantly black inner city? Of course, that depends upon the viewpoint. A Latino or Asian would argue with both of my options. But anyway, dating. In had boyfriends in high school and I had become used to attention from males. Things were different in college.
R- Can you say more about that?

Not that every man was looking at me, but some would find me attractive, and that was nice. But then I went to college. The men there were mostly white from a certain socio-economic background had there own idea of what was attractive, like Heather, or Rachel down the hall and say this is the hot girl. And I would look at her and I would say she’s pretty, maybe a little too thin, but I would understand why they are attracted to her but that doesn’t mean that Kanesha isn’t pretty too. So everyone is paying attention to the white girls and they are held up as the standard of beauty. Meanwhile the Latinos are looking at Maritza and the blacks are looking at Kanesha undercover. It’s not fair, I understand why but I don’t think they recognize that their standard is universal, that’s why she is the cover girl. I had non-white friends at college, and they were like a haven. We used to talk about white people all the time. That was another difference that I noticed – I wouldn’t have contributed to a conversation like that before because I’m half-white.

R- Can you say more about that?

My mom is white and I didn’t want to disrespect her, but I would think this is just complaining. But then when I became a marginalized person and I wasn’t the star student I realized that
white people would just assume that I was in a class because of Affirmative Action. That’s when I realized there was something to complain about.

R- Can you say more?

Even though the minorities would be vehement in their discussions and sometimes it was ridiculous, but other times they had something to say and a white person would walk in and they would drop it. Out of politeness to the white person, you don’t want to talk about someone when they are there, you don’t want to offend them. But that is contributing to the situation when you don’t raise your complaints, your criticism, with them. At college they would have plenty of minority events and speakers. They had Spike Lee films, they love Spike Lee, they had talks about reparations and stuff like that, but the people who really needed to go didn’t. So the black people would go and the Latinos would go and talk about it among themselves, but the people with the power, the ones whose attitudes and ideas needed to change, didn’t.

R- Can you say more about that?

Well, maybe they (non-white people) were afraid, maybe because this is the way it has been for so long, they don’t want to mess with it. That’s the attitude that I see with minorities
toward white people, oh just let them be. They have been doing it so long just let them be. I think that’s what it was; they were just letting them be.

But that distinction, half-white, is sort of a luxury one can have when surrounded by non-whites. White people just lump everyone together by skin tone.

R- Is it an issue between non-white people?

It is an issue in the black community when the light skinned girl is saying she isn’t as good as me. I don’t think it’s that big of an issue. There is a black sorority that had the paper bag test. If you were darker than a paper bag you couldn’t join the sorority. And that’s true if you look back to the 30’s and 40’s, but I think a lot of those ideas have changed. I think that more economically well off black people are more interested in becoming white, there were some more active black people at college and some who were not, that I think would rather be white. But I think those are exceptions. Whites want to believe that we are all the same, but minorities know that we are not the same. We would like to be equal. White people think that we are all the same, but we don’t have to be equal. They say you can all live in the ghetto, and pretend that we are all the same.

It's ironic almost. It took a semester of living in a predominantly
white setting for me to get in touch with my blackness, all this after years of living with black people! Please don’t think of me as vain, but I wasn’t really used to paucity of attention from boys. And that got me to thinking about differences in beauty standards. White girls are unlucky in the sense that there are very strict definitions of what is beautiful. Thinness is pivotal. For blacks and Latinos, the body shape is not so important. A girl can be thin or full-figured, and it doesn’t really matter so much. A rounder ass is important, and physiologically a large ass equals large thighs. That image is in complete contradiction with the beauty standards of white girls. Unfortunately, white people usually don’t question the universality of their culture, which is not their fault because they aren’t taught to. They just assume.

R- Can you say more about that?

Some white people get it, but the vast majority does not. While black people, speaking politically, vote overwhelmingly democratic. Both political parties assume white standards. The republicans say we don’t expect you to become white or become equal with us. We blame you for not being equal; it’s your fault. We are not going to fund affirmative action programs that help you rise up from your current situation, which they have caused,
but they won’t admit. A democrat would say we expect you to be white; we have full trust in your capability to assimilate to our culture and become civilized. Nothing really fits a black person or any minorities needs and it limits your options because white people are the majority and the dominant culture, everywhere you go you are faced with whiteness. Even in black neighborhoods you go into the store and see the white super model, and Italians own the shops or Jews and you can’t escape it. You would think out of respect for black people that they would have images of black people in black neighborhoods. Now they are starting to, but it is always astonishing to see images of blond haired blue-eyed white people advertising beauty products that black people are using. A black person might say this is what they do, but I say that white people are just not thinking, because I did not think that way either. You don’t think about it because you don’t have to.

So black and Latina girls are inundated with beauty standards that don’t apply to them, and not to mention black and Latino boys. On the flip side, many black women are overweight. This is not purely a racial thing because many lower-class white women are overweight as well. Joining a gym is expensive, but I was faced with these new standards. I joined the gym and I
began eating healthier. I began taking more interest in the tiny
details of my personal appearance (nails, waxing, etc.), all of
which led to a lifestyle change. This sounds superficial as hell, I
know. Still, a large part of this change was due to white girls
and trying to compete with them. Not compete for boys, but
compete in terms of being recognized as their equal. I
automatically felt that they were looking down on me so I didn’t
want to give them any reasons to support their view if I could
help it.

R- Can you say more?

Just to be considered equal with white girls... I mean I don’t
think that black people have the same standards. A heavier black
girl would be voluptuous, but a heavier white girl is just fat. The
standards are very rigid.

What’s funny is now that I’m done, I’m thinking of much better
and more impressive examples of dealing with whiteness.
Everything about college was an encounter with whiteness. But
remind me when we have this interview.
I racked my brains for an academic or intellectual incident – or some kind of dramatic one-on-one encounter with whiteness – but I just can’t think of one.

Initially, P struggled to recall dramatic encounters with whiteness.

R- Can you say more now?

When I thought about it, there were some other things I could have said. Like incidents were I was confronted with this attitude...like wait a minute...I couldn’t believe some of the things they had to say but they really believed it. I’m trying to think of some examples. Sometimes it would be little things, like with bodies: this is fat and this is skinny. There are a variety of shapes and I would be surprised when they would say that. Mostly it was surprising, sometimes it was offensive, but mostly I couldn’t believe that people actually believed these things.

P was able to recall being confronted by white people with “attitudes.” She was offended when these white people imposed rigid standards upon her that caught her off guard. P was distressed by the harshness of these standards and the lack of an invitation to express her own views. The force that was applied by these white people was hidden behind
the lack of significance of the subject matter.

R- Can you say more?

Sometimes I don’t believe that there can be a mainstream view in our society, but there is one, so they would follow the mainstream view. I grew up at home and there are so many different views. Like in high school, there were black people who listened to hip hop, and there were punks, and there were mainstream students, but there weren’t that many of them. So I never realized that they were the mainstream of society and they were deciding things and it was there attitudes that constituted American attitudes.

P was startled by the callousness of the white people who confronted her. Their “whiteness” was manifested in attitudes that excluded P. P was affected by being excluded because of the stark contrast with her experience of being included growing up in a racially diverse community.

R- Can you say more?

When I went to college I did meet a lot of different ethnicities, for instance Latinos and West Indians, but they were such a small percentage of the population of college’s student body.

P’s experience of whiteness made the presence of people of color significant for her.
That doesn't mean one never happened but I hope this will be enough for your study. It's about dating. I finished two years at college which is 4% black. I didn't look at these numbers when I applied to the school or accepted, but that is pretty low. Most large schools seem to be somewhere between 6-10% black. I'm biracial so at first that didn't matter to me at all, but when I got there I felt entirely out of place.

R- Can you say more?

I never really considered myself black...they needed star students, not that I am a star student but when they had a good student in high school they would send them places, they would prostitute them in order to give the school a better name. So I would get these things but I was always uncomfortable receiving the attention because I knew that it was because I was part black, black enough to satisfy the requirement, so I felt bad. So when I went to college I thought that it wouldn't really matter because I was part white. Like for a long time I always felt white, like I wasn't black at all and that I was closer to white, but when I got to college and everyone was white and there were no black people at all. I realized that when they said that there were 10% minorities, if I was in a room of ten people, I was the minority, the 10%! And so when people looked at me they would
see black or Hispanic, they always got confused.

P’s encounter with whiteness and her subsequent exclusion disrupted her sense of self by blocking her project of being accepted as “white.” For P, being biracial had meant being accepted both as a black person or as a white person depending on the situation. Being excluded from participating as a white person shifted her sense of self-identity to blackness. This shift resulted in a revisiting of situations in high school, where P received special attention for her achievements. P is saddened by the possibility that this special attention was in large part due to her being black. P’s blackness was significant for her, and the sudden and profound shift to blackness in her encounter with whiteness left her feeling confused about her identity. P’s shift to blackness also made the scarcity of black people at college significant for her.

I went to the public magnet schools at home, which make a point of being integrated, and I grew up in a black neighborhood, so there have been black people around my whole life. I never even used to think about them or race relations seriously or in-depth – you don’t really have to when black people are all over the place.
R- Can you say more?

Because it didn’t seem that they had a problem, it was hard to see them as a minority because they were all over the place, there are so many of them around. But again that’s an attitude thing...so when I go grocery shopping I catch a jitney home because I don’t have a car and they are rich you know, jitneys have a lot of money. They would tell me about their children and the great things that they are doing. But when a mainstream person looks at a jitney or a numbers man, they see them as deviants, poor, or lower class but they are really not, they are just not making money in the typical way. I looked at these people and thought that they did not have a problem, but I went to college and there were these white people who did things the traditional way. If your father wasn’t a doctor or lawyer...if your father was a numbers man that didn’t count towards anything. Now there are lots of black doctors and lawyers, but it is hard for the average black person to reach those heights.

