Stories of Dismantling Whiteness in Social Work Educational Spaces

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Stories of Dismantling Whiteness in Social Work Educational Spaces

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education Administration
West Chester University
West Chester, PA

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Doctor of Education in Policy, Planning, and Administration

By
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May 2024

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my husband, Kevin Stauffer, who provided the love, support, space, and nourishment I needed to be successful. I love you, and I am forever grateful.
Abstract

Social work and higher education are rooted in systems of racism and exclusion and continue to operate as racialized spaces. As the social work profession grapples with its past and calls upon social work educators to support efforts to undo structural racism, paying attention to what is happening in educational spaces is essential. In this study, I examined the stories and tensions of White Social Work faculty engaged in efforts to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, and universities. Using narrative inquiry, I interviewed nine White faculty from different universities representing five regions across the United States. I explored their interpretations of whiteness within social work and higher education and elicited stories about how they work to disrupt whiteness and what tensions they experience. The stories illuminated three foundational insights about doing the work, including the importance of critical inquiry and systems thinking, an awareness of the ambiguousness of whiteness, and a belief that resistance takes many forms. The study also revealed that faculty sought to disrupt existing power structures in and outside of the classroom, primarily by amplifying diverse perspectives and examining policy. Finally, the classroom represented a distinctive place for faculty to challenge the status quo. When efforts moved outside of the classroom and beyond their own agency, resistance arose. Two participants experienced significant backlash that led to professional and personal harm. This study provides evidence of the operations of whiteness in social work educational spaces and insights into the ways White social work faculty push back.
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Chapter 1

Contemporary universities are broadly hailed as places for intellectual exploration and steppingstones to social mobility (Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2021). As centers of knowledge production, they stand as liberatory pillars of modern society, offering the potential to address complex social, political, and economic challenges facing humanity (Giroux, 2007). Indeed, some of the most highly influential educational philosophers, such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Paulo Freire, understood education as a foothold for freedom. Du Bois (1935/1998) wrote, "Had it not been for the Negro school and college, the Negro would, to all intents and purposes, have been driven back to slavery" (p. 667). Both Freire (1996/2001) and Du Bois (1935/1998) teach us that education is an emancipatory tool for reshaping dominant narratives that devalue the “universal human ethic” (Freire, 1996/2001, p. 25). In other words, education empowers individuals to act against oppressive systems to build a more just and equitable society. In this way, education should not be separated from the people or the betterment of society (DuBois, 1935/1998; Freire, 1996/2001; Love, 2019). Knowledge constructed through the hearts and minds of the people, not dictated by the labor market or dominant culture, is the key to achieving individual freedom and societal uplift (DuBois, 1935/1998; Freire, 1996/2001; Giroux, 2007, 2017). Education diminished to a transfer of information accepts knowledge and conditions as fixed, serving only to preserve oppressive systems (Freire, 1996/2001; Giroux, 2007, 2017).

Similarly, the social work profession holds the value of human rights at its core and aspires to liberate individuals and society, particularly vulnerable and oppressed populations (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021a). The profession's code of ethics calls upon members to value the dignity, worth, and right to self-determination of all individuals (NASW, 2021a). Its dual commitment to “enhancing human well-being and [emphasis added]
championing social justice” is a distinguishing characteristic of the social work profession (NASW, 2021a, p. 2). Social workers are not taught to help individuals maintain their place within oppressive systems. They must provide support and resources while taking action to promote change and challenge the systems that create the need for social workers. In the absence of advocacy and empowerment, structural inequities remain unchallenged, and the human condition unchanged (Moreau, 1990).

Despite shared philosophical leanings toward the promise of radical transformation, higher education and social work histories reveal realities deeply rooted in systems of exclusion and domination (Crudup et al., 2021; Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2021; Gregory, 2021; Leonardo, 2013; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Stein, 2017; Wilder, 2013). Both are, to borrow from Gregory (2021), products and projects of whiteness¹. U.S. higher education and social work grew from the logics of colonialism and White supremacy (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Wilder, 2013). Colonial colleges and universities, rather than advancing human potential and creating just societies, centered White superiority as universal truth and used education as a project to destroy the voices, cultures, and very bodies of non-White beings (Wilder, 2013). Early social welfare initiatives similarly trampled individual freedom and dignity through efforts to reform and assimilate immigrants and the so-called deserving poor into the dominant White culture (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Crudup et al., 2021; Maglalang & Rao, 2021; Rangel, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021). Both institutions, at their founding, denied access to non-whites (Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2021; Wilder, 2013; Snowden et al., 2021).

¹ In alignment with current practices of Critical Whiteness Studies scholars Cabrera (2022) and Matias (2022), whom I cite throughout this dissertation, I will not capitalize the word whiteness. I do this not as a means of rendering it invisible, but rather in effort to diminish its power. I will, however, capitalize Black and White when referring to racial identities to acknowledge the significance of race as part of individuals’ social identities in a racialized society.
The Past is Present

Statistics reveal that both higher education and social work continue to exist as raced spaces. Disparities can be seen in who gets to research, study, teach, and practice social work. A 2020 report to the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) revealed that among recent social work graduates, 66% identify as white, followed by 22% identifying as Black or African American (Salsberg et al., 2020). Earlier statistics indicated that 69% of the social work workforce is White (Salsberg et al., 2017). White people are also overrepresented in staff and leadership positions within organizations serving people of color (NASW, 2021b). Comparable data about who controls the higher education landscape was reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). In the fall of 2021, nearly three-quarters of full-time faculty at U.S. post-secondary institutions identified as White (NCES, 2022).

Through a critical lens, one must consider the impact of knowledge and practices borne from ideologies of White superiority and operating within spaces dominated by White people. Universities produce and disseminate knowledge that feeds what is considered true and significant in society (Leonardo, 2013; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). But research and learning are interpretive (Leonardo, 2013; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). In other words, knowledge cannot be separated from the lens of the knower. Hegemonic perspectives of White superiority have reinforced the interests of the dominant culture and shaped beliefs about human nature and the human condition (Leonardo, 2013; Wilder, 2013; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). For example, as Wilder (2013) wrote, “Race did not come from science and theology; it came to science and theology” (p. 182). Sentiments of the natural order of Black and Indigenous inferiority that was deeply rooted in the American conscious, were expanded and reinforced in
academia, first through religion and then science (Smedley & Smedley, 2011; Wilder, 2013). In short, we must consider from where, from whom, and to what end academic knowledge has been shaped, distributed, and accepted as truth or best practice.

**Yes, Social Work Too**

Social work, regardless of its commitment to improving individual and societal conditions, is not immune to the ‘isms’ from which the U.S. was built (Crudup et al., 2021). The profession has been implicated in reproducing racism (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Crudup et al., 2021; Gregory, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021; Wachholz & Mullaly, 1997), classism (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Snowden et al., 2021; Wachholz & Mullaly, 1997), capitalism (Chapman & Withers, 2019), ableism (El-Lahib, 2020), elitism (Crudup et al., 2021), colonialism (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Crudup et al., 2021; Gregory, 2021), and patriarchy (Dressel, 2014; St. Vil et al., 2019). From the beginning, social work has aligned with oppressive systems and dominant White ideologies through its policies, practices, and institutions (Gregory, 2020; NASW, 2021b; Snowden et al., 2021). As highlighted by the NASW (2021b), examples of historic initiatives supported by prominent social workers include segregated settlement houses (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Kennedy, 2008), blocking voting rights (Jones, 2020), and college access for Black women (Howard, 2017), forcing Indigenous children from their homes and eliminating their cultures (Chapman & Withers, 2019), and using political power to exclude Black workers from social programs (Howard, 2017).

Racism and White normativity persist in present-day practices and continue to cause harm to communities of color (NASW, 2021b; Maglalang & Rao, 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Odera et al., 2021). Inequitable racial outcomes can be seen across a range of service systems, including healthcare, child welfare, housing, legal, and education (Copeland & Ross,
The social work discipline, like other U.S. institutions, developed through frameworks of White supremacy (Crudup et al., 2021; Maglalang & Rao, 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Odera et al., 2021). Today’s most prominent social work theories, curricula, and practices grew from these ‘isms and are dominated by White ways of knowing (Crudup et al., 2021; Maglalang & Rao, 2021). More details about the history of the social work discipline are included in the next chapter.

The foundation and logic of White supremacy remain embedded in U.S. systems, laws, education institutions, and, yes, in helping professions like social work (Cabrera et al., 2016; Crudup et al., 2021; Harris, 1993; Leonardo, 2013; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Wilder, 2013). If social workers are going to fulfill the dual responsibility of improving individual well-being and fighting for justice, they must be willing to engage in critical inquiry about how racist and oppressive perspectives cultivated in the past have been planted in present teachings, practices, and structures. Social work faculty play a key role in developing future social workers and contributing to knowledge production. Improving the human condition will require creative and collective resistance against oppressive ideological and material forces entrenched in the educational spaces where they operate (Du Bois, 1935/1998; Freire, 1996/2001; Love, 2019; Stokas, 2023).

**Rationale for Study**

In June 2021, on the heels of national uprisings against police brutality and systemic racism, the NASW released a report apologizing for the profession’s long history of racist practices and affirming its commitment to undoing racism (NASW, 2021b). Special editions of social work journals published a myriad of articles calling for dismantling whiteness in the profession and naming the extensive harm whiteness in social work pedagogy and practice has
inflicted on people and communities of color (Crudup et al., 2021; Gregory, 2021; Hanna et al., 2021; Maglalang & Rao, 2021; Rangel, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021). Most recently, the Council for Social Work Education (CSWE) updated its Educational and Professional Standards (EPAS) to include new racial equity goals and associated competencies (Council on Social Work Education, 2022).

Such public promises and goal-setting represent important steps in acknowledging racial equity; however, history informs us that efforts to address racism taken up within the predominantly White social work profession (Salsberg et al., 2017) have fallen short and created harm. Social work interventions in non-White communities have historically relied on punitive measures framed by White ideologies, racialized perceptions, and efforts to “reform” the individual rather than address racist and oppressive systems (Gregory, 2021; Rangel, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021). Throughout history, social work has pledged services to marginalized populations while backing racist ideas, policies, and practices, including eugenics, assimilation schools and adoption programs for Indigenous children, the Tuskegee Experiment, and Japanese internment camps (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Maglalang & Rao, 2021; NASW, 2021b; Vanidestine et al., 2023).