P grew up in a black community and felt accepted as a person without regard for her biracial status. Race and race relations were not as significant for her until she encountered whiteness at college. One of the ways in which whiteness became more significant for her was through the
supremacy manifested by particular white people at college. These white people ranked others by their standards and claimed superiority over those who did not meet them. P was angered by the blatant racism of these white people and defended the black people in her community. She pointed out the social responsibility and general humanity of the black people in her community who lived by standards that were disparaged by those who manifested their whiteness. Whiteness became more significant for P in her encounter with white people who aimed to dominate and exclude her and other people of color.

And it's funny, too, because when I first went to college as a freshman, as soon as I started walking around the campus I knew that something was missing. Something was different than home. I knew that there wouldn't be many minorities when I accepted but I didn't think what that would mean. Really, the most painful part of being from a marginalized group is when you find out that you're marginalized.

R- Can you say more?

I never knew that black people...well I knew of course from school from black history and black politics. I knew but it was only when I went where I could see that black people were a
minority, 4% of the population that I learned about a lot of things. You know they gloss over lynching in school and then I learned about these things. You know they gloss over slavery and give it a political slant, slavery wasn’t that bad. Then I learned how painful the history of blacks in America was. It really started to hurt because I realize that people look at the fake version that they teach in school and they would take that and compare it to the images they see of black people and they would say, “well this is the way that black people act.” But that’s not really true; there is no justification for the way that they are today, mostly poor or wild.

P’s encounter with whiteness meant being immersed in a community predominated by white people who manifested whiteness in their attitudes, beliefs, and comportment towards her. She felt out of place and not at home in this community, excluded from participating as an equal member. She did not know what to expect, but she assumed that being half white would qualify her as a member. Being excluded and oppressed was painful for P, and she longed for the sense of inclusion that she had taken for granted in the predominantly black community of her youth. Encountering white people who manifested whiteness made it incarnate for
her, and connected P with her blackness in a way that she had never before experienced. P's experience with whiteness connected her with her ancestry, and P gained insight into the manner in which whiteness subtly hides from the atrocities perpetrated by many white people against her ancestors.

R- How do you identify yourself?
Well, people would have no problems if I were to say “As a black person we need to do this...” but if I were to say, “As a white person, I feel this way...” I think there would be some problems there.

P believed that having a white mother would enable her to gain access as a white person, but this belief was shattered in her encounter with whiteness.

R- Do you identify yourself as black?
Sort of... superficially, but sometimes I feel like with black girls there is such a difference. A lot of the black female bonding has to do with hair, and I never relaxed my hair or anything like that and you know my mother is white. I don’t feel uncomfortable with black people and I don’t feel uncomfortable with white people but sometimes we can’t really relate. I feel different from black girls and I feel very different from most white girls so when
it comes to developing intimate friendships it comes with others. One of my closest friends is African. She’s black but not black American. And another one of my close friends is half Native American and half white. I think that black people tend to be more open to interracial relationships or biracial people than white people because there are so many light skinned black people that black people include them as part of the family. It might be different for the biracial person because they feel part of two different worlds, but black people tend to be a little more open. When it comes to walking down the street or doing something public like that but maybe when it comes to developing a close relationship...so I think that white people look at a biracial person as being unique, for instance television shows the difficulties of being a biracial person, “the tragic mulatto,” that’s really not true, but because they have the dominant perspective that becomes true. Sometimes it gets a little hard, but it’s not tragic!

While P’s encounter with whiteness did connect her with her blackness, her biracial status keeps her from completely identifying herself as black. P was able to have intimate relationships with others who are not part of the black/white interracial antagonism that she became a part of after her
encounter with whiteness. Prior to her encounter, P was accepted as a member of a community and took her inclusion for granted. P no longer took her inclusion in the community of her youth for granted, and she came to understand why her situation is “tragic.” Being biracial meant that P was not white, and for her that meant she was excluded from participating in the community at large. Her project of inclusion in the community at large had been blocked by the project of whiteness to exclude her because she was “impure.”

Anyone who wants to say that blacks and whites are culturally the same is plain wrong. College and home are like two different worlds to me, everything is different between them. Hairstyles, slang, music preference, attitudes, cleanliness, even the brand names that people wear; these things may seem small but I had become accustomed to one world, so when I got to this new, academic world it was like a blow to the stomach or something. The differences between the open and diverse community that she was familiar with and the new, rigid, hostile and closed world that she had entered became striking for her. For P, being excluded as well as subtly but definitively dominated and oppressed by white people who incarnate
whiteness was like being physically assaulted.

R- Can you say more?

I couldn’t believe it at first, I didn’t know how to react, and I didn’t know how I was supposed to react. I realized that when I was the 10%, the one minority in a roomful of ten people, I have to act a certain way and so the options are so limited. You can assimilate and it proves to white people that they are right, that their attitude is the universal attitude in that they are not doing anything wrong because here is a black person and she can tough it out, and she has no complaints. Or I can go to the other extreme and turn into an African queen. I can sympathize with Afro-centricity and I have no problem with an Afro-centric world-view, but because I am biracial, it just doesn’t work.

P was lost when the standards of whiteness were imposed upon her. She was excluded from participation as a white person, and she was expected to be a “minority,” a person who is excluded and who is expected to submit to the identity created for her by white people. P’s encounter with “whiteness incarnate” left her with a dilemma: submit to the identity imposed upon her or adopt the counter identity based in Afro-centricity. However, P’s being part of both sides of this antagonism left her unable to participate in
Afro-centricity.

So that’s why I had to be myself. When white people would say things that had racist overtones I would not let them off the hook just because they don’t know what they are saying. I would tell them that what they were doing was wrong, and when you act a certain way that, maybe this is too vague, I am a literature major and there is this whole idea of universality, I read that they told this to Toni Morrison, that your experience shouldn’t be black. When people read your book they shouldn’t know that you are black. When you read a book by Stephen King however, it is obvious that he is a white person. They think that the white experience is a universal experience and nothing should deviate from that experience. If it does, then it is bad literature. Too ethnic, or something like that, and that is ridiculous. When you come to a book from someone from a different culture, you should just read it and take something out of it. Maybe that’s true, but there is also a sect that says you should know something about the culture before you read the book and then you’ll be able to take more out of it. People are writing from their own experience. And it was funny, the book was even Russian and it was about Central Asiatic people and there was an argument about not understanding it. And that was because they
did not know about the Asiatic people! I read articles about their culture and their religion, and now I understand why they write in Arabic! They (other students) did not want to do that, not only because it was more work for them, but also it would have meant admitting that their view was not universal. And they would have to go outside of themselves to get something from people from another background. And even though black people are part of American society, they are sort of a distinct group. When you read an article by an African-American it helps to be familiar with the things that they are dealing with. When you read a Toni Morrison novel, and I don’t even like Toni Morrison, it is helpful to be familiar with the black community and the things that they are facing, but they don’t want to do that.

P’s attempted to resolve her dilemma by deciding to take a stand against white people who manifest whiteness through subtle racist attitudes, beliefs, and comportment towards her and other people of color. Her project became naming whiteness and ending its imposition as a universal standard for all people. P would no longer allow white people to exclude her or other people of color and perpetuate the myth of white supremacy and superiority under the disguise of innocence. P’s encounter with whiteness left her angry with
white people that she encountered who refused to move beyond their own beliefs and attitudes and be open to her as an equal, fellow human being. The anger that P experienced still lives for her, though she had hoped to transform her anger into a project to expose whiteness through its false claims of superiority and its project of domination of her and other people of color.

At first, I had this existential dilemma – which is the real world?

R- Can you say more about that?

I remember asking my friend, “Which world is real?” And she said that you are on an academic track so for you this is the real world but for the cashier or bus driver back home, that is their world. Again, were do I fit in? I grew up at home but now I’m at college and this is moving up. I could have gone to Pitt, or Howard, but instead I went to college. This is a step up, the Ivy League, even though I didn’t feel that it was jumping from one place to another place. I miss college, I miss some of my classes, I miss my teachers, I miss the type of students who I could be friends with but being there I miss black people, black people are funny, you know being in the city, I miss the comfort of having them around. Some times at college they would have dance hall nights featuring hip hop and you would see all these
black people, and I wondered where they all came from? It was a shock, but I don’t like that it has to be a shock, because now there are black people all over the place and I’m not shocked. I wish that it could be one way.

P’s encounter with whiteness created an “existential dilemma” for her. Her previous ability to live comfortably included in a community was in stark contrast to her experience of exclusion in a community dominated by whiteness. Being self-conscious of her non-white status was new for P, and she was not prepared for the conflict that she experienced at College. P discussed her ambivalence with friends: she was torn between being comfortable in a community surrounded by black people that had limited future possibilities, versus being uncomfortable and excluded in a community dominated by white people that was full of possibilities for her. P wished that she could both remain in the community that was full of possibilities and feel comfortable and included at the same time.

The protected, isolated school setting or the urban, poorer, predominantly black inner city? Of course, that depends upon the viewpoint. A Latino or Asian would argue with both of my options.
But anyway, dating. In high school and I had become used to attention from males. Things were different in college.

R- Can you say more about that?

Not that every man was looking at me, but some would find me attractive, and that was nice. But then I want to college. The men there were mostly white from a certain socio-economic background had there own idea of what was attractive, like Heather, or Rachel down the hall and say this is the hot girl.

And I would look at her and I would say she’s pretty, maybe a little too thin, but I would understand why they are attracted to her but that doesn’t mean that Kanesha isn’t pretty too. So everyone is paying attention to the white girls and they are held up as the standard of beauty. Meanwhile the Latinos are looking at Maritza and the blacks are looking at Kanesha undercover.

It’s not fair, I understand why but I don’t think they recognize that their standard is universal, that’s why she is the cover girl.

I had non-white friends at college, and they were like a haven. We used to talk about white people all the time. That was another difference that I noticed – I wouldn’t have contributed to a conversation like that before because I’m half-white.

R- Can you say more about that?
My mom is white and I didn’t want to disrespect her, but I would think this is just complaining. But then when I became a marginalized person and I wasn’t the star student I realized that white people would just assume that I was in a class because of Affirmative Action. That’s when I realized there was something to complain about.

Being excluded meant that P did not meet the standards for beauty at college, in contrast to her earlier experience in high school. She resented that the white women who were the standard bearers for all others to emulate received all of the attention. The women of color did receive attention from the men of color, but it was out of the purview of the white people who created the standards. P’s resentment for being excluded from attention because she did not meet the rigid standards for beauty imposed upon her resulted in her contributing to conversations that were critical of white people who manifested whiteness. Previously, P would not participate in these conversations because she was half-white, and she had not experienced the sting of being marginalized as a person of color. Being marginalized by white people who incarnated whiteness angered P, and her self-consciousness opened her to the lived meanings of
whiteness for persons of color.

R- Can you say more?

Even though the minorities would be vehement in their discussions and sometimes it was ridiculous, but other times they had something to say and a white person would walk in and they would drop it. Out of politeness to the white person, you don’t want to talk about someone when they are there, you don’t want to offend them. But that is contributing to the situation when you don’t raise your complaints, your criticism, with them. At college they would have plenty of minority events and speakers. They had Spike Lee films, they love Spike Lee, they had talks about reparations and stuff like that, but the people who really needed to go didn’t. So the black people would go and the Latinos would go and talk about it among themselves, but the people with the power, the ones whose attitudes and ideas needed to change, didn’t.

R- Can you say more about that?

Well, maybe they (non-white people) were afraid, maybe because this is the way it has been for so long, they don’t want to mess with it. That’s the attitude that I see with minorities toward white people, oh just let them be. They have been doing it so long just let them be. I think that’s what it was; they were
just letting them be.

*P was frustrated with her inability to speak to the white people who manifested whiteness about the social oppression that she experienced. Even though forums were provided for the discussion of these issues, white people who manifested whiteness unawares did not participate. Both sides of the racial divide disappointed P: white people for not recognizing the affect of their participation in whiteness, and persons of color for not being loud and clear about their complaints. Being biracial meant that P embodied and incarnated this racial dichotomy, and her encounter with whiteness left her “living” out the conflict in the split between white people and persons of color.*

But that distinction – half-white – is sort of a luxury one can have when surrounded by non-whites. White people just lump everyone together by skin tone.

**R- Is it an issue between non-white people?**

*It is an issue in the black community when the light skinned girl is saying she isn’t as good as me. I don’t think it’s that big of an issue. There is a black sorority that had the paper bag test. If you were darker than a paper bag you couldn’t join the sorority. And that’s true if you look back to the 30’s and 40’s, but I think a*
lot of those ideas have changed. I think that more economically well off black people are more interested in becoming white, there were some more active black people at college and some who were not, that I think would rather be white. But I think those are exceptions. Whites want to believe that we are all the same, but minorities know that we are not the same. We would like to be equal. White people think that we are all the same, but we don't have to be equal. They say you can all live in the ghetto, and pretend that we are all the same.

It's ironic almost. It took a semester of living in a predominantly white setting for me to get in touch with my blackness, all this after years of living with black people! Please don't think of me as vain, but I wasn't really used to paucity of attention from boys. And that got me to thinking about differences in beauty standards. White girls are unlucky in the sense that there are very strict definitions of what is beautiful. Thinness is pivotal. For blacks and Latinos, the body shape is not so important. A girl can be thin or full-figured, and it doesn't really matter so much. A rounder ass is important, and physiologically a large ass equals large thighs. That image is in complete contradiction with the beauty standards of white girls. Unfortunately, white people usually don't question the universality of their culture,
which is not their fault because they aren’t taught to. They just assume.

*P felt included in a racially diverse community were skin color was not a focal issue. Her exclusion from participating as a white person meant that P identified herself as a person of color. Previously, P’s mixed ancestry was not an issue, but her ranking as a person of color by white people who manifested whiteness made her socially and racially conscious. Being affected by whiteness meant that P would begin her own project for racial equality, which meant being treated equally as a person without submitting to the standards imposed upon her by white people who incarnated whiteness. P does not desire to be white; being a person of color allows her to accept herself. She does not want to be judged by the same rigid and unforgiving standards that she saw imposed upon white women.*

R- Can you say more about that?

Some white people get it, but the vast majority does not. While black people, speaking politically, vote overwhelmingly democratic. Both political parties assume white standards. The republicans say we don’t expect you to become white or become equal with us. We blame you for not being equal; it’s your fault.
We are not going to fund affirmative action programs that help you rise up from your current situation, which they have caused, but they won’t admit. A democrat would say we expect you to be white; we have full trust in your capability to assimilate to our culture and become civilized. Nothing really fits a black person or any minorities needs and it limits your options because white people are the majority and the dominant culture, everywhere you go you are faced with whiteness. Even in black neighborhoods you go into the store and see the white super model, and Italians own the shops or Jews and you can’t escape it. You would think out of respect for black people that they would have images of black people in black neighborhoods. Now they are starting to, but it is always astonishing to see images of blond haired blue-eyed white people advertising beauty products that black people are using. A black person might say this is what they do, but I say that white people are just not thinking, because I did not think that way either. You don’t think about it because you don’t have to.

P’s encounter has made her more attuned to whiteness.

Whiteness was ubiquitous for P, and she saw the standards that are imposed upon her everywhere she looked. She felt that she had only two choices, one was to be forced to
accept her situation and “tough it out” and the other was to submit to the standards imposed upon her and impose them upon herself. However, P was unable to accept either choice. Taking full responsibility for being excluded or forcing herself to internalize the standards of whiteness were not options for her. Being biracial left P confused and struggling with the affects of her encounter with whiteness, the limited options did not work for her.

So black and Latina girls are inundated with beauty standards that don’t apply to them, and not to mention black and Latino boys. On the flip side, many black women are overweight. This is not purely a racial thing because many lower-class white women are overweight as well. Joining a gym is expensive but I was faced with these new standards. I joined the gym and I began eating healthier. I began taking more interest in the tiny details of my personal appearance (nails, waxing, etc.), all of which led to a lifestyle change. This sounds superficial as hell, I know. Still, a large part of this change was due to white girls and trying to compete with them. Not compete for boys, but compete in terms of being recognized as their equal. I automatically felt that they were looking down on me so I didn’t want to give them any reasons to support their view if I could
In spite of her objections to the standards imposed upon her, 

P found herself submitting to them. P was deeply 
affected by her exclusion from participation as a white 
person. She felt less powerful than the white girls who were 
ranked above her by the white people who manifested 
whiteness. She chose to combat her lower rank by 
conforming to the standards of whiteness rather than 
participating in projects to counter the domination of 
whiteness.

R- Can you say more?

Just to be considered equal with white girls... I mean I don’t 
think that black people have the same standards. A heavier black 
girl would be voluptuous, but a heavier white girl is just fat. The 
standards are very rigid.

What’s funny is now that I'm done, I'm thinking of much better 
and more impressive examples of dealing with whiteness. 

Everything about college was an encounter with whiteness. But 
remind me when we have this interview.
APPENDIX E

Protocol #3

Before I start off by describing a situation in which I was affected by whiteness, I must say that, for me, whiteness gives rise to two very different kinds of feelings. The word white is so loaded. My initial associations to whiteness are Pure, Clean, Innocent . . . Sacred even. Like crisp white sheets, clean white laundry, and spotless white gloves.

Yet when I reflect on situations in which I was affected by whiteness, I invariably recall negative situations that I wish I hadn't lived. Some of these recollections stay with me like the way smoke clings to fabrics. They leave a disgusting aftertaste, way worse than souring milk. I am trying to understand the dichotomy of images: from the pristine world of household things to the shaming personal encounters. All of these are implied in whiteness.

Perhaps the two dichotomous notions are related, implying and playing off of each other. Every situation in which I was affected by "whiteness" is one in which my being non-white has led to at best being unjustly judged or at worst physically harmed. So instead of being treated as good or decent or
"white," I became something of a spectacle and viewed curiously, suspiciously, or hatefully.

In each instance of whiteness, I felt less than who I am, less than an individual, less than a human being. Less is the key word. And this gives me pause. I do not want to be misunderstood. Even though each instance left me feeling as though I was lacking something--the same something that I have never had control over namely my non-whiteness--I know that no one can "make" me feel that way. I don't want to blame whiteness for my negative feelings. I know that I must have brought some of that feeling less to the situations. The instances of whiteness just brought that feeling to the fore and maybe magnified it.

Obviously, by now you know that I am not physically white, though I have been to white schools and lived in white neighborhoods, and have numerous white friends. No matter what, I still see whiteness as something other than what I am even though I have been surrounded by it, steeped in it, and know it well. It is still, somehow not me, not of me, and not where I'm from.

During my teens, another non-white friend asked: "Ever wish you could be white?" I was startled to realize that I had
NEVER wished to be white. I found that surprising at the time, and I think I still do. The thought never even occurred to me. I still never wish to be white. Maybe it's because I am not one to make unrealistic wishes and I've never passed myself off as having "a really good tan." Or maybe it's because all I've ever wanted was just to fit in, not change my physicality and heritage in order to do so.

Being white? What would that be like? I would feel like I could do more, blend in more, and not stick out so much. Something about de-individuation and getting away with more... I think I would feel more anonymous and therefore, more powerful. There is something about whiteness being the dominant culture and the majority. The majority rules, you know. The rest feel somewhat subjugated or subjects of the majority, but white people are stereotyped as often as non-white folk. And I suppose being white comes with a cross to bear. It's not easy to be blamed for the sins of fathers from whom one is so far removed.

Now, I suppose I ought to answer your question more directly by recalling a specific event. I have several, but some are too painful to discuss. I'm not aware of my non-whiteness most of the time. Most of the time, I'm just living my life, with an
acceptance of my non-whiteness on the back burner. It's more
preconscious and not always conscious. It's only when certain
events startle me back to my non-white self that I remember that
I'm not white.