Not surprisingly, then, social work scholars have noted a lack of evidence of the social work profession’s commitment to dismantling whiteness within social work education (Copeland & Ross, 2021; Olcoñ et al., 2020; Perez, 2021). Some researchers have pointed to the unpreparedness of Social Work faculty to teach about racism and effectively disrupt racist behaviors and discourse in the classroom (Massey & Johnson, 2021; Olcoñ et al., 2020; Perez, 2021) and the tendency to reproduce whiteness through anti-racist pedagogy (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Crudup et al., 2021; Hanna et al., 2021; Jeffrey, 2005). Others
have critiqued the profession for excluding critical theories and frameworks in educational content in favor of hegemonic philosophies and curricula (Crudup et al., 2021; Maglalang & Rao, 2021). Historically, efforts to address racism in social work education have fallen peripherally under the categories of diversity and cultural competency, which neglect to disrupt White supremacy and its roots in the profession (Copeland & Ross, 2021; Olcoń et al., 2020; Perez, 2021; Vanidestine et al., 2023).

As social work faculty endeavor to implement the new EPAS and engage in efforts to dismantle whiteness within academia, we must pay attention. It is important to understand how White people interpret the call to action, how White people engage in the work, and how white-dominated systems respond. Collecting narratives from White faculty about their efforts to disentangle the knots of White normativity embedded in social work research, pedagogy, practice, and programs will shed light on their experiences and their interpretation of these experiences. Attending to these stories provides an opportunity for deeper understanding of whiteness and to expose and interrogate the forces at play in interrupting progress toward racial justice.

**Problem Statement**

The social work profession and education programs continue to exist as raced spaces dominated by White ideologies (Crudup et al., 2021; Maglalang & Rao, 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021; NASW, 2021b; Odera et al., 2021). From disparities in educational access (Salsberg et al., 2017) to deficient historical narratives (Bowles et al., 2016; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Rangel, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021), limited Eurocentric practice models (Maglalang & Rao, 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021), and inadequate attempts to address racism in curricula and pedagogy (Copeland & Ross, 2021; Hanna et al., 2021; Jeffrey, 2015; Massey & Johnson,
2021; Nylund, 2006; Olcoń et al., 2020; Perez, 2021), there is much work to be done to advance current racial equity goals in social work. As outlined throughout this chapter, White domination in the social work profession has led to racism, oppression, and marginalization in the name of advancing human dignity and self-actualization. White social workers have controlled the narrative of what social work is and how it should be taught and practiced (Maglalang & Rao, 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021). The radical potential of social work’s commitment to social and racial justice has been sidelined in favor of individual reform, cultural competence, and celebrations of diversity (Nylund, 2006). These approaches neglect to challenge systems of social control that perpetuate oppression and racism and contribute to gross educational, social, and health inequities (Crudup et al., 2021; Vanidestine et al., 2023).

This study seeks to address the problem of White social workers perpetuating whiteness in social work educational spaces. As social work educators implement new initiatives to advance anti-racist EPAS goals, there exists the potential to reproduce whiteness (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Jeffrey, 2015; Mathew et al., 2021). Scholars have written about the tendency of well-intentioned White people to perpetuate whiteness when implementing anti-racist and racial justice strategies (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Jeffreý, 2015; Lensmire, 2022; Mathew et al., 2021). If White social work educators continue to perpetuate whiteness, they will continue to harm the individuals and communities they aim to support (Crudup et al., 2021; Maglalang & Rao, 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Odera et al., 2021). Further, Social Work faculty are responsible for educating students who take what they learn in the classrooms to their work in communities and organizations. In the absence of ongoing critical examinations of self and systems, White Social Work faculty risk quashing the liberatory and human potential that lies at the heart of social work education (Odera et al., 2021).
Purpose of Study

This research study explores the stories of White Social Work faculty answering calls to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, and universities. To dismantle whiteness means to uproot systems that perpetuate racial inequity (Cabrera, 2022; Gusa, 2010; Leonardo, 2004; Matias & Boucher, 2021). It requires critical examination of how historical narratives about White superiority live in today’s systems and continue to marginalize and erase the experiences, contributions, and ways of knowing of people of color. Dismantling whiteness is to understand and act against the accepted normativity and dominance of White ideologies to make space for diverse perspectives and promote racial equity. The purpose of this study is to explore the stories of White Social Work faculty endeavoring to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, and universities and to examine the forces that shape and challenge the work.

This study uses Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) (Cabrera, 2016; Cabrera, 2022; Leonardo, 2004; Matias & Boucher, 2022) as a framework for interrogating how White people understand whiteness within social work and higher education and how they engage in decentering whiteness in educational spaces. It is important to examine the narratives of White Social Work faculty working to make change while reflecting upon the potential reification of whiteness (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Crudup et al., 2021) and identifying the forces that shape and challenge the work. Engaging the stories of White faculty answering calls to disrupt White ideologies and systemic racism will shed light on the tensions and institutional challenges to help inform change.

History informs us that efforts to address racism taken up by White social workers have led to insufficient efforts that center White people while neglecting to address systemic problems and excluding theories and frameworks that reflect the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and
People of Color (BIPOC) (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Crudup et al., 2021; Maglalang & Rao, 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Odera et al., 2021). As heightened attention is given to the topics of whiteness, systemic racism, and anti-racist pedagogy in social work, we must stay in tune with what is happening in educational spaces, including the efforts of White people. While this research explores the stories of White people, it is not meant to elevate their efforts over those of BIPOC. The intention is not to bolster White experiences or champion their ways of knowing. Rather, this study critically examines the on-the-ground responses of White faculty dismantling whiteness with a critical eye toward reproducing whiteness and developing insights about disrupting individual and institutional systems of domination in educational spaces.

**Research Questions**

This research study gathered the stories of White Social Work faculty members' efforts to undo oppressive practices in social work educational spaces. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the stories of White Social Work faculty endeavoring to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, institutions, and related work?

2. What tensions do White Social Work faculty navigate in their efforts to dismantle whiteness, and how do they manage these tensions?

The first research question aimed to understand the various approaches faculty members use to enact change in the educational spaces in which they work. Because whiteness is embedded across spaces in academia (Ahmed, 2012; Cabrera et al., 2016; Stokas, 2023) and calls for changes in the profession are broad (GCSW, 2020; Yearwood et al., 2021), I was interested in gaining insight into the many ways in which faculty are working to deconstruct whiteness.
Additionally, collecting stories about the experiences of those answering calls to disrupt systemic racism is important to building a shared commitment to the work (Riessman, 2008).

The second research question acknowledged the struggles inherent in working to uproot deeply embedded systems of White supremacy. Uncovering the tensions to doing the hard work is critical to informing future initiatives and continued change. Exploring how individuals navigate and potentially overcome challenges is similarly powerful and contributes to what Giroux (2007, 2017) called educated hope. We must envision change to achieve progress. Combating systems of power can be isolating. It is important that stories are shared to build solidarity and empower collective efforts toward change.

**Rationale for Methods**

This study used narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Riessman, 2008) to elicit stories of White Social Work faculty engaging in efforts to disrupt the oppressive powers of whiteness. Qualitative research is important for developing a deep understanding of complex phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this study, a qualitative approach allowed me to move beyond an inventory of White Social Work faculty efforts. Using qualitative narrative methodology allowed me to elicit a deeper understanding of how participants interpreted and assigned value to their experiences and assess both the content and structure of their narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Riessman, 2008).

Stories are an essential part of meaning-making for individuals (Riessman, 2008). The act of storytelling not only allows for personal meaning-making but also ignites a sense of solidarity that can lead to shared commitments and produce change (Riessman, 2008). Hearing the stories of White Social Work faculty engaging in efforts to dismantle whiteness is critical to understanding how calls for racial equity are being taken up on the ground within social work
educational spaces. Their stories can shed light on both the individual and structural forces of whiteness at play in educational spaces. Because history informs us that White people working to address racism have perpetuated inequities (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Crudup et al., 2021; Hanna et al., 2021; Jeffrey, 2005; Snowden et al., 2021), it is important to remain vigilant of current efforts toward change.

Further, narrative analysis goes beyond individuals’ experiences to engage the broader narratives and social conditions within which the individuals are situated (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Examining the broader context of whiteness in social work educational departments and post-secondary universities was of additional importance to this study. Narrative inquiry allowed an exploration of the greater institutional and societal narratives at play in conjunction with the stories that White Social Work faculty shared about their experiences confronting whiteness.

Significance of Study

Social workers support society’s most marginalized individuals, families, and communities. Their clients face multiple and complex issues that extend far beyond any individual. As such, social work requires a broad range of skills and critical insights into societal structures and forces that influence power and oppression. In the summer of 2020, people across the world got a marked glimpse into the widespread, yet oft-overlooked, systemic inequities that shape daily existence for so many people in this country, particularly through the brutal murder of George Floyd (Altman, 2020; History, 2021). Not only were the disparities in health outcomes for BIPOC made obvious by the Covid 19 pandemic (Andraska et al., 2021; Solman, 2020), social media forced skeptical and apathetic onlookers to acknowledge what Black and Brown people have been shouting for decades – racism is still deeply embedded and very much alive in
the U.S. The social work profession, like many other entities, pledged solidarity with Black and Brown people and promised to do better (NASW, 2021b).

Social work and education share a commitment to justice, empowerment, and the betterment of humanity. Social work education programs, then, hold an obligation to engage students and faculty in critical inquiry that challenges oppressive systems and to act as sites of “revolutionary contestation” (Stokas, 2023, p. 187). Future social work practitioners receive much of their training and inculcation into the discipline through their formal higher education programs. Social work faculty hold incredible power in shaping the minds of students who will be sent to work alongside and for vulnerable populations. They have an opportunity to effect change and create space for deeper understanding and critical interrogation of systems, policies, and practices that perpetuate inequities and cause harm. Social work educators must consider the forces operating within educational spaces that interrupt diversity of thought, perpetuate structural racism, and negate the emancipatory power of social justice work. Thus, it is important to examine curricula, teaching practices, department and university policies, and faculty perceptions about whiteness.