Here's my situation: It started out like any other day. The
basic routine was the same: I got up, got ready, had a hurried
breakfast, grabbed my keys, and set off for work. So all I was
thinking about was work: how I had to get there fast, how much I
had to do that day, etc. Nothing different than nearly any other
day, except this was the first day that I saw the owner of the
white pick-up truck that's always parked in the nearby vicinity.
As I pulled out of the little driveway that leads from the
apartment building, the white pick-up truck that I sort-of
recognized, was parked there. To give you a visual image, we
were at right angles to each other, sort-of perpendicular-like.
His was a beat-up truck. It looked like it had been through a lot.
And I guess, maybe he had been through a lot too. He was just
in my face, he was my neighbor and this situation just popped
up. I've driven beat up cars before, but right now I'm in one that
isn't so visibly beat up. In fact, it looks more new than old.

Well, I waited at the edge of the driveway area before
pulling onto the street as I normally do. As I was looking both
ways, I noticed that he was staring at me from inside his truck. I think that I stared back blankly, in one of those sleepy absent-minded "Huh?" looks. Only I had my sunglasses on, so I don't know how sleepy I looked to him. I normally don't stare at men I don't know, but again, I wasn't staring out of interest, but more out of curiosity. So it was a combination of just returning the stare and wondering what was going on. I also have a little blurry vision, especially when I first wake up and with the sun, I couldn't completely see the details of his face. So I was also wondering if he was saying something that I couldn't quite grasp because of the blurriness of my vision. I think I sort of half nodded, as if to acknowledge that I had seen him and he had seen me. But not in a familiar "I know you," kind of way. Anyway, this all happened rather quickly like within a few minutes. Then, he gave me the finger. I sort of peered closer to see what he was saying and then I realized he was gesturing, and then I guess I'm sort of slow in the morning, I realized he was giving me the finger. I think my jaw relaxed a little. I'm saying that my jaw sort of dropped but my mouth wasn't wide open. I was given the finger by a total stranger for no reason except maybe for staring and nodding. And since when did people give other people the finger for staring? I was stunned
and sat there for a few seconds longer thinking, what was that? What did I do? Why did he do that? That was so mean. All those thoughts really, all together, all jumbled up.

Then, I thought, well, if he gave me the finger, I don't want to pull out in front of him. That would be seen as me being aggressive or something and I didn't want him to attack me. So I thought I had better stay put. I'll let him go first. My heart was beating faster, cause I was nervous and feeling really rattled by that. I tried to look away but still keep my guard up, but not stare or look at him directly. Part of me wanted to go up to him and say, "HEY? What the hell? What did I do?? What is your problem??" But I looked around and saw there were "no witnesses" except for a little bent over elderly man who was hobbling up the street with his back to us. So no one could "rescue" me and plus, I realized that would be a dumb thing to do.

I did have to get out of the car to close the garage door and did so really quickly. The door closer button was right near my car door but I have to get out to reach it. So I didn't have to walk near him or anything. So out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that he was taking his own sweet time getting his car in gear and warming it up. He didn't take fifteen minutes, but at
that point, it felt like he did. I think he probably took five minutes that stretched out unbearably. As soon as he pulled out of his parallel parking spot which shouldn't have been hard because there was no one in front or behind him. There couldn't be anyone in front of him because that would be blocking the apartment driveway which was where I was, further up that driveway. He then left in a smooth, unhurried way. Like it was old hat for him to give people the finger and simply drive off. My heart was still beating a little faster and I pulled away slowly, so slowly like at a snail's pace almost. Then, once I was off that street, I picked up the pace and reached my normal speed. I put the radio on, I think and started humming some tunes. I was just trying to forget the whole thing. Finally, I got to work.

I didn't think about it the whole day, mainly because I was so busy, there wasn't any time to devote to it. A few days later, maybe a week later, I was talking about that and some other situations with another non-white friend at work. When I got to the part about him giving me the finger which I still couldn't understand why, she immediately said: "You're not better than me." Then she clarified that that was what he was thinking: "Don't think you're better than me." I think she's right, now that I think about it.
Because it was like old beat up car, newer car, young white
guy with muscles, young non-white female with no discernible
muscles. Don't think you're better than me. That was the
message. And I only got it later, loud and clear. It's so amazing
to me because the idea of being better than anyone, especially a
complete stranger is just not the way that I think. I was just
doing my thing, going to work, pursuing the basic right to life,
liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, well, ok employment, and I
got attacked with a profane gesture. I think it's interesting that
he was in a white pick-up truck. Just white guy in white pick-up
truck. Talk about whiteness, and non-white me in a bluish-
blackish car. And feeling sort of black and blue too, after that
encounter.

An ironic thing here is that, a while later, I had to get my
car fixed and the rental car company that I needed to use while
my car was in the shop, well they had ONLY a white pick-up
truck or a huge white minivan for me to drive. Sort of funny, isn't
it? I ended up picking the white pick-up truck because I had
zero visibility in the minivan and felt that that wouldn't be safe.
So anyway, I didn't even remember the whole pick up truck guy
incident not consciously, anyway at that time. And I have seen
that guy since then, and whenever I do, I look away. I'm not
sure if he still gives me the finger or not because I just look away now. I just got a kick out of driving something that was so obviously not-me. I mean NO ONE can imagine me in a white pick-up or any pick-up. I enjoyed driving it. IS this identification with the aggressor? I felt like such a bad ass. I remember chuckling to myself thinking, "What an experience! I'm driving a pick up truck. I'm driving a pick-up truck. ME! I can't believe I'm driving a white pick-up!" It felt rugged and strong and like I was someone who could build things.

I also noticed that no one gave me second looks in that truck. In fact, no one looked at me at all, except occasionally other pick-up truck drivers. Sometimes they looked at me with surprise because, again, I'm not a pick-up truck kind of person, but mostly they just looked at me and then looked away like no big deal. I felt much more accepted and also much more anonymous. Like I blended in more. I almost felt sad to say goodbye to that truck. I only drove it for a few days. Meanwhile, when I was back in my regular car, I felt more vulnerable to the uncomfortable looks again.

As for how I would approach that situation in the future: I would do the same thing. I am not about to engage the guy in any kind of dialogue because I would like to safeguard my
personal health. And there is no talking to people who are that aggressive out of nowhere, especially when I have no backup or posse, if you will. And there is no talking to him when he knows where I live. I do think the whole eye contact thing was significant. I know that in some cultures, eye contact especially prolonged eye contact is disrespectful, not deferential, and seen as a way to intimidate. I guess he felt that I was out of line by looking at him and he saw it that way? I don't know. And as I mentioned before, I have seen him since then very regularly in fact in the mornings. So I've varied my departure time so as not to coincide with his.

I thought this situation was interesting, the white pickup, the white guy, it was too much and so obvious so that is why I picked this incident. Maybe one other thing that I would do differently would be to not stare at people even in an unintended absent-minded way and to get some more sleep so that I wouldn't half-stare at people in a dazed un-blinking trance that they might misinterpret. This was difficult to write about. But thanks for the opportunity to self-reflect. I hadn't made explicit some of these issues before.
Before I start off by describing a situation in which I was affected by whiteness, I must say that, for me, whiteness gives rise to two very different kinds of feelings. The word white is so loaded. My initial associations to whiteness are Pure, Clean, Innocent... Sacred even. Like crisp white sheets, clean white laundry, and spotless white gloves. Yet when I reflect on situations in which I was affected by whiteness, I invariably recall negative situations that I wish I hadn't lived. Some of these recollections stay with me like the way smoke clings to fabrics. They leave a disgusting aftertaste, way worse than souring milk. I am trying to understand the dichotomy of images: from the pristine world of household things to the shaming personal encounters. All of these are implied in whiteness.

R - Can you say more?

I think that I was struck when I was first reflecting on your question, initially. Maybe I was looking in terms of white as being good, and then it would mean that not being white was bad. With me not being white, it was kind of obvious but not so obvious with it not being brought to the fore. Or at least not being brought to the fore for a long time. And then I was thinking about the fact that white was always seen as being good, like
white linen, and those seem to be things as opposed to white people being good. Then when I was thinking about whiteness, I was thinking about my experiences with whiteness, and the only ones that came to mind were unfortunately bad ones. And because otherwise I just feel that I am one with the other person, I am one of them, we are all together and there is no difference, things like that. But when I am aware of whiteness, its because I am startled and think that I am not white, because I don’t think about it until there are times when I realize that I am not white. So those times have been shaming negative personal encounters. When human beings are involved and whiteness is involved, it’s always negative, even though I have lots of experiences with people who are white that are positive. But I am just not aware that they are white, and they are being nice. It’s usually they are white and I am not.

I think that the image of whiteness and my experience with white people are connected, because then I am not clean and I am not pure and I am not good, like all of those thing qualities but the opposite.

Perhaps the two dichotomous notions are related, implying and playing off of each other. Every situation in which I was affected by “whiteness” is one in which my being non-white has led to at
best being unjustly judged or at worst physically harmed. So instead of being treated as good or decent or "white," I became something of a spectacle and viewed curiously, suspiciously, or hatefully. In each instance of whiteness, I felt less than who I am, less than an individual, less than a human being. Less is the key word. And this gives me pause. I do not want to be misunderstood. Even though each instance left me feeling as though I was lacking something--the same something that I have never had control over namely my non-whiteness--I know that no one can "make" me feel that way. I don't want to blame whiteness for my negative feelings. I know that I must have brought some of that feeling less to the situations. The instances of whiteness just brought that feeling to the fore and maybe magnified it.

R - Can you say more?