If the stories of White faculty working to unsettle whiteness go untold, we will have incomplete and unexamined pictures of the promises that were made. It is easy to post pledges of support but much more difficult to navigate systems, institute change, and redefine what is considered truth. If the stories go untold, we have insufficient insight into how best to refine our tactics and move forward with intention. In the absence of stories, we neglect opportunities to make meaning of our work and open ourselves to critical feedback. As we move forward, we must not forget the legacy of harm created by White women intervening to help people of color or the accumulating effects enduring in social work today. Tackling the complexities of
whiteness requires examination of efforts across educational spaces, including those of White people.

Summary

I opened this chapter with a nod toward scholars, philosophers, students, and dreamers who have dared grasp at the edges of educated hope to imagine a time and place where education and social work live up to their liberatory potential. I then provided a brief overview of how ideologies of White superiority entered higher education and social work and the ways that whiteness continues to exist, shape knowledge, and hinder transformative change in educational spaces. I rationalized the current study of White faculty undoing racism in relation to both the widespread calls within the social work profession and the complicated history of White people reproducing whiteness. I advised that we pay attention to these unfolding efforts as a way of engaging in critical analysis and inspiring ongoing efforts toward change. In the next chapter, I review the literature on the manifestations of whiteness in higher education and social work and discuss Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) as a theoretical framework for analyzing this study.
Chapter 2

This study explored the stories of White Social Work faculty answering calls across the profession to dismantle whiteness in their social work classrooms, departments, and institutions. Such an investigation required understanding the complexities of whiteness through historical and present-day lenses, with specific attention paid to concepts applicable across higher education and social work. Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) (Cabrera, 2016; Cabrera, 2022; Leonardo, 2004; Matías & Boucher, 2022) provided a foundation for examining efforts to dismantle whiteness with a keen eye toward disrupting the embedded ideologies of White domination and confronting the reification of whiteness. The discipline aims to expose and undo the harm inflicted on people of color through exclusionary epistemologies and systems (Cabrera, 2016; Matías & Boucher, 2022).

I begin this chapter with a brief synopsis of the term whiteness (Ahmed, 2012; Alcoff, 2015; Applebaum, 2016; Cabrera et al., 2016; Harris, 1993; Leonardo, 2002; Mohajeri, 2022; Omi & Winant, 2015) and an exploration of the concept of race (Omi & Winant, 2015). I continue with an examination of CWS, emphasizing the tensions that exist in the literature in relation to my study (Cabrera, 2022; Matías, 2022; Matías & Boucher, 2021). To address the tensions, I draw on insights from White allyship literature (Gates et al., 2021; Massey & Johnson, 2021; Mathew et al., 2021). I then contextualize the history of whiteness in higher education (Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2021; Stein, 2017; Wilder, 2013) and social work (Bowles et al., 2016; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Crudup et al., 2021; Gregory, 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Snowden, 2021) and consider present-day manifestations within these two arenas. The second half of the chapter focuses on the theoretical framework I use to guide my inquiry: Whiteness as Property (Harris, 1993), Ontological Expansiveness (Sullivan, 2006), and Assumed
Racial Comfort (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). These tenets within CWS are most applicable to the examination of dismantling whiteness in my study of social work academic spaces. Thus, I am using elements of CWS both as part of my literature review and as the framework for my inquiry.

**What is Whiteness?**

An absolute definition of whiteness remains elusive as the contours of whiteness are multi-faceted and ever-evolving (Applebaum, 2016; Cabrera et al., 2016; Mohajeri, 2022a; Omi & Winant, 2015). Additionally, the concept of whiteness is best understood through its relationship to other equally complex systems of oppression, such as racism, classism, colonialism, White supremacy, neoliberalism, and racial capitalism (Cole, 2021). Rather than address each of these oppressive structures separately in this literature review or define their intersectionality, I will subtly weave the concepts throughout, replicating the fluidity and reciprocity with which they exist in relation to one another.

Whiteness acts in both subtle and overt ways, wielding power and upholding systems and ideologies that favor White people (Ahmed, 2012; Alcoff, 2015; Cabrera et al., 2016; Harris, 1993; Leonardo, 2002; Omi & Winant, 2015). A fundamental misconception about whiteness is that it is synonymous with White people (Leonardo, 2002). Rather, scholars understand whiteness as a much more complex ‘racial discourse’ embedded in our society (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Leonardo, 2002; Mohajeri, 2022a/2022b). To view whiteness solely in relation to individual White people would ignore the structural existence of White ideologies, culture, and norms embedded in U.S. society and institutions (Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2021). While White people benefit from whiteness, the two are not the same (Leonardo, 2002). The rooted and dominant discourse of White superiority that has become normalized in U.S. culture makes it
possible for people of color to ascribe to the discourse of whiteness and engage in White ideological ways of being (Cabrera et al., 2016).

A "product of history" (Alcoff, 2015, p. 149), whiteness is so deeply ingrained in daily existence that it fades into the background and becomes the truth and measure by which individuals, cultures, languages, and beliefs receive value (Ahmed, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Leonardo, 2002). Whiteness is at once hidden because it is normalized to the point of invisibility (Ahmed, 2012; Applebaum, 2016; Cabrera, 2016) and visible through tangible manifestations that grant economic, social, political, and educational advantages to White people while marginalizing people of color (Alcoff, 2015; Gregory, 2020; Leonardo, 2002). Understanding the constructs of racialized privilege and oppression requires an investigation into the origins of race-making, which I will explore next.

**Race-Making**

The racialization of humans in the United States traces to its history of slavery and colonialism rooted in methods of control and exploitation (Omi & Winant, 2015). Race has been used as a “master category of social organization in the United States,” one fixated on difference, hierarchy, marginalization, subordination, and oppression (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 108). Race is a social rather than biological construct created by the ruling class to maintain systems of power and privilege for “white” people while “othering” non-White bodies (Cabrera et al., 2016; Gregory, 2021; Leonardo, 2002; Omi & Winant, 2015).

Historical analyses of White racial categorization reveal the politics of whiteness (Applebaum, 2016; Omi & Winant, 2015). Designations of who gets to be White have changed throughout history and have never been disentangled from White supremacy, political agendas, and targeted efforts to include and exclude (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008; Omi & Winant, 2015).
Skin color, science, geography, professional and societal contributions, moral character, religion, European descent, and so-called common knowledge have all been used to set legal precedence for determining various ethnic groups’ eligibility for being White (Gualtieri, 2001). Omi and Winant (2015) refer to this classification and stratification of humans as race-making.

Though race is not real, race-making has real consequences (Omi & Winant, 2015). Being White not only grants rights, freedoms, and social status, it protects from being “othered.” David Roediger (1991), borrowing from W.E.B. Du Bois, termed the phrase “wages of whiteness” to identify the metaphorical payment or benefits of being “not Black.” Through race-making, ideologies of White supremacy and the normalization of whiteness push “others” to the margins of humanity with devastating effects, as demonstrated by the following quote from W.E.B. Du Bois (2014).

He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of White Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face…These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed, or forgotten…[they] flash here and there like falling stars, and die sometimes before the world has rightly gauged their brightness. (Du Bois, 2014, p. 5)

Du Bois’ writings at once exposed the destructive power of whiteness while disrupting notions of White godliness and reshaping ideas about Black identity. In a single passage, he makes clear the material consequences of whiteness and challenges the existence of White superiority. It is this troubling of whiteness that scholars point to as the essence of Critical Whiteness Studies and that which has been neglected in higher education critical whiteness
research in favor of understanding how White people experience whiteness (Matias & Boucher, 2021; Cabrera, 2022). I will explore this philosophical tension in the next section.

**Critical Whiteness Studies**

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) is a relatively new academic field. Though popularized in academia in the 1990s when White authors began publishing about White privilege (Gregory, 2020; Matias, 2022), leading CWS theorists trace the origins of whiteness studies to distinguished Black scholars such as W. E. B. Du Bois (1920s) and James Baldwin (1960s-80s) (Cabrera et al., 2016; Gregory, 2021; Matias, 2022). That White scholars succeeded in drawing attention to a subject meant to center the voices and experiences of people of color is both an example and a product of whiteness that continues today (Matias, 2022). Over the last few decades, higher education scholarship has emphasized White privilege and White identity formation as primary approaches for understanding whiteness (Cabrera, 2022; Matias, 2022). Similarly, social work education has focused on concepts of diversity and multiculturalism as a means of studying and addressing racism (Copeland & Ross, 2021; Olcoń et al., 2020). While cultural competence and appreciation are important skills for engaging with diverse populations, they do not address the history of domination or structural forces that impact social work clients (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Olcoń et al., 2020; Vanidestine et al., 2023). Fighting for social and racial justice requires more than individual-level explorations and acknowledgment of human differences. Individual-level frameworks not only paradoxically recenter White people, they also abandon the critical importance of exposing the harmful impacts of White supremacy on people of color and neglect to disrupt the ideologies and systems that create the harm (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Leonardo, 2004; Rangel, 2021).
In the following paragraphs, I explore the tension of the prospect of White people reproducing whiteness when engaging in undoing whiteness. I consider how I, a White researcher, will navigate these tensions as I research the experiences of White Social Work faculty working to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, universities, and related work. I propose that drawing on recent social work scholarship about White allyship will help find a way through these tensions (Gates et al., 2021; Mathew et al., 2021).

**The Pull between White Whiteness and Black Whiteness Studies**

Since its entrée into higher education scholarship, the field of critical whiteness studies has been ever-evolving. Theorists of various races have detailed nuanced interpretations of the depth and breadth of whiteness, exploring concepts like White privilege (McIntosh, 1992), White emotionality (Matias et al., 2016), White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2010), and White ignorance (Mills, 2015). Scholars have also studied the impacts of whiteness on students of color through microaggressions (Smith et al., 2016) and hostile climates (Gusa, 2010) that lead to racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2016). Educators have also explored pathways for undoing whiteness through anti-racism (Basham et al., 1997; Copeland & Ross, 2021; Hanna et al., 2021; Kendi, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lensmire et al., 2013; Matias et al., 2016; Vanidestine et al., 2023) and neo-abolitionism (Gregory, 2021; Leonardo, 2002). Cabrera (2022) identified two eras within the exploration of whiteness in higher education scholarship. The first era (2000-2009) concentrated on White students' racial identity development, and the second era (2010-2020) expanded to incorporate critical analysis of the relationship between whiteness and systemic racism but continued to emphasize White student experiences. Taken together, approaches to disrupting White supremacy in higher education have largely recentered White people (Cabrera et al., 2016). Matias (2022) pointedly remarked that
whiteness studies are “one long wave that continuously crashes on the lives of Black, Indigenous, people of Color” (p. 2).

Black scholars acknowledged the relevance of studying how White people experience and understand whiteness (Matias & Boucher, 2021), but they also noted significant pitfalls, including the emphasis on awareness over action (Cabrera et al., 2016; Leonardo, 2004; Massey & Johnson, 2021; Mathew et al., 2021; Rangel, 2021). Leonardo (2004) argued that focusing solely on White privilege centers the conversation on the advantages White people receive while neglecting critical discussions about what makes their privilege possible. Acknowledging one's privilege does not disrupt White normativity or dismantle structural racism; instead, it weakens these efforts (Miller & Lensmire, 2020). The overwhelming emphasis on understanding one’s White privilege becomes self-serving if the analysis does not move beyond a framework of White epistemologies (Matias, 2022; Matias & Boucher, 2021). The goal of CWS is not to raise awareness of White ignorance, innocence, or privilege. Achieving enlightenment about whiteness is important, but it is not the endpoint. Rather, educational practice and pedagogy must examine the social conditions that make dominance possible and engage liberatory efforts to dismantle exclusionary systems and structures that continue to marginalize Black and Brown people (Leonardo, 2004; Squire et al., 2018).

In response to the decades-long overemphasis on centering White people’s experiences with whiteness, top CWS scholars have recently committed to a return to studies that honor and align with original interrogations by W.E.B. Du Bois and James Baldwin – what Zeus Leonardo termed Black whiteness studies (Cabrera, 2022; Matias, 2022; Matias & Boucher, 2021). Recall the passage from Du Bois that illustrated the complexities of whiteness as both real (causing psychological, physical, social, and economic harm) and unreal (race and ideas of White
superiority are manufactured concepts). Matias and Boucher (2021) stated the need for CWS grounded in epistemologies that “examine and identify the complexities behind racial dominant ideology and demonstrate its impact on people of Colour” (p. 12). Cabrera (2022) echoed this imperative when they emphasized the need to draw connections between cause (whiteness) and effect (harm) to demonstrate whiteness as “a real and actual problem” (p. 5). In the next section, I explore how the tension between White whiteness studies and Black whiteness studies shows up in this study and present ideas for how I might move through the tension.

The Tensions of White Allyship

As I endeavor to explore the stories of White Social Work faculty working to dismantle whiteness in their educational spaces, I am keenly aware that I am not dancing around the edges but stepping directly into the tension of centering and reproducing whiteness. My research on the stories of White faculty seemingly misaligns with current calls from prominent CWS scholars of color to return to Black whiteness studies (Cabrera, 2022; Matias, 2022; Matias & Boucher, 2021). I step humbly and restlessly into these murky waters with ongoing reflection on the limitations of my white, onto-epistemic social imaginary (Stokas, 2023).

As I move forward, I will carry with me the wisdom and critiques of scholars of color, including the realization that my positioning against whiteness will never be separated from the legacy of whiteness or my own history (Chapman & Withers, 2019). I will hold tight to the notion that the line between justice and injustice is imaginary (Chapman & Withers, 2019). According to Chapman and Withers (2019), one can never simply cross over to the other side of justice or injustice because the path is not linear. Instead, we become entangled in the complexities of our intersecting identities as we acquire knowledge about ourselves and the unique experiences of others. Put simply, I am engaging in oppression even as I work against
oppression. I can never always know all the ways of oppression in relation to all people, and I will always be clouded by my own ways of knowing. To help navigate this truth, I will lean on insights about White allyship from scholars of color and focus my analysis on critically examining whiteness rather than engaging White epistemological frames that uplift White identity formation, innocence, or ignorance (Matias, 2022).

Allyship is an inherent goal of social work, as social workers are expected to support diverse populations and improve societal conditions (Gates et al., 2021). While White allyship is critical to promoting social equity and disrupting whiteness (Cabrera et al., 2016), it also has the potential to reproduce whiteness when “unhelpful” White allies are unwilling to speak up and challenge the system (Mathew et al., 2021, p. 5). White allyship is not about becoming a savior of another person or group; it is about using one’s position to enact change (Gates et al., 2021; Mathew et al., 2021). In this way, allyship should be viewed as a process rather than an identity (Gates et al., 2021). Adopting an ally identity without social action serves to elevate one's status as a social justice advocate rather than shed light on the destructive power of whiteness (Mathew et al., 2021). Similarly, embracing social justice language but being unwilling to use one's power and privilege to enact change is not allyship (Mathew et al., 2021). Allyship requires efforts beyond statements of support on websites, signs on office doors, and solidarity logos in email signatures. Successful White allyship requires a combination of ongoing self-education and self-reflection about whiteness and employing consistent and intentional actions that challenge structural racism (Massey & Johnson, 2021).

In response to the Council of Social Work Education’s new educational standards (a system of professionalization itself tied to whiteness and neoliberalism), White faculty across the country are implementing anti-racist practices in their classrooms, departments, and other works.
Their efforts to destabilize whiteness beckon examination as a means of assessing the reification of the oppressive forces of whiteness and the potential to cause further harm. In alignment with Matias’ (2022) position on criticality, this study assumes that: “1) race, racism, and White supremacy are operating at all times; and 2) the study of whiteness intrinsically enables society to better understand how people of Colour are racially oppressed” (p. 11). I engage in this study not to heroicize the efforts of White Social Work faculty endeavoring to disrupt White normativity (Mathew et al., 2021; Matias & Mackey, 2015; Spears & DeLoach, 2020). The study will not focus on understanding their experiences of whiteness but on investigating their experiences of dismantling whiteness in academia. The study will interrogate the problem of whiteness as a way of understanding its forces. This study intends to expose the tensions involved in dismantling whiteness to disrupt existing power structures in an effort toward transformative change. As discussed in the next section, history demonstrates the dangers of allowing the good intentions of White social workers to go unchecked and highlights the destructive powers of hegemony in higher education.

**Historical Ties and Current Manifestations of Whiteness**

In this third portion of the literature review, I scrutinize the problematic beginnings of higher education and social work as a way of understanding the present manifestations of whiteness. Because faculty fulfill multiple roles as researchers, educators, and workers, it is important to explore the ways whiteness lives and operates in social work pedagogy and practice as well as within the structures and cultures of departments and institutions. This section, therefore, examines how whiteness became entrenched in higher education and social work and how it continues to uphold power structures that marginalize people of color. First, I briefly explore the rise of U.S. universities as a project of whiteness through slavery and settler
colonialism (Wilder, 2013; Stein, 2017). I follow with a look at the role of early universities in producing and disseminating hegemonic knowledge (Corces-Zimmerman & Cabrera, 2021; Wilder, 2013). I end the section with a similar examination of social work’s historical (Bowles et al., 2016; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Gregory, 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021) and current relationship to whiteness (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Crudup et al., 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Rangel, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021).

**Historical Ties of Whiteness and Higher Education**

U.S. universities have, since their colonial founding, served as sites for the reproduction of White ideologies (Cabrera et al., 2016; Corces-Zimmerman & Cabrera, 2021; Wilder, 2013) that interrupt diversity of thought, perpetuate inequity, and negate the emancipatory and democratic power of intellectual discovery (Cabrera et al., 2016; Giroux, 2007, 2017). These early institutions were deeply entwined with racism, capitalism, and imperialism, employing notions of White superiority to amass wealth and maintain power (Harris, 1993; Omi & Winant, 2015; Stein, 2017; Wilder, 2013). While enslaved Africans were used as free labor and capital for further expansion, elite institutions were building global capitalist economies and narratives about Black and Indigenous bodies and cultures that rationalized the commodification, destruction, and displacement of non-whites (Stein, 2017; Wilder, 2013). College leaders and benefactors, together with church and state, coined themselves saviors, using divinity and natural order to justify the most gruesome actions and perpetuate oppression and inequity (Wilder, 2013). Corces-Zimmerman et al. (2021) noted that the terms “higher acculturation” and “higher stratification” better capture the sordid history of U.S. higher education (p. 10).

In his book *Ebony and Ivy*, Wilder (2013) traces the history between elite U.S. universities and systems of domination, religious doctrine, and science, illustrating the power of
higher education to reproduce ideas of White superiority. For example, George Berkeley, the namesake of UC Berkeley, used Indigenous children as weapons of cultural destruction against their own communities. With the funding and forces of religious and university institutions, educated White men stole Indigenous children from their homes, indoctrinated them into White Euro-centric ideals, and sent them back to their people to spread White ways of knowing (Wilder, 2013). Similar tactics of ethnic cleansing and cultural suppression were led by figures like Reverend William Smith of the College of Philadelphia (now University of Pennsylvania) and Reverend John Witherspoon of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) (Wilder, 2013). Young White male students were used to program Native children toward “civility” and “morality” (Wilder, 2013, p. 94) and spread religious and racist teachings far and wide.

Eventually, the hegemonic ideologies of White superiority that infiltrated economic and religious realms seeped into the scientific arena and strengthened racial classification and social stratification (Gregory, 2021; Smedley & Smedley, 2011; Wilder, 2013). Though common discourse positions scientific research as unbiased, accepting such conclusions is dangerous. Research is inevitably interpreted through the worldviews of those conducting it (Leonardo, 2013; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). As Wilder (2013) wrote, “Race did not come from science and theology; it came to science and theology” (p. 182). Sentiments of the natural order of Black and Indigenous inferiority that was deeply rooted in the American consciousness were expanded and reinforced in academia, first through religion and then science (Smedley & Smedley, 2011; Wilder, 2013). Rather than promoting education as a means of exploring a fuller understanding of the world, advancing human potential, and creating just societies, early elite institutions propagated White superiority as universal truth and used education, wealth, and power to destroy
the voices, cultures, and very bodies of non-White beings (Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2021; Wilder, 2013).