It is so easy to fall into this white person did this and this white person did that therefore I am pissed off, how dare they do this, that and the other thing. It’s not that clear cut: there are always two people involved in an interaction. It’s about power, if you are giving that person that power, to make you feel that way. How can anyone be responsible completely for your feelings, they can’t. They might be evoked by something that person did
or said, but they are not totally responsible for any of your feelings at any time, so it’s how you take it up, what you do with it. Make the best of it. They are unfortunate and unfair situations which I did not choose, but how much of it sticks to me and makes me feel negative is mostly up to me. If I am feeling so deficient because of what this white person did or said, how could someone push me down that far? I must have started out pretty low. I couldn’t have been feeling all competent and all wonderful. But on the back burner, usually what I am not aware of is that sense that I am not white, like I have half a leg or something. And past experiences make me sensitive to new ones, like it keeps happening over and over. When there is a pattern you have to wonder about a common thread, and it’s who? It’s me! How is it that I continue to evoke these things? Well, a lot of it is the fact that I am not white and I don’t have control over that, but a lot of it is the situation I put myself in and I must be careful of that. There is a total hyper-vigilance, and sometimes the antennae are way up and sometimes they are not, but they are there. I am trying not to blame myself, but I am trying not to blame the other. It’s not 50-50, maybe 60-40 and I struggle with that. These situations leave me struggling with how much of this was me, how much of it was them, well I know
It was me and them. What could I do differently, how could I have avoided this?

R - It seems to me that you are trying to avoid being a victim.

No, no, no, then I would feel worse, and you can't live like that, feeling totally powerless.

Obviously, by now you know that I am not physically white, though I have been to white schools and lived in white neighborhoods, and have numerous white friends. No matter what, I still see whiteness as something other than what I am even though I have been surrounded by it, steeped in it, and know it well. It is still, somehow not me, not of me, and not where I'm from. During my teens, another non-white friend asked: "Ever wish you could be white?" I was startled to realize that I had NEVER wished to be white. I found that surprising at the time, and I think I still do. The thought never even occurred to me.

R - Can you say more?

I was in my teens and I had never thought about wishing or wanting to be white. I guess it wasn't an option so I never entertained it. It was like castles in the sky. I never thought about it and thought that it won't happen so I don't think about it. I wasn't looking to be something else. I just wanted to be more
comfortable with who I was. When experiences of whiteness come about, they are uncomfortable situations. But they are still not enough to make me want to be white, not that there is anything wrong with being white.

I still never wish to be white. Maybe it's because I am not one to make unrealistic wishes and I've never passed myself off as having "a really good tan." Or maybe it's because all I've ever wanted was just to fit in, not change my physicality and heritage in order to do so. Being white? What would that be like? I would feel like I could do more, blend in more, and not stick out so much. Something about de-individuation and getting away with more... I think I would feel more anonymous and therefore, more powerful. There is something about whiteness being the dominant culture and the majority. The majority rules, you know. The rest feel somewhat subjugated or subjects of the majority, but white people are stereotyped as often as non-white folk. And I suppose being white comes with a cross to bear. It's not easy to be blamed for the sins of fathers from whom one is so far removed.

R - Can you say more?

I think that white people get away with more, and when you are not white you stick out. Because white is the majority, its like
taking sugar and sprinkling cocoa or coffee granules, the coffee sticks out. The sugar all looks the same, and a lot of times all white people look the same. I know they are not and they are all individuals, but the coffee granules really stick out and there are so few of them that it makes it all the more visible. And a lot of times all white people say that all non-white people look the same, or of this ethnic group or that ethnic group look the same and I understand what they are saying. But it works both ways. There was a book about these two gloves that were magical and the one best friend put one glove on and the other best friend put on the other and then both disappeared. That is kind of what it’s like being white, you are born with this skin and it becomes invisible to you. But it’s visible to others who are not white. But for me anyways, only in those instances that have been difficult. It’s visible as something or someone who is more powerful and can get what they want. Where I was feeling more frustrated. I feel powerless, less powerful, like my goal was thwarted, all of those things. My living or my way of being was hindered as a result of this person’s whiteness. But not completely, I don’t want to blame this person completely, I feel like they were the obstacle, or what they did was the obstacle. There is a tendency to want to minimize these instances, to not feel that powerless,
like it doesn't happen all that often, the good times are better than the bad.

Now, I suppose I ought to answer your question more directly by recalling a specific event. I have several, but some are too painful to discuss. I'm not aware of my non-whiteness most of the time. Most of the time, I'm just living my life, with an acceptance of my non-whiteness on the back burner. It's more preconscious and not always conscious. It's only when certain events startle me back to my non-white self that I remember that I'm not white. Here's my situation: It started out like any other day. The basic routine was the same: I got up, got ready, had a hurried breakfast, grabbed my keys, and set off for work. So all I was thinking about was work: how I had to get there fast, how much I had to do that day, etc. Nothing different than nearly any other day, except this was the first day that I saw the owner of the white pick-up truck that's always parked in the nearby vicinity. As I pulled out of the little driveway that leads from the apartment building, the white pick-up truck that I sort-of recognized, was parked there. To give you a visual image, we were at right angles to each other, sort-of perpendicular-like. His was a beat-up truck. It looked like it had been through a lot. And I guess, maybe he had been through a lot too. He was just
in my face, he was my neighbor and this situation just popped up. I've driven beat up cars before, but right now I'm in one that isn't so visibly beat up. In fact, it looks more new than old.

R - Can you say more?

Like wow, this person is really working hard, trying to make a way in this world. I can identify with that, with his car, because I had not at that point ever driven a pickup truck, but I had been there, done that. I felt a kindred-ness or a oneness with him like a fellow human being. We have more in common than differences. And being more alert to that, it is only when something negative happens that I am alert to the differences. Well, I waited at the edge of the driveway area before pulling onto the street as I normally do. As I was looking both ways, I noticed that he was staring at me from inside his truck. I think that I stared back blankly, in one of those sleepy absent-minded "Huh?" looks. Only I had my sunglasses on, so I don't know how sleepy I looked to him. I normally don't stare at men I don't know, but again, I wasn't staring out of interest, but more out of curiosity. So it was a combination of just returning the stare and wondering what was going on. I also have a little blurry vision, especially when I first wake up and with the sun, I couldn't completely see the details of his face. So I was also wondering
if he was saying something that I couldn't quite grasp because of the blurriness of my vision. I think I sort of half nodded, as if to acknowledge that I had seen him and he had seen me. But not in a familiar "I know you," kind of way. Anyway, this all happened rather quickly like within a few minutes. Then, he gave me the finger. I sort of peered closer to see what he was saying and then I realized he was gesturing, and then I guess I'm sort of slow in the morning, I realized he was giving me the finger. I think my jaw relaxed a little. I'm saying that my jaw sort of dropped but my mouth wasn't wide open. I was given the finger by a total stranger for no reason except maybe for staring and nodding. And since when did people give other people the finger for staring? I was stunned and sat there for a few seconds longer thinking, what was that? What did I do? Why did he do that? That was so mean. All those thoughts really, all together, all jumbled up. Then I thought, well, if he gave me the finger, I don't want to pull out in front of him. That would be seen as me being aggressive or something and I didn't want him to attack me. So I thought I had better stay put. I'll let him go first. My heart was beating faster, cause I was nervous and feeling really rattled by that. I tried to look away but still keep my guard up, but not stare or look at him directly. Part of me
wanted to go up to him and say, "HEY? What the hell? What did I do?? What is your problem??" But I looked around and saw there were "no witnesses" except for a little bent over elderly man who was hobbling up the street with his back to us. So no one could "rescue" me and plus, I realized that would be a dumb thing to do. I did have to get out of the car to close the garage door and did so really quickly. The door closer button was right near my car door but I have to get out to reach it. So I didn't have to walk near him or anything. So out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that he was taking his own sweet time getting his car in gear and warming it up. He didn't take fifteen minutes, but at that point, it felt like he did. I think he probably took five minutes that stretched out unbearably. As soon as he pulled out of his parallel parking spot which shouldn't have been hard because there was no one in front or behind him. There couldn't be anyone in front of him because that would be blocking the apartment driveway which was where I was, further up that driveway. He then left in a smooth, unhurried way. Like it was old hat for him to give people the finger and simply drive off. My heart was still beating a little faster and I pulled away slowly, so slowly like at a snail's pace almost. Then, once I was off that street, I picked up the pace and reached my normal speed. I put
the radio on, I think and started humming some tunes. I was just trying to forget the whole thing. Finally, I got to work. I didn't think about it the whole day, mainly because I was so busy, there wasn't any time to devote to it. A few days later, maybe a week later, I was talking about that and some other situations with another non-white friend at work. When I got to the part about him giving me the finger which I still couldn't understand why, she immediately said: "You're not better than me." Then she clarified that that was what he was thinking: "Don't think you're better than me." I think she's right, now that I think about it.

R - Can you say more?

Actually, when she first said it I thought she meant it, like it was out of nowhere, and I thought what is this, everybody is doing this to me today. She then clarified that that was probably what he was thinking. And then I thought about it and I think she is right.

Because it was like old beat up car, newer car, young white guy with muscles, young non-white female with no discernible muscles. Don't think you're better than me. That was the message. And I only got it later, loud and clear. It's so amazing to me because the idea of being better than anyone, especially a
complete stranger is just not the way that I think. I was just doing my thing, going to work, pursuing the basic right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, well, ok employment, and I got attacked with a profane gesture. I think it's interesting that he was in a white pick-up truck. Just white guy in white pick-up truck. Talk about whiteness, and non-white me in a bluish-blackish car. And feeling sort of black and blue too, after that encounter. An ironic thing here is that, a while later, I had to get my car fixed and the rental car company that I needed to use while my car was in the shop, well they had ONLY a white pick-up truck or a huge white minivan for me to drive. Sort of funny, isn't it? I ended up picking the white pick-up truck because I had zero visibility in the minivan and felt that that wouldn't be safe. So anyway, I didn't even remember the whole pick up truck guy incident not consciously, anyway at that time. And I have seen that guy since then, and whenever I do, I look away. I'm not sure if he still gives me the finger or not because I just look away now. I just got a kick out of driving something that was so obviously not-me. I mean NO ONE can imagine me in a white pick-up or any pick-up. I enjoyed driving it. IS this identification with the aggressor? I felt like such a bad ass. I remember chuckling to myself thinking, "What an experience! I'm driving a
pick up truck. I'm driving a pick-up truck. ME! I can't believe I'm driving a white pick-up!" It felt rugged and strong and like I was someone who could build things.