**U.S. Universities Today**

Not surprisingly, ideologies of White superiority were not left in the colonial era. Land Grant policies of the mid to late 1800s, the G.I. Bill, affirmative action legislation, and modern-day neoliberal and post-racial ideologies have all shaped and reified whiteness in higher education, frequently under the guise of expanding access and equity (Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2021). Contemporary scholars have demonstrated many ways that U.S. higher education institutions remain entangled with the logic of White superiority, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism. (Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2021; Gusa, 2010; Squire et al., 2018; Stokas, 2023; Wilder, 2013). A critical look across the academic spectrum reveals the embeddedness of whiteness in institutional structures, processes, and practices (Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2021; Gusa, 2010; Leonardo, 2013; Squire et al., 2018; Stokas, 2023). Most relevant to this study are the ways whiteness continues to control knowledge production and perpetuate race and class divides that social workers labor against. In the following paragraphs, I provide a few examples of the ways that the (il)logics of whiteness show up in the structural and intellectual operations of academia.

Governance and funding structures provide one example of how modern-day universities reflect those from colonial times. Wilder (2013) painted a clear picture of how the African slave trade funded the growth of American higher education. He wrote, “Merchants and planters became not just the benefactors of colonial society but its new masters. Slaveholders became college presidents. The wealth of the traders determined the locations and decided the fates of colonial schools” (Wilder, 2013, p. 77). In other words, merchants controlled university ventures,
and their interests were tied up in expansionism and wealth accumulation. Today, despite advances in the diversification of university leadership, White men still hold the majority of seats on college and university governing boards (Whitford, 2021). Additionally, contemporary universities are increasingly tied to capitalist interests, which continue to influence what is designated as worthy of studying and researching (Corces-Zimmerman et al., 2021; Giroux, 2007, 2017; Newfield, 2016; Squire, 2016). Other social, political, and economic functions within the university hierarchy, such as adjunct hiring, the faculty tenure process, and employment benefits and pay structures, continue to position White people at the top and Black people at the bottom of the power pyramid (Squire et al., 2018; Stokas, 2023).

University admissions hold critical opportunities to expand diversity of thought and improve equity (Boske et al., 2018; Hakkola, 2021; Madden, 2000; Posselt et al., 2017; Vigilante, 1978). Access to higher education, particularly selective universities, continues to disadvantage students of color and those from lower socio-economic statuses (Baker & Bastedo, 2021; Bastedo et al., 2018; Posselt et al., 2020). Studies show that even holistic admissions practices meant to improve access demonstrate mixed outcomes for marginalized students (Bastedo et al., 2018; Rosinger et al., 2021). Just as objective admissions measures like GPA and test scores are laden with historical and structural injustices (Bastedo et al., 2018), subjective evaluation criteria reliant on individual interpretation and value judgments can further, rather than disrupt, inequities (Rosinger et al., 2021; Thornhill, 2018). In other words, it matters who is at the decision-making table (Posselt et al., 2020; Squire, 2020). As Wilder (2013) demonstrated, student, faculty, and administrative profiles have implications for who constructs knowledge and what is generated and accepted as truth.
While the racial profiles of today’s university faculty are varied, the majority of four-year higher education institutions’ faculty are White (NCES, 2022). Since faculty members typically produce and disseminate research and writing in the academy through peer-review processes and journals, opportunities for creativity, diverse worldviews, and resistance against hegemonic ideas become limited (Rangel, 2021; Whebi & Turcotte, 2019). Additionally, when research is privately funded, market logics influence what is considered worthy of study and publication (Squire, 2016; Whebi & Turcotte, 2019). These market frameworks typically value performance, productivity, and profit over partnership with and contributions to the community (Squire, 2016; Whebi & Turcotte, 2019). Whebi and Turcotte (2019) described these neoliberal influences on higher education as an “erosion of our basic values of social justice, empowerment, liberation, and community engagement (para. 39).

**Historical Context of Whiteness in Social Work**

The dominant narrative about the beginnings of social work focuses primarily on the stories of helpful middle- and upper-class White women (Bowles et al., 2016; Chapman & Withers, 2019; McCleary & Simard, 2021). In the United States, Mary Richmond and Jane Addams have been coined the founders of social work with origins dating back to the Progressive Era (Bowles et al., 2016; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Gregory, 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Snowden, 2021). Histories commonly taught in academic spaces credit Richmond with the conservative, individual-level Charity Organization Society (COS) that sent so-called friendly visitors to teach the impoverished how to live morally and properly (Bowles et al., 2016; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Crudup et al., 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Snowden, 2021). The same historical accounts associate Addams and the settlement house movement with the liberal arm of social work that used community organizing as a tool for improving societal
conditions (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Snowden, 2021). Critical versions of social work’s founding in North America recognize these accounts as incomplete and exclusionary. First, White women were not the sole people working to support individuals, improve communities, and champion social justice (Bowles et al., 2016; Chapman & Withers, 2019; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Snowden, 2021). Moreover, such narratives neglect to acknowledge the deeply problematic and paradoxical entanglements of these movements with oppressive forces (Chapman & Withers, 2019).

An Incomplete Truth

Racism and White supremacy narratives influenced the development of social work, just as it did post-secondary institutions. Not surprisingly, then, early social welfare initiatives led and practiced by White women focused on services for the "deserving poor," which did not include Black people (Gregory, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021). Early COS interventions relied on punitive measures framed by White ideologies and racialized perceptions (Gregory, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021). Systemic issues brought about by racism and oppression were ignored in favor of surveillance methods, and reformist approaches focused on moving individuals toward behaviors deemed moral and respectable to the ruling class (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Rangel, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021). Chapman and Withers (2019) highlighted the extent of the sanitization of social work history when they wrote that COS “took concrete food and money away from poor and disabled people, contributed to their construction as biologically defective, and rationalized both their incarceration and the apprehension of their children out of plainly and explicitly eugenic motivations” (pp. 39-40).

Contemporary critical social work scholars have also noted the absence of stories about Black, Indigenous, and people of color’s historical contributions to social work. For example,
core social work concepts such as the strengths perspective, social justice, and empowerment were key tenets of W.E.B. Dubois' writings and sociological philosophies (Bowles et al., 2016). Snowden’s (2021) historical research found that while the social work profession abandoned Black and other communities of color until the Civil Rights Movement, Black social workers were providing for individual needs and engaging macro-level interventions. Unfortunately, the robust narratives of BIPOC have been silenced in favor of stories of White people doing and professionalizing social work (Bowles et al., 2016; Crudup et al., 2021; Snowden et al., 2021). Since the profession's inception, the cultural values, voices, and contributions of people of color have been discounted by White narratives that relegate non-whites as second-class citizens (Snowden et al., 2021) and “outside agitators” (Rangel, 2021, p. 978). These missing narratives are important to positioning BIPOC as experts in their communities, uplifting BIPOC ways of knowing, and infusing non-Eurocentric healing and helping practices that expand social workers’ efforts toward change. More outsider stories must be taught as they represent non-conformist ideologies that could move social workers toward their commitment to justice (Rangel, 2021).

**Appreciating Diversity; Sidestepping White Supremacy**

Calls for addressing racism within the social work profession are not new, nor are attempts to do so. Special reports, advisory boards, organizations, and educational standards have been developed at various times over the decades to combat racial injustices in society and within the profession (Vanidestine et al., 2023). In 1968, a group of Black Social Workers established the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) and led change efforts to address racism and White supremacy, including pushing back against white-dominated Eurocentric curricula and service delivery in Black communities (Association of Black Social workers, n.d.). In 2007 and 2013, the NASW issued special reports calling for the profession to
engage in steps toward racial equity (Vanidestine et al., 2023). The NASW’s 2021 report on undoing racism (NASW, 2021b) represents the most recent iteration of the profession’s long struggle to enact institutional change.

Despite ongoing efforts to combat racism, social work scholars have reported a disconnect between the profession’s stated commitments and dominant pedagogical practices (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Copeland & Ross, 2021; Olcoń et al., 2020). Not until 2022 did the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) incorporate racial equity goals into the educational standards. Rather than integrate issues of racism and White supremacy, social work education has relied primarily upon enhancing cultural diversity, appreciation, competency, and sensitivity (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Copeland & Ross, 2021; Olcoń et al., 2020; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Perez, 2021). These micro-level approaches neglect deeper analysis and engagement with issues of structural racism (Perez, 2021; Vanidestine et al., 2023).

Additionally, these and other newer pedagogical frameworks that integrate issues of power, privilege, and oppression tend to position White students as the central learners of social work, reinforcing existing power structures (Hanna et al., 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021). Attempts to engage diversity in Eurocentric U.S. social work curricula have served to reify racialized ideologies by depicting BIPOC as recipients of care and White people as the helping professionals (McCleary & Simard, 2021). As such, standard classroom approaches have also prioritized creating comfortable spaces for White students to explore their relationship to power and privilege while neglecting the critical approaches needed to disrupt the status quo of whiteness and its roots in the profession (Aguilar & Counsel-Carpenter, 2021; Perez, 2021; Rangel, 2021; Vanidestine et al., 2022). Unsurprisingly, researchers have noted that social work educators are unprepared and uncomfortable teaching about racism and effectively disrupting
racist behaviors and discourse in the classroom (Massey & Johnson, 2021; Olcoń et al., 2020; Perez, 2021).

Attempts to address racism outside of the classroom have also fallen short. Rangel (2021) stated, "Through social work, White supremacy is embedded in processes that diagnose, treat, analyze and theorize about people of color's experiences and trauma, but then do nothing to change social work's involvement in it" (p. 979). Similarly, Gregory (2020) highlighted how social work interventions have focused on addressing the "effects" of whiteness while accepting its "existence" (p. 1210). In other words, the white-dominated social work profession has contradictorily aligned with oppressive systems and dominant White ideologies while professing its commitment to promoting racial justice (Gregory, 2020; Snowden et al., 2021).

Calls for diversity, equity, and anti-racism are not new to the social work profession, but they have received significant attention since 2020 (Hanna et al., 2021). Special racial justice editions of social work publications gave voice to the many ways that whiteness moves within educational spaces, paradoxically limiting progress toward racial and social justice (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Rangel, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021; McCleary & Simard, 2021). While Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) has not been at the forefront of white-prevailing efforts to address racism in social work, current calls to dismantle whiteness echo longstanding insights from CWS. Demands include accounts of expanded and truthful social work history (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Rangel, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021), curricula that inspire discomfort as a necessary step toward behavioral change (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Perez, 2021), action over awareness and competence (Rangel, 2021; Spears & DeLoach, 2021), and centering the experiences, knowledge, and contributions of people and communities of color to the profession (Rangel, 2021; Snowden, 2021; Spears & DeLoach, 2021). In alignment with these
critical conceptions for undoing whiteness in social work, my research study utilizes tenets from CWS as the theoretical framework. In the next section, I review details about the theoretical framework and its relation to the current study.