**R - Can you say more?**

*I felt like a totally different person, like I had more physical strength and I was much more manly, really someone who could make things and do lots of hands on stuff. This goes with the pickup truck.*

I also noticed that no one gave me second looks in that truck. In fact, no one looked at me at all, except occasionally other pick-up truck drivers. Sometimes they looked at me with surprise because, again, I'm not a pick-up truck kind of person, but mostly they just looked at me and then looked away like no big deal. I felt much more accepted and also much more anonymous.

**R - Can you say more?**

*I felt invisible in a good way. I can go about my projects without being interrupted by other people's stuff. And you can also get away with more, you can bend the rules, break the rules, whatever. I feel just like I'm on top of the world rather than in the middle somewhere. If one is dominant the other is subservient, they go together. The unwritten social code, and*
now I’m on the other side. Anyone who knows me can’t imagine me in a white pickup truck. Being in the car made me feel like I belonged, in a way that I had not felt. It’s just a car, but it’s so odd. But it was more than a car. Like I blended in more. I almost felt sad to say goodbye to that truck I only drove it for a few days. Meanwhile, when I was back in my regular car, I felt more vulnerable to the uncomfortable looks again. As for how I would approach that situation in the future: I would do the same thing. I am not about to engage the guy in any kind of dialogue because I would like to safeguard my personal health. And there is no talking to people who are that aggressive out of nowhere, especially when I have no backup or posse, if you will.

**R - Can you say more?**

*It was a fantasy after an interaction that didn’t go well, I thought about it later and how I could come out more on top. Or just feel better. Wouldn’t it be neat if I had more clout in that situation! The only way I could have had more clout, short of changing my race, was if I had more white people with me. Specifically, if there were some white people who would stick up for me, it would be totally different and I don’t think he would have done what he did if I had a lot of white people there with me.*
And there is no talking to him when he knows where I live. I do think the whole eye contact thing was significant. I know that in some cultures, eye contact especially prolonged eye contact is disrespectful, not deferential, and seen as a way to intimidate. I guess he felt that I was out of line by looking at him and he saw it that way? I don't know. And as I mentioned before, I have seen him since then very regularly in fact in the mornings. So I've varied my departure time so as not to coincide with his.

R - Can you say more?

I try to leave earlier or later, in a lot of those situations it requires a lot of flexibility on the part of the non-white person’s part. Because it seems like the white person who does that just continues to do it, and there is not much reflection, like they are not doing anything wrong. It’s up to the non-white person. This is where it’s based on how you take it up. The non-white person needs to be really, really flexible and really adaptable and really make the best out of it. And the only way to make the best out of it is to be really flexible and really adaptable. Try to get what you need to get done in a way that doesn’t just safeguard you but prevents those types of situations from occurring as much as you can. As much as you have control over. He’s going to
continue to do what he does, and I chose not to be the person that he does them to. I need to be flexible, but he can continue to be rigid, that's the way it is, that's the way the code goes. You learn these things from when you are really young, and it's been like that forever. Like bullies at school, you just learn who to avoid and who to never be seen talking to, who to never look at. It can play out in so many different ways.

I thought this situation was interesting, the white pickup, the white guy, it was too much and so obvious so that is why I picked this incident. Maybe one other thing that I would do differently would be to not stare at people even in an unintended absent-minded way and to get some more sleep so that I wouldn't half-stare at people in a dazed un-blinking trance that they might misinterpret. This was difficult to write about. But thanks for the opportunity to self-reflect. I hadn't made explicit some of these issues before.

Meaning Units

Regular Font – Original protocol

**Bold – Researcher’s questions**

*Italics – P’s response*

**Bold Italics – Meaning Units**

Before I start off by describing a situation in which I was affected
by whiteness, I must say that, for me, whiteness gives rise to two very different kinds of feelings. The word "white" is so loaded. My initial associations to whiteness are Pure, Clean, Innocent . . . Sacred even. Like crisp white sheets, clean white laundry, and spotless white gloves. Yet when I reflect on situations in which I was affected by whiteness, I invariably recall negative situations that I wish I hadn't lived. Some of these recollections stay with me like the way smoke clings to fabrics. They leave a disgusting aftertaste, way worse than souring milk. I am trying to understand the dichotomy of images: from the pristine world of household things to the shaming personal encounters. All of these are implied in whiteness.

*P associated whiteness with purity, cleanliness, innocence and the sacred. However, the lived meanings of whiteness signified experiences that P wished had not occurred. These experiences with whiteness lived on for P and left her feeling disgusted. P was struck by the contrast between her initial associations with whiteness and her lived experience of it.*

**R - Can you say more?**

*I think that I was struck when I was first reflecting on your question, initially. Maybe I was looking in terms of white as being good, and then it would mean that not being white was bad.*
With me not being white, it was kind of obvious but not so obvious with it not being brought to the fore. Or at least not being brought to the fore for a long time. And then I was thinking about the fact that white was always seen as being good, like white linen, and those seem to be things as opposed to white people being good.

P’s reflection on whiteness as an idea shifted to how whiteness applied to her as a person of color. P was also struck by the paradox of whiteness representing good while her lived experiences with whiteness as it was incarnated by white people was always negative.

Then when I was thinking about whiteness, I was thinking about my experiences with whiteness, and the only ones that came to mind were unfortunately bad ones. And because otherwise I just feel that I am one with the other person, I am one of them, we are all together and there is no difference, things like that. But when I am aware of whiteness, its because I am startled and think that I am not white, because I don’t think about it until there are times when I realize that I am not white. So those times have been shaming negative personal encounters.

P tended to experience the social world as unified without regard to racial differences. When she encountered a white
person who incarnated whiteness, P’s unified social world became fragmented by racial difference and separated her from others. Recognizing that she was not white meant that P felt ashamed, and she felt negated as a person.

When human beings are involved and whiteness is involved, it’s always negative, even though I have lots of experiences with people who are white that are positive. But I am just not aware that they are white, and they are being nice. It’s usually they are white and I am not.

While P could recall many positive experiences with white people, all of her experiences with whiteness that were negative involved white people. She typically was not aware of the white people that she had positive experiences with. It was only in the experiences with white people who manifested whiteness that her difference became significant for her. P’s not being white was focal for her rather than the white person’s whiteness.

I think that the image of whiteness and my experience with white people are connected, because then I am not clean and I am not pure and I am not good, like all of those thing qualities but the opposite.
P recognized the subtle but definitive link between the image of whiteness and her experience of white people who incarnated whiteness. P could sense the affects of her experience through her recognition of how she had symbolized the opposite qualities signified by whiteness.

Perhaps the two dichotomous notions are related, implying and playing off of each other. Every situation in which I was affected by "whiteness" is one in which my being non-white has led to at best being unjustly judged or at worst physically harmed. So instead of being treated as good or decent or "white," I became something of a spectacle and viewed curiously, suspiciously, or hatefully. In each instance of whiteness, I felt less than who I am, less than an individual, less than a human being. Less is the key word.

For P, whiteness meant being judged and physically harmed by white people who incarnated whiteness. P was marked by her difference, for not being white. Not being white has meant being viewed as less than human, inferior, and somewhat of a spectacle or something to be suspicious of or hate. Not being white in experiences with white people who manifest whiteness has meant not being human for P.
And this gives me pause. I do not want to be misunderstood. Even though each instance left me feeling as though I was lacking something--the same something that I have never had control over namely my non-whiteness--I know that no one can "make" me feel that way. I don't want to blame whiteness for my negative feelings. I know that I must have brought some of that feeling less to the situations. The instances of whiteness just brought that feeling to the fore and maybe magnified it.

**While P's encounters with whiteness may have left her feeling dominated and less than human, she kept the subtle insinuations of her inferiority at bay. P kept her autonomy by framing the encounter with whiteness in such a way as to retain personal responsibility for how she may have participated in the process of domination. P put encounters with whiteness in context by reflecting upon how particular white people had taken advantage of a pre-existing vulnerability to insinuations of her inferiority. P’s encounters with white people who manifested whiteness tended to magnify her vulnerability to these insinuations.**

R - Can you say more?

*It is so easy to fall into this white person did this and this white person did that therefore I am pissed off, how dare they do this,*
that and the other thing. It's not that clear cut: there are always two people involved in an interaction. It's about power, if you are giving that person that power, to make you feel that way. How can anyone be responsible completely for your feelings, they can't. They might be evoked by something that person did or said, but they are not totally responsible for any of your feelings at any time, so it's how you take it up, what you do with it. Make the best of it. They are unfortunate and unfair situations which I did not choose, but how much of it sticks to me and makes me feel negative is mostly up to me.

P recognized the ambiguity involved in her encounters with whiteness. A subtle, psychological appeal originating in the social structure beckoned P to take up a role as the subordinated opposite the white person’s role of dominator. However, her reflection upon the dynamics of the situation kept her from taking up the subordinated role. Her reflection enabled P to distance herself from the immediacy of her experience and gain a perspective on the situation. Reflection allowed P to distance herself from the encounter in order to try and make sense of it. P attempted to keep the perspective gained in her reflection and have some influence in order to mitigate the affects of the situation. Reflecting
upon the situation and gaining perspective enabled P to retain some sense of autonomy in spite of her limited control over the frequency of her random encounters with whiteness.

If I am feeling so deficient because of what this white person did or said, how could someone push me down that far? I must have started out pretty low. I couldn’t have been feeling all competent and all wonderful. But on the back burner, usually what I am not aware of is that sense that I am not white, like I have half a leg or something. And past experiences make me sensitive to new ones, like it keeps happening over and over. When there is a pattern you have to wonder about a common thread, and it’s who? It’s me! How is it that I continue to evoke these things?