**Theoretical Framework**

In the following paragraphs, I present the theoretical framework that guides this study. In doing so, I connect critical concepts from the framework to the preceding literature review to emphasize the relevance of the theories to the study of whiteness in social work educational spaces. Drawing from CWS, Cabrera et al. (2016) identified five essential mutually reinforcing concepts relevant to studying postsecondary institutions; these include colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2010), epistemologies of ignorance (Mills, 1997), ontological expansiveness (Sullivan, 2006), whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), and assumed racial comfort (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). While I briefly review the concepts of colorblindness and epistemologies of ignorance, I focus primarily on the latter three frameworks as they are most applicable to analyzing whiteness in this study. Further, the selected tenets for this study focus on structural elements of whiteness – how whiteness inhabits space – rather than factors of individual identity. A structural-level approach helps to uphold my commitment to examine the ways whiteness operates in educational spaces rather than focusing on how White people experience whiteness.

**Colorblindness and Epistemologies of Ignorance**

Colorblindness and epistemologies of ignorance denote an inability or unwillingness to acknowledge the existence and ongoing effects of systemic racism. Colorblind racism is a form of “racetalk” that uses “semantic moves to save face” and create the appearance of being “not racist” (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000, p. 76). Colorblind ideologies also work to preserve privilege through discourse that assumes race is no longer relevant in society; therefore, existing
racial disparities should be attributed to individuals rather than embedded racism. Epistemologies of ignorance also allow racist systems to remain intact. Individuals hide behind defensive claims of not knowing about or being responsible for systemic racism, which leads to inaction (Cabrera et al., 2016).

**Whiteness as Property**

A third framework highlighted by Cabrera et al. (2016), and one that is central to my study, is whiteness as property. In a foundational piece, Harris (1993) demonstrated in detail how property ownership and racialization of humans are deeply intertwined and rooted in the U.S. history of slavery and colonialism. They traced the path of White identity from ideological to concrete, outlining the social, economic, and eventually legal benefits and protections that transformed whiteness from race classification into “a highly valued and exclusive form of property” (p. 1724). Harris (1993) wrote, “The law’s construction of whiteness defined and affirmed critical aspects of identity (who is white); of privilege (what benefits accrue to that status); and, of property (what legal entitlements arise from that status)” (p. 1725). The fusion of White legal identities with legal benefits reinforces power structures that elevate White status.

The functionalities of whiteness as property persist in today’s legal, educational, and social systems (Harris, 1993). Like property, whiteness grants rights of disposition, the right to use and enjoyment, the right to reputation and status, and the absolute right to exclude (Harris, 1993, p. 1714). The following paragraph highlights a few examples of the ways whiteness has functioned as property in higher education and social work, awarding access, enjoyment, status, and exclusive benefits throughout history.

Early U.S. universities exclusively educated wealthy White males (Corces-Zimmerman & Cabrera, 2021; Wilder, 2013) and created criteria and policies that overtly and covertly excluded
others (Bastedo et al., 2018; Cabrera et al., 2016). When the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 expanded higher education, White leaders restricted funds from flowing to Black communities (Corces-Zimmerman & Cabrera, 2021). Early social welfare initiatives of the nineteenth century excluded services to Black people because they were not considered worthy or helpable (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Gregory, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021). Educational curricula centered dominant White Eurocentric ideas while silencing others (Bowles et al., 2016; Crudup et al., 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1998; NABSW; Rangel, 2021; Snowden, 2021). Social work histories excluded and devalued the voices and contributions of people of color in favor of White narratives (Bowles et al., 2016; Crudup et al., 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Rangel, 2021; Snowden, 2021). Social work admissions and gatekeeping practices are intertwined with longstanding efforts to elevate the profession’s status (Bohrman et al., 2022). The professionalization of social work as a means of gaining legitimacy centered White ways of knowing and excluded community healing and helping strategies from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (Chapman & Withers, 2019; McCleary & Simard, 2021).

The preceding examples highlight exclusionary practices within education and social work that maintained rights and status associated with whiteness. The examples demonstrate how whiteness, whether through individuals whose identity is White or who uphold white-framed interpretations of social work, has held the privileged position of having ownership over the profession, including social work educational spaces. White-centered ideologies shape curricula, pedagogies, research, and methodologies (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter; Crudup et al., 2021; Jeffrey, 2005; McCleary & Simard, 2021; Odera et al., 2021; Rangel, 2021), defining what is worthy of study and who has access to study. These notions of possession and
entitlement correlate to two additional CWS concepts, ontological expansiveness and assumed racial comfort, which are relevant to my study and taken up in the next section.

**Ontological Expansiveness and Assumed Racial Comfort**

Sullivan (2006) used ontological expansiveness to describe how White people perceive all space and place as belonging to them. Because White people have historically had access to all spaces, actual and figurative, they assume entitlement to lived space and see the world as if they are the only ones to exist, and their ways of knowing and being are the only ways of knowing and being. In other words, a White person moves through spaces freely, their whiteness granting vast access and power. When White people are denied comfortable access to spaces or perceive their access to be limited, they feel wronged and often resort to claims of reverse racism (Sullivan, 2006).

Similarly, assumed racial comfort refers to notions of White peoples’ perceived rights to feel safe - in spaces and places - when engaging in racial dialogue (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). ‘Safe spaces’ became standard nomenclature in educational spaces when engaging students, faculty, and staff in dialogue about race. Leonardo and Porter (2010) asked the critical question, “Safety for whom?” (p. 139). They explain that maintaining safety for White individuals often comes at the expense of people of color and positions White people as central benefactors of racial dialogue. If the purpose of dialogue about race is to disrupt dominant ideologies and existing power structures, then discomfort should be anticipated (Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Leonardo & Porter, 2010; Perez, 2021).

The harm created when White social workers perceive the world through lenses of self and whiteness can be seen throughout history. Mary Richmond’s friendly visiting initiative discussed earlier in this chapter, for example, was prefaced on the idea that the way to improve
social and economic conditions for poor people was to move them toward the moral ways of the ruling class (Chapman & Withers, 2019). Friendly visitors assessed the worthiness of poor immigrants for material goods, including food and clothing (Chapman & Withers, 2019), and completely deserted Black communities that were collectively deemed unworthy (Gregory, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021). Early social work organizations also supported eugenics and sterilization programs aimed at ridding society of those believed biologically and intellectually deficient (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Snowden et al., 2021). In the nineteenth century, social workers also engaged in efforts to indoctrinate Indigenous children to U.S. values and culture by supporting assimilation schools and adoptions into White families (Chapman & Withers, 2019; NASW, 2021). In recent decades, social work education has relied on comfortable discourses of cultural diversity and multiculturalism (Copeland & Ross, 2021; Olcoń et al., 2020; Vanidestine et al., 2022) rather than critical conversations that deconstruct dominant narratives. This educational approach aligns with Leonardo and Porter's (2010) concept of assumed racial comfort.

**Delusions of Deserved Dominance: The Mechanics of Whiteness**

The nuanced theories of whiteness explored in the previous paragraphs share commonalities that thread through time and place, weaving together delusions of deserved dominance over the production and ownership of knowledge in social work educational spaces (see Figure 1). Fed by the rooted logics of White superiority, colonialism, and racialization, the gears of whiteness are consistently in motion within social work educational spaces, grinding against alternative ways of knowing and being. Ontological Expansiveness, Assumed Racial Comfort, and Whiteness as Property work together to reproduce White normativity and negate transformative potential. As Crudup et al. (2021) wrote, the power of White supremacist norms in the social work profession creates a system whereby “we become socialized to the same
hegemony we claim to fight against” (p. 654). As White social workers answer calls to stop the gears of whiteness from reproducing systems of marginalization, the tenets of Critical Whiteness Studies provide a framework for exposing ideologies that uphold exclusionary practices and block the liberatory power of education and social work.

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Framework*

![Diagram of Delusions of Deserved Dominance Operating in Educational Spaces]

*Note.* This figure represents the mechanics of whiteness operating in social work academia. Academic operations grew from systems of oppression (White superiority, colonialism, and racialization) that continue to create delusions of ownership, authority, and entitlement that reproduce White normativity and crush racial transformation.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I reviewed literature relevant to studying the current efforts of White Social Work faculty attempting to unravel the knots of whiteness in social work educational spaces. I began with an exploration of the concept of whiteness and its relationship to the social
construction of race as a means of power and control (Omi & Winant, 2015). I examined the application of Critical Whiteness Studies in higher education, paying specific attention to scholars’ concerns about the paradox of centering whiteness while trying to dismantle it. As a White researcher studying White faculty, it was important to both name the tension of recentering whiteness in my study and to consider ways I might move through the tension, including a focus on troubling systems of power and exclusion. I incorporated research about White allyship authored by scholars of color that examined the importance of action in allyship. In the chapter, I also examined the historical ties between the rise of White supremacy and the origins of higher education and social work in the United States. The review incorporated present-day manifestations of White supremacy and colonialism in educational spaces.

In the second portion of this chapter, I presented three theories from Critical Whiteness Studies in higher education that I believe are most applicable to analyzing the efforts of White Social Work faculty striving to destabilize the powers of whiteness in academia. As depicted in the theoretical framework diagram, Delusions of Deserved Dominance (Figure 1), the three theories that guide this study are Whiteness as Property, Ontological Expansiveness, and Assumed Racial Comfort. Taken together, these concepts depict White ownership, possession, dominance, and entitlement that operate in social work educational spaces and reproduce White hegemony.
Chapter 3

In this chapter, I provide an overview of my methodological approach. I open with a review of narrative inquiry and discuss why it serves as a relevant approach to investigating my research questions about dismantling whiteness. I move to the study design and discuss the research setting in relation to the current legislative strikes against critical inquiry of race in U.S. classrooms. I continue with a description of my participants, including recruitment and participant selection, and lay out the procedures I will use for obtaining consent and protecting confidentiality. I move into an overview of the interview protocol that guides the data collection methods for the study. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the strategies I will use to develop credibility in my research process, with an emphasis on reflexivity and researcher positionality.

Research Questions

This research study investigates the stories of White Social Work faculty working to undo whiteness in social work educational spaces. The following research questions guide the study:

1. What are the stories of White Social Work faculty endeavoring to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, institutions, and related work?
2. What tensions do White Social Work faculty navigate in their efforts to dismantle whiteness, and how do they manage these tensions?

Narrative Inquiry

This study uses narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Riessman, 2008) to investigate the experiences of White Social Work faculty attempting to destabilize whiteness in academic spaces. My research crosses the fields of social work and education, both of which commonly use narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Using a qualitative narrative
methodology will allow me to elicit a deeper understanding of how White Social Work faculty interpret and story their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Riessman, 2008). Storytelling is an essential part of meaning-making for individuals (Riessman, 2008). Narrative methodology is a tool for exploring both the content and construction of stories. In other words, the stories are examined alongside an analysis of how the stories are told and for what purpose (Riessman, 2008).

There is no single best approach to narrative inquiry or analysis (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), and Riessman (2008) encourages researchers to move within and across the “fuzzy borders” of various approaches (p. 18). At the same time, researchers point to specific elements of narrative studies that distinguish it from other qualitative methodologies (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), such as the importance of space, place, time, and social and cultural context (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Riessman, 2008). The narratives that people tell extend beyond their individual experiences because stories are situated in broader culture and discourse (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Riessman, 2008). In this way, narrative inquiry incorporates both personal and social conditions relative to the study and its participants and considers the historical, present, and future conditions (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

In my study, exploring the individual experiences of White Social Work faculty working to dismantle whiteness in conjunction with institutional and socio-political environments is critical to understanding the dynamics of whiteness. Additionally, a narrative methodological approach allows me to position myself in the research because it recognizes that storied research is co-constructed by the researcher and participant. Who I am as a researcher influences my chosen theoretical framework, my research questions, and my analysis (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).
Study Design

To answer the research questions, I used qualitative narrative inquiry with semi-structured individual interviews with nine White Social Work faculty. Rather than focus on a particular university or region, I opened the study to participants across the United States. Keeping the scope broad aligned with widespread calls in the profession of social work to dismantle whiteness and adopt anti-racist educational strategies. The Council of Social Work Education serves as the accrediting body for social work programs across the U.S. Its most recently published Educational and Professional Assessment Standards (EPAS) require social work programs to implement new anti-racist education goals as a condition of accreditation (Council on Social Work Education, 2022). As such, it is important to explore national efforts to fulfill the profession’s stated commitment to “undoing” racism (NASW, 2021, p. 2).

Study Context

Unique to the setting of this study is the heightened political backlash against critical studies of race in education (Crenshaw, 2021b; Hill, 2021). While the specific target of current legislation against critical explorations of race in U.S. schools is Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Crenshaw, 1988), the tenets of Critical Whiteness Studies are closely related to CRT (Cabrera et al., 2016) and, therefore, equally susceptible to scrutiny and political attack. Originating in the 1970s, CRT is an analytical framework used to examine how racism has shaped and become embedded within U.S. legal and social institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Almost fifty years later, on the heels of national protests against systemic racism, Trump signed an executive order barring federally funded organizations from providing diversity and race sensitivity training, including those grounded in CRT (Goldberg, 2021). While President Biden quickly overturned the order after stepping into office in 2021, politically conservative
states began pushing the anti-CRT agenda (Goldberg, 2021). On April 28th, the governor of Idaho passed a bill banning public schools from teaching concepts of CRT (Gluckman, 2021). Soon after, Oklahoma and Tennessee followed as other states began working to pass similar legislation (Svitek, 2021).

While most of the legislation targets K-12 schools, there are currently 44 legislative measures targeting higher education institutions that have either been adopted or introduced at state and federal levels (CRT Forward, n.d.). The bills prohibit CRT-related teaching, curricular content, and policies (CRT Forward, n.d.). While critical race concepts are being banned from institutional classrooms and policies across the country, social workers are being called to address systemic racism in their pedagogy, practice, and research. The concepts are labeled divisive, anti-American, Marxist threats (Goldberg, 2021) that, according to the Idaho law, run "contrary to the unity of the nation" (Gluckman, 2021, n.p.). Supporters position the legislation as protection against racism under the pretext that such examinations place an undue burden and guilt on students. While the nationwide efforts to silence the threat of progress toward social and racial equity are “a page out of a very old book” (Crenshaw, 2021), they are essential to understanding the social, political, and cultural context of my study examining White Social Work faculty attempting to undo whiteness in higher education spaces.

**Study Participants**

Participants for this study were White Social Work faculty working for CSWE-accredited undergraduate or graduate social work programs at institutions of higher education in the U.S. To be included in the study, participants had to be at least 18 years of age and hold a graduate degree in Social Work or a related academic field. Because this study focused on White Social Work faculty, participants had to self-identify as predominantly white, European-American, or Anglo-
American in terms of their race. They also had to identify as someone actively working to dismantle whiteness in their classroom, department, institution, or related work. I decided to exclude Social Work faculty employed at West Chester University out of concern that participant stories might be assumed to be connected to the university where I am employed and a student, and therefore, threaten confidentiality. Although Social Work faculty from West Chester University were not recruited as participants in the study, they were part of my recruitment plan, as described below.

Participant Recruitment

I recruited participants purposefully, using my professional network, snowball sampling (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019), outreach to Social Work scholars who study whiteness, and social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. I offered no compensation for participating in the study. I have included details about the four recruitment strategies below.

Snowball Sampling with My Professional Network. I engaged in informal conversations and sent an initial Recruitment Email (See Appendix A) to colleagues in the undergraduate and graduate social work departments at West Chester University. The Recruitment Email sought requests for referrals to faculty colleagues from other post-secondary institutions and asked recipients to forward the recruitment email and attached Recruitment Flyer (See Appendix B) to their faculty networks. The Recruitment Flyer contained a QR code directing potential participants to an electronic Interest Form (See Appendix C) that contained eligibility criteria and the Informed Consent process. I sent a Study Recruitment Email (see Appendix D) to any potential participant referrals provided by my colleagues. The Study Recruitment Email contained the Recruitment Flyer and a link directing potential participants to the Interest Form containing the eligibility criteria and the Informed Consent process. The
Interest Form also included an opportunity for potential participants to provide contact information for potential participants from other institutions. I emailed the Study Recruitment Email to any referrals provided by potential participants.

**Snowball Sampling with Study Participants.** At the end of each participant interview, I asked the interviewee, either by Zoom or email, if they knew any faculty colleagues from within or outside their institutions who might be interested in participating in the study. I sent the Participant Recruitment Email (Appendix D) to any referrals provided. I also encouraged interviewees to forward the Recruitment Flyer (Appendix B) to their social work faculty networks.

**Outreach to Social Work Scholars Who Study Whiteness.** I sent the Scholars Outreach Email (Appendix F) to a list of Social Work faculty I identified who had published articles within the last three years on whiteness in the social work profession. The email sought recruitment support by asking scholars to forward the information, including the Recruitment Flyer, to Social Work faculty from their departments or faculty networks actively engaged in efforts to dismantle whiteness. The email included my contact information and a link to the Qualtrics Interest Form with the Informed Consent process.

**Social Media.** I planned to share the Recruitment Flyer (Appendix B) via social media with select Social Work groups on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram, such as Abolitionist Social Work, Grand Challenges for Social Work, Philly Radical Social Workers, SWCAREs, and Social Work Racism Response Movement. Ultimately, because I am not active on social media and was not a member of these groups, I excluded personal social media outreach from my recruitment strategy. Several faculty colleagues, however, successfully shared the flyer via their social media accounts and groups.
Participant Demographics

Below, I include a table displaying the demographic information I collected from participants. I exclude racial identity because the participants in my study all self-identified as white/European American/Anglo American as part of the study’s inclusion criteria. Additionally, every participant indicated, at the time of the study, employment as a faculty member at a CSWE-accredited social work program in the United States, excluding West Chester University of Pennsylvania.

Table 1

Demographics of study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>GENDER IDENTITY</th>
<th>YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>YEARS PRACTICE EXPERIENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>cis gender</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>cis female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>65+</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Volunteer only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kacey</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jakov</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>cis man</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimi</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The faculty spanned four age categories representing overall ages from 35 to 65+ years. They brought varying years of teaching and practice experience. One participant had 35 years of teaching experience, two individuals had between 20-26 years of teaching experience, and the remaining six participants had 9-15 years of experience. Participants’ years of practice experience ranged widely between volunteer-only and 36 years. Participants self-described their gender identity, with most noting female, cis-female, or woman. One participant identified as a cis-man. While I did not capture undergraduate majors in the survey, participants discussed their
early college studies during their interviews. Only one participant earned an undergraduate
degree in social work. Others studied religion/theology, English, history, psychology, and
political science. Interestingly, four of the nine participants either earned law degrees or were on
the path to law school when they discovered social work.

In Table 2 below, I present information related to the type and location of institutions
where study participants worked. I separate the university data from the participant
demographics to protect their identities. Participants selected their Institutional Type(s) from the
options I provided on the Qualtrics Interest Form (Appendix C). Using the name of their
institution, which I received in the interview or via email, I identified the U.S. regions where
their schools were located. However, to protect participant anonymity, I randomly assigned
locational data in the chart below.

**Table 2**

*Types and Locations of Participant Institutions, Randomly Assigned*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTITUTIONAL TYPE</th>
<th>U.S. REGION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predominantly White Institution (PWI)</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>New England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public, Predominantly White Institution (PWI)</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public, Other</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>New England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public, Minority Serving Institution (MSI)</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public, Research, Predominantly White Institution (PWI)</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants worked at universities in eight states in the Northeast, Southeast, and
Midwest regions of the U.S. Six out of nine participants identified their universities as public,
while one selected private and one indicated non-profit. In terms of the student body, three
individuals categorized their universities as Predominantly White Institutions and one as a
Minority Serving Institution. Additionally, one participant indicated they worked at a research university.

**Data Collection Methods**

The study used narrative inquiry as a way of eliciting in-depth responses and stories from participants about their efforts and experiences working to dismantle whiteness. I individually interviewed nine White Social Work faculty who indicated they are actively working to dismantle whiteness in educational spaces within post-secondary institutions. I used semi-structured, open-ended interview questions as outlined in the Interview Protocol (Appendix E) but remained flexible in the wording and flow of questions, allowing a conversational approach that provided space for rich detail (Riessman, 2008). The interviews lasted between 65-106 minutes, with an average interview length of 87 minutes.