P’s reflection was interrupted by a sense of being overwhelmed by both the inequity of her social status as a non-white person as well as her vulnerability to the perpetual reoccurrences and revisiting of past and present encounters. On the one hand, P’s reflection upon encounters with whiteness enabled her to withstand white people’s insinuations of her inferiority. However, she refused to accept her lesser social status as a non-white person and P was unwilling to bear the burden of
responsibility necessary to resist the psychological affects of encounters with whiteness.

Well, a lot of it is the fact that I am not white and I don’t have control over that, but a lot of it is the situation I put myself in and I must be careful of that. There is a total hyper-vigilance, and sometimes the antennae are way up and sometimes they are not, but they are there.

P tried to re-establish her perspective in order to resist the psychological affects of whiteness. Part of the burden for P to resist was maintaining a hyper-vigilance for potential encounters with whiteness that allowed her to respond to these situations based upon the circumstances.

I am trying not to blame myself, but I am trying not to blame the other. It’s not 50-50, maybe 60-40 and I struggle with that. These situations leave me struggling with how much of this was me, how much of it was them, well I know it was me and them. What could I do differently, how could I have avoided this?

R - It seems to me that you are trying to avoid being a victim.

No, no, no, then I would feel worse, and you can’t live like that, feeling totally powerless.

P struggled to maintain a balance between accepting responsibility for her participation in encounters with
whiteness and placing blame upon white people who subtly strived to dominate her through subtle inferences of her inferiority. P’s project was to remain open while protecting herself from attacks upon her assumed social inferiority by white people who incarnated whiteness. P participated in a dialectic between remaining open to being accepted as a complete human being and avoiding being victimized and powerless.

Obviously, by now you know that I am not physically white, though I have been to white schools and lived in white neighborhoods, and have numerous white friends. No matter what, I still see whiteness as something other than what I am even though I have been surrounded by it, steeped in it, and know it well. It is still, somehow not me, not of me, and not where I'm from.

_P had been surrounded by whiteness and steeped in it, yet she has never been of it. For P, whiteness represented what she was not._

During my teens, another non-white friend asked: "Ever wish you could be white?" I was startled to realize that I had NEVER wished to be white. I found that surprising at the time, and I think I still do. The thought never even occurred to me.
R - Can you say more?

I was in my teens and I had never thought about wishing or wanting to be white. I guess it wasn’t an option so I never entertained it. It was like castles in the sky. I never thought about it and thought that it won’t happen so I don’t think about it. I wasn’t looking to be something else. I just wanted to be more comfortable with who I was.

P had experienced whiteness as what she was not, but she had never wished to be a white person. P was surprised by the fact that she had never wished to be white, and her project had been to become more comfortable and at ease with who she was.

When experiences of whiteness come about, they are uncomfortable situations. But they are still not enough to make me want to be white, not that there is anything wrong with being white.

P was ill at ease during encounters with whiteness, but she did not want to become white in order to avoid them.

I still never wish to be white. Maybe it’s because I am not one to make unrealistic wishes and I've never passed myself off as having "a really good tan." Or maybe it's because all I've ever
wanted was just to fit in, not change my physicality and heritage in order to do so.

*P's project had never been to become a white person. Her project had been to be included and equal, unmarked and less conscious of her racial identity. She was proud of who she was and comfortable with herself and her heritage.*

Being white? What would that be like? I would feel like I could do more, blend in more, and not stick out so much. Something about de-individuation and getting away with more... I think I would feel more anonymous and therefore, more powerful.

*P wished that she had the advantages of being a white person, including being un-self-conscious, unmarked, and therefore not a target of many white people's project of domination and supremacy.*

There is something about whiteness being the dominant culture and the majority. The majority rules, you know. The rest feel somewhat subjugated or subjects of the majority, but white people are stereotyped as often as non-white folk. And I suppose being white comes with a cross to bear. It's not easy to be blamed for the sins of fathers from whom one is so far removed.

*For P, whiteness represented the hegemony of white people*
as the dominant culture. P felt subjugated and subject to that domination, yet she recognized that being white and dominant comes with a price to pay and was not ideal.

R - Can you say more?

I think that white people get away with more, and when you are not white you stick out. Because white is the majority, its like taking sugar and sprinkling cocoa or coffee granules, the coffee sticks out. The sugar all looks the same, and a lot of times all white people look the same. I know they are not and they are all individuals, but the coffee granules really stick out and there are so few of them that it makes it all the more visible. And a lot of times all white people say that all non-white people look the same, or of this ethnic group or that ethnic group look the same and I understand what they are saying. But it works both ways.

For P, being white meant being more powerful than she was and having more latitude. Being a person of color meant being visible and marked as not white, and therefore under scrutiny as a “suspect”. In other words, for P being white meant innocence until proven guilty, while being a person of color meant guilt until proven innocent. Being white meant being invisible and able to participate in the world un-self-consciously. For P, being non-white meant being marked,
visible and self-conscious as she participated in the world. There was a book about these two gloves that were magical and the one best friend put one glove on and the other best friend put on the other and then both disappeared. That is kind of what it’s like being white, you are born with this skin and it becomes invisible to you. But it’s visible to others who are not white.

P believed that white people were not self-conscious of their race and they were invisible to themselves. However, white people were visible to P as a reminder of what she was not. But for me anyways, only in those instances that have been difficult. Its visible as something or someone who is more powerful and can get what they want. Where I was feeling more frustrated. I feel powerless, less powerful, like my goal was thwarted, all of those things. My living or my way of being was hindered as a result of this person’s whiteness.

P became marked in situations with white people who manifested whiteness. In these situations white people were visible for her as the other who was more powerful and dominant. P became frustrated in these situations.

But not completely, I don’t want to blame this person completely, I feel like they were the obstacle, or what they did was the obstacle. There is a tendency to want to minimize these
instances, to not feel that powerless, like it doesn’t happen all that often, the good times are better than the bad.

P framed these situations as problems that she needed to solve, and she rationalized them in order to try to overcome her powerlessness. Minimizing these encounters allowed P to retain some control and kept her from being overwhelmed.

Now, I suppose I ought to answer your question more directly by recalling a specific event. I have several, but some are too painful to discuss. I'm not aware of my non-whiteness most of the time. Most of the time, I'm just living my life, with an acceptance of my non-whiteness on the back burner. It's more preconscious and not always conscious. It's only when certain events startle me back to my non-white self that I remember that I'm not white.

P’s encounters with whiteness have been numerous and occasionally too traumatic for her to talk about. P’s racial status only became significant for her when she encountered white people who incarnated whiteness.

Here's my situation: It started out like any other day. The basic routine was the same: I got up, got ready, had a hurried breakfast, grabbed my keys, and set off for work. So all I was
thinking about was work: how I had to get there fast, how much I had to do that day, etc. Nothing different than nearly any other day, except this was the first day that I saw the owner of the white pick-up truck that's always parked in the nearby vicinity. As I pulled out of the little driveway that leads from the apartment building, the white pick-up truck that I sort-of recognized, was parked there. To give you a visual image, we were at right angles to each other, sort-of perpendicular-like. His was a beat-up truck. It looked like it had been through a lot. And I guess, maybe he had been through a lot too. He was just in my face, he was my neighbor and this situation just popped up. I've driven beat up cars before, but right now I'm in one that isn't so visibly beat up. In fact, it looks more new than old.

R - Can you say more?

Like wow, this person is really working hard, trying to make a way in this world. I can identify with that, with his car, because I had not at that point ever driven a pickup truck, but I had been there, done that. I felt a kindred-ness or a oneness with him like a fellow human being. We have more in common than differences. And being more alert to that, it is only when something negative happens that I am alert to the differences.
P began her description of a situation in which she was affected by whiteness by empathizing with the white person who incarnated whiteness. She imagined his circumstances to be similar to her own experiences, and her effort at empathizing with the other was part of her project to create social equality. However, her project conflicted with whiteness manifested by this white person’s project for white supremacy, making her status as a person of color significant for her.

Well, I waited at the edge of the driveway area before pulling onto the street as I normally do. As I was looking both ways, I noticed that he was staring at me from inside his truck. I think that I stared back blankly, in one of those sleepy absent-minded "Huh?" looks. Only I had my sunglasses on, so I don't know how sleepy I looked to him. I normally don't stare at men I don't know, but again, I wasn't staring out of interest, but more out of curiosity. So it was a combination of just returning the stare and wondering what was going on. I also have a little blurry vision, especially when I first wake up and with the sun, I couldn't completely see the details of his face. So I was also wondering if he was saying something that I couldn't quite grasp because of the blurriness of my vision. I think I sort of half nodded, as if to
acknowledge that I had seen him and he had seen me. But not in a familiar "I know you," kind of way. Anyway, this all happened rather quickly like within a few minutes. Then, he gave me the finger. I sort of peered closer to see what he was saying and then I realized he was gesturing, and then I guess I'm sort of slow in the morning, I realized he was giving me the finger. I think my jaw relaxed a little. I'm saying that my jaw sort of dropped but my mouth wasn't wide open. I was given the finger by a total stranger for no reason except maybe for staring and nodding. And since when did people give other people the finger for staring? I was stunned and sat there for a few seconds longer thinking, what was that? What did I do? Why did he do that? That was so mean. All those thoughts really, all together, all jumbled up.

*P entered her everyday social world with openness and feeling connected with other people. P was shocked by the gesture made to her by the white person that she encountered on her way to work. His hostility threw her back upon herself. P’s project for racial equality was blocked by this white person’s manifestation of whiteness. She was confused and tried to determine how she may have provoked this gesture. P was also angered by this white*
Then, I thought, well, if he gave me the finger, I don't want to pull out in front of him. That would be seen as me being aggressive or something and I didn't want him to attack me. So I thought I had better stay put. I'll let him go first. My heart was beating faster, cause I was nervous and feeling really rattled by that. I tried to look away but still keep my guard up, but not stare or look at him directly. Part of me wanted to go up to him and say, "HEY? What the hell? What did I do?? What is your problem??" But I looked around and saw there were "no witnesses" except for a little bent over elderly man who was hobbling up the street with his back to us. So no one could "rescue" me and plus, I realized that would be a dumb thing to do.

*P's notion to challenge this white person shifted because of her fear of being physically attacked if she provoked him.*

*P's experiences of being physically assaulted by white people because of her race were on the horizon. Her heart was beating faster as her past experiences with white people who incarnated whiteness re-emerged. Her thoughts of speaking to this white person were thwarted by her physical vulnerability and the lack of support of others.*
I did have to get out of the car to close the garage door and did so really quickly. The door closer button was right near my car door but I have to get out to reach it. So I didn't have to walk near him or anything. So out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that he was taking his own sweet time getting his car in gear and warming it up. He didn't take fifteen minutes, but at that point, it felt like he did. I think he probably took five minutes that stretched out unbearably. As soon as he pulled out of his parallel parking spot which shouldn't have been hard because there was no one in front or behind him. There couldn't be anyone in front of him because that would be blocking the apartment driveway which was where I was, further up that driveway. He then left in a smooth, unhurried way. Like it was old hat for him to give people the finger and simply drive off. My heart was still beating a little faster and I pulled away slowly, so slowly like at a snail's pace almost. Then, once I was off that street, I picked up the pace and reached my normal speed. I put the radio on, I think and started humming some tunes. I was just trying to forget the whole thing. Finally, I got to work.

*P was amazed by the lack of concern shown by the white person that made the obscene gesture to her. The contrast*
between her anxiety and fear and his lackadaisical attitude exemplified in his unhurried and relaxed attitude was striking for P. His participation in whiteness' project of domination and supremacy seemed to express the natural order of things, while her project for racial harmony was obliterated. P attempted to re-enter her everyday mode of being one with others as she turned on her car radio, and she finally arrived at work.

I didn't think about it the whole day, mainly because I was so busy, there wasn't any time to devote to it. A few days later, maybe a week later, I was talking about that and some other situations with another non-white friend at work. When I got to the part about him giving me the finger which I still couldn't understand why, she immediately said: "You're not better than me." Then she clarified that that was what he was thinking: "Don't think you're better than me." I think she's right, now that I think about it.

R - Can you say more?

Actually, when she first said it I thought she meant it, like it was out of nowhere, and I thought what is this, everybody is doing this to me today. She then clarified that that was probably what he was thinking. And then I thought about it and I think she is
right.

Because it was like old beat up car, newer car, young white guy with muscles, young non-white female with no discernible muscles. Don't think you're better than me. That was the message. And I only got it later, loud and clear. It's so amazing to me because the idea of being better than anyone, especially a complete stranger is just not the way that I think. I was just doing my thing, going to work, pursuing the basic right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, well, ok employment, and I got attacked with a profane gesture. I think it's interesting that he was in a white pick-up truck. Just white guy in white pick-up truck. Talk about whiteness, and non-white me in a bluish-blackish car. And feeling sort of black and blue too, after that encounter.

*P immersed herself in work in order to re-enter her everyday world and create distance from the incident. During a later discussion of encounters with whiteness with a non-white colleague, P mentioned her struggle to make sense of this particular incident. Her colleague suggested that the white person whom P encountered was making a loud and clear statement of his supremacy over her. The white person who incarnated whiteness made her feel vulnerable as a non-*
white person. This white person who participated in the project of white supremacy interrupted her naïve everyday mode of being, bringing forth past experiences of whiteness which deeply affected P.

An ironic thing here is that, a while later, I had to get my car fixed and the rental car company that I needed to use while my car was in the shop, well they had ONLY a white pick-up truck or a huge white minivan for me to drive. Sort of funny, isn't it? I ended up picking the white pick-up truck because I had zero visibility in the minivan and felt that that wouldn't be safe. So anyway, I didn't even remember the whole pick up truck guy incident not consciously, anyway at that time. And I have seen that guy since then, and whenever I do, I look away. I'm not sure if he still gives me the finger or not because I just look away now. I just got a kick out of driving something that was so obviously not-me. I mean NO ONE can imagine me in a white pick-up or any pick-up. I enjoyed driving it. IS this identification with the aggressor? I felt like such a bad ass. I remember chuckling to myself thinking, "What an experience! I'm driving a pick up truck. I'm driving a pick-up truck. ME! I can't believe I'm driving a white pick-up!" It felt rugged and strong and like I was someone who could build things.
R - Can you say more?

I felt like a totally different person, like I had more physical strength and I was much more manly, really someone who could make things and do lots of hands on stuff. This goes with the pickup truck.

I also noticed that no one gave me second looks in that truck. In fact, no one looked at me at all, except occasionally other pick-up truck drivers. Sometimes they looked at me with surprise because, again, I'm not a pick-up truck kind of person, but mostly they just looked at me and then looked away like no big deal. I felt much more accepted and also much more anonymous.

R - Can you say more?

I felt invisible in a good way. I can go about my projects without being interrupted by other people’s stuff. And you can also get away with more, you can bend the rules, break the rules, whatever. I feel just like I’m on top of the world rather than in the middle somewhere. If one is dominant the other is subservient, they go together. The unwritten social code, and now I’m on the other side. Anyone who knows me can’t imagine me in a white pickup truck. Being in the car made me feel like I
belonged, in a way that I had not felt. It’s just a car, but it’s so odd. But it was more than a car.

Like I blended in more. I almost felt sad to say goodbye to that truck I only drove it for a few days. Meanwhile, when I was back in my regular car, I felt more vulnerable to the uncomfortable looks again.

Several months after this encounter with whiteness and after consciously avoiding the person who attacked her, P found herself revisiting the incident. The impetus for revisiting was her imaginary reliving of the incident as the participant with the power to dominate. In her fantasy, P had the penultimate characteristics of whiteness embodied in the image of the virile white male. P felt invisible and unmarked as a person imbued with power, on the other side of the unwritten social code. P was sad when her imaginary project ended as she returned to her everyday sense of being visible, marked, and dominated. The experience of blending in and being free to participate without being vulnerable to encounters with whiteness and white supremacy was vivid for P.

As for how I would approach that situation in the future: I would do the same thing. I am not about to engage the guy in any kind
of dialogue because I would like to safeguard my personal health. And there is no talking to people who are that aggressive out of nowhere, especially when I have no backup or posse, if you will.

R - Can you say more?

It was a fantasy after an interaction that didn’t go well, I thought about it later and how I could come out more on top. Or just feel better. Wouldn’t it be neat if I had more clout in that situation! The only way I could have had more clout, short of changing my race, was if I had more white people with me. Specifically, if there were some white people who would stick up for me, it would be totally different and I don’t think he would have done what he did if I had a lot of white people there with me.

P’s encounter with whiteness reminded her of how physically vulnerable she could be in these encounters. She imagined how different this encounter could have been and how powerful she would have felt if she was with white people who had supported her. For P, being a person of color meant living with the possibility of being confronted by white people who sought to dominate her psychologically and potentially assault her physically. Ironically for P, only white people had the power to stop this type of encounter.
from occurring.

And there is no talking to him when he knows where I live. I do think the whole eye contact thing was significant. I know that in some cultures, eye contact especially prolonged eye contact is disrespectful, not deferential, and seen as a way to intimidate. I guess he felt that I was out of line by looking at him and he saw it that way? I don't know. And as I mentioned before, I have seen him since then very regularly in fact in the mornings. So I've varied my departure time so as not to coincide with his.

P continued to try to make sense of why this particular white person acted aggressively towards her. She tried to rationalize a motive for his actions in order to not feel so vulnerable to seemingly random acts of racial discrimination by white people whose motives she could not fathom. However, his awareness of where she lived, the randomness of the act, and this white person’s apparent lack of humanity confound her attempts to push this encounter away.

R - Can you say more?

I try to leave earlier or later, in a lot of those situations it requires a lot of flexibility on the part of the non-white person’s part. Because it seems like the white person who does that just continues to do it, and there is not much reflection, like they are
not doing anything wrong. It’s up to the non-white person. This is where it’s based on how you take it up. The non-white person needs to be really, really flexible and really adaptable and really make the best out of it. And the only way to make the best out of it is to be really flexible and really adaptable. Try to get what you need to get done in a way that doesn’t just safeguard you but prevents those types of situations from occurring as much as you can. As much as you have control over. He’s going to continue to do what he does, and I chose not to be the person that he does them to. I need to be flexible, but he can continue to be rigid, that’s the way it is, that’s the way the code goes. You learn these things from when you are really young, and it’s been like that forever. Like bullies at school, you just learn who to avoid and who to never be seen talking to, who to never look at. It can play out in so many different ways.

P was uncomfortable with not making sense of this white person’s motive for acting as he had. She could not understand how this white person and others who have incarnated whiteness could be so cruel and inhuman and yet be so unconcerned with the implications and affects of their actions upon her. P resented the fact that she was so deeply affected by these encounters while white people who
manifested whiteness apparently acted with impunity and without a conscience. P has had these experiences since she was very young, and the legacy of these experiences leaves her vigilant, careful, and self-conscious. Yet being vigilant and careful never guaranteed that she was protected, because she was continuously surprised by the ways that these encounters unfolded.

I thought this situation was interesting, the white pickup, the white guy, it was too much and so obvious so that is why I picked this incident. Maybe one other thing that I would do differently would be to not stare at people even in an unintended absent-minded way and to get some more sleep so that I wouldn't half-stare at people in a dazed un-blinking trance that they might misinterpret. This was difficult to write about. But thanks for the opportunity to self-reflect. I hadn't made explicit some of these issues before.

P ended her reflection trying to rationalize and make sense of this white person's actions. She returned to her project of racial equality in order to combat her vulnerability to random attacks by white people who incarnated whiteness.