My Interview Protocol (Appendix E) contained fourteen primary questions developed to elicit background information about the participants as well as more detailed stories relevant to exploring the study’s research questions. The first three questions were about the individual participants and their educational and professional social work backgrounds. I designed these introductory questions as a way of building participant comfort with me and the interview process. The fourth question related to each participant’s current educator position to gain insights into the educational setting in which they work (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The remaining questions related directly to the exploration of whiteness in educational spaces. I included inquiries about participants’ understanding of and relationship to whiteness and their efforts and experiences working to disrupt whiteness in the places where they work. I also included a question related to the current political climate discussed in the setting section of this
chapter to elicit an understanding of the social conditions at play in the narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Following each interview, I engaged in a process called researcher memoing as a way of reflecting on the interview and interview process. Capturing insights at the time of data collection served as a useful tool throughout the research process, including during data collection, analysis, and writing the findings. Through these reflections, I tracked a combination of observations about the participants, the interview content, my developing insights, and self-introspections. I transcribed each interview using Rev.com, a trusted online transcription service. In several cases, I developed a set of follow-up questions for participants and marked places in the transcript where I felt I missed opportunities to gain additional details from the participants. As a novice researcher, assessing the transcripts in this way served as a useful learning tool as I continued through my participant interviews. Due to time constraints and the breadth of information I collected through initial interviews, I did not conduct follow-up interviews with any participants.

**Procedures**

Prior to beginning my research, I sought approval to conduct research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Following the research protocol, I filed an application with the IRB that described this study in detail, including data collection procedures, participant protections, and potential risks and harms to participants (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). After IRB approval and before conducting my research, I defended my research proposal to my dissertation committee at WCU.

Once I received IRB and department permissions, I began recruitment. I engaged in informal conversations with members of my professional network and asked for referrals for
potential faculty participants from outside WCU. I sent the Recruitment Email to Social Work Colleagues (Appendix A) to faculty in the undergraduate and graduate social work departments at WCU and sent the Scholars Outreach Email (Appendix F) to my list of scholars who recently published articles about whiteness in social work.

I checked Qualtrics regularly for completed Interest Forms, which included the eligibility screening and the Informed Consent process (Appendix C). I emailed the Participant Recruitment Email (Appendix D) to everyone referred to me by Social Work colleagues or whiteness scholars. I continued to ask my professional network for contact information of potential study participants and sent a reminder email to my professional network reminding them to forward the Recruitment Flyer (Appendix B) to their social work faculty networks. A few faculty colleagues posted my study flyer to their professional networks via social media.

For eligible individuals who met the inclusion criteria and provided consent, I scheduled two-hour Zoom interviews at times most convenient for them. I conducted interviews using the Interview Protocol (See Appendix E) as a guide. I include more details about the interview process in the Participant Consent, Confidentiality, and Protection section later in this chapter. At the end of each interview, or in some cases, in a follow-up email, I asked study participants if they knew anyone who might be interested in participating in the study. If they provided me with contact information for the names of potential participants, I sent the Participant Recruitment Email (Appendix D). I also encouraged each study participant to share the Recruitment Flyer (Appendix B) with their professional networks.

After each interview, I checked the audio and video to ensure proper recording in Zoom. Once I confirmed the recording quality, I deleted the iPhone recording from my phone. I did not download the Zoom interview recordings to my laptop. I uploaded the interview files to
Rev.com, an online transcription service. I checked each transcription for accuracy. I stored interview transcriptions electronically on my password-protected laptop.

Consistently throughout the recruitment period, I checked Qualtrics for completed Interest and Consent Forms (Appendix C) and continued emailing eligible participants to schedule individual interviews. I continued recruiting participants through mid-February, at which time I closed the Interest Form. In February and March, I reviewed and analyzed data, coding the stories thematically and structurally (Riessman, 2008) as described below. I wrote the study results, including a discussion of the findings during March and April, before submitting the dissertation to my committee chair in late April in preparation for my dissertation defense in early May. I will delete interview recordings after successfully defending my dissertation.

**Participant Selection**

Individuals who responded to outreach efforts using the link or QR code contained in the email and flyer were directed to an electronic Interest Form in Qualtrics that contained a series of questions used to determine whether they met the inclusion criteria, as outlined in the participant recruitment section above. Respondents who met the inclusion criteria were allowed to continue to the Informed Consent portion of the Interest Form. Respondents who did not meet the inclusion criteria were taken to the end of the survey and thanked for their time and interest. Interested participants who met the study’s inclusion criteria and completed the Informed Consent process were taken to the demographic portion of the form. The demographic section included seven questions and collected the following information: characteristics of the institution where employed, respondent’s race, respondent’s gender, respondent’s age, year respondent earned their graduate degree, years of experience teaching social work, and years of experience practicing social work. I interviewed all nine respondents who met the inclusion
criteria, signed the informed consent form, and completed the demographic questionnaire. Interviews lasted between 1-2 hours.

**Participant Consent, Confidentiality, and Protection**

The recruitment emails described above included a weblink, and the flyers had a QR code that led to the study’s online Qualtrics Interest Form, which included the Informed Consent process. To submit the Interest Form, interested participants had to electronically sign the Informed Consent, which I required before scheduling any individuals for interviews. I emailed eligible individuals who completed the Interest Form and Informed Consent to schedule individual interviews.

At the beginning of the scheduled interviews, I re-consented participants. I reminded participants that participation was voluntary and that they could skip any question(s), take a break, or end the interview at any time. I asked participants if they had any questions about the study or their participation in the study. No participant had any questions prior to the interview. After participant consent, I provided them the opportunity to enter a pseudonym on Zoom to protect their identity. Some participants entered a pseudonym; others did not. I requested permission from the participant to start the audio and video recordings. One participant wished to remain off-camera. With permission, I turned on the Zoom recording and back-up iPhone Voice Memos recording application and conducted the interview using the Interview Protocol (See Appendix E).

Confidentiality risks existed since interviews were recorded using Zoom, and participant names were collected on the Qualtrics Interest and Consent Form. To minimize risks, I followed several procedures to protect participant data during collection, storage, analysis, and reporting. I collected and stored electronic consent forms using Qualtrics online software, which was
password-protected. I did not download any data to my laptop from Qualtrics. I used Zoom to conduct interviews and did not download any recordings to my laptop. I de-identified interviewee names using pseudonyms in the interview conversations and in the transcribed data to protect participant identity. I used participant pseudonyms to report demographic data, analysis, and findings. I reported institutional data only by institutional type, and while I included institutional region, I reported the data randomly in relation to the institutional type.

Participation in the study contained minimal social and psychological risks to participants. Negative emotions such as discomfort, anxiety, guilt, frustration, or depression may have occurred related to questions about whiteness and race-related experiences and perceptions. To minimize these risks, the written and verbal Informed Consent processes notified participants that they could skip any question(s), take a break, or end the interview at any time. During the informed consent process, I provided the National Mental Health Hotline, along with my personal contact information, as resources to participants.

**Data Analysis**

I analyzed data using narrative analysis. There are multiple ways of conducting narrative analysis, and approaches to analysis can be combined (Riessman, 2008). Riessman outlines four different approaches to analysis, including thematic, structural, dialogic/performance, and visual. In simple terms, thematic analysis focuses on the content of stories, while structural analysis focuses on the organization and presentation of stories. Structural analysis pays attention to how the narrator uses language to a specific end. In other words, the analysis includes considerations related to the goal of the storytelling (Riessman, 2008, p. 81). Dialogic/performance analysis incorporates elements of thematic and structural with emphasis on the co-construction of the story through engagement by both the narrator and the researcher. Visual approaches to narrative
research incorporate visual artifacts, such as illustrations, videos, and photographs, into the
analysis, though the use and interpretation of the artifacts vary across studies (Riessman, 2008).
Specifically, my analysis of data included thematic and structural techniques, including the use
of Labov’s method, which examines “the sequence of moves” within the dialogue (Riessman,

I utilized inductive and deductive coding techniques. Inductive, or first cycle coding, is a
process of organic reviewing and analyzing data guided by the researcher’s own intuition and
insights. Saldaña (2016) recommends that solo researchers conduct first-round coding during the
transcription process as a way of building trustworthiness. I followed this technique by
conducting first-round coding while listening to the audio recordings and cleaning transcriptions.
This allowed me to clean up the transcriptions I received through Rev.com while reconnecting to
the interview and documenting emerging codes. I used both descriptive and in vivo coding
techniques, handwriting words and phrases in the margins of my printed transcripts. Some words
and phrases served as a way of summarizing content and, in other cases, as a way of pulling out
keywords and phrases. I moved through the interviews and first-round coding, organically
switching between “lumping” and “splitting” techniques (Saldaña, 2016, p. 23).

After transcribing and coding several interviews, which involved re-reading the
transcripts, the concept of characters as roles of resistance emerged. I began to see that
participants had unique insights and approaches to their acts of resistance that connected to their
personalities and strengths but also to the environments where they worked. Other early insights
included concepts of power-sharing, stories of resistance and backlash, and the importance of
relationships. These concepts continued to shift throughout the coding process, some gaining
energy and others fading into the background.
After coding my first few interviews and awaiting the others, I decided to enter my codes into an Excel spreadsheet as a way of tracking the data in one place and to help identify themes. This strategy proved particularly useful and allowed me to view the codes collectively and across participants. I also took time to re-read Riessman’s (2008) book on narrative methods to reorient myself to narrative approaches and help guide my next steps.

When I completed transcribing and coding all nine interviews and adding the codes into Excel, patterns arose, including concepts related to tactics, identity, and tension, alongside stories of resistance, loneliness, questioning, harm, and hope. Additionally, issues related to power became clear, including power-sharing and the power of conversations and the classroom.

Feeling overwhelmed by the immense number of codes and categories, I decided to use Dedoose software as an additional tool for organizing the data. Specifically, I wanted to consolidate interview text and stories within the emerging categories so I could review related content in one place. I loaded my transcripts into Dedoose and reengaged in the coding process, highlighting and coding text using parent and child codes.

I also used deductive or second-cycle coding, whereby I coded the interviews using concepts from my literature review and the Critical Whiteness Studies framework I selected to guide my study. Connections between the interviews and concepts of whiteness as property, ontological expansiveness, and assumed racial comfort were evident.

When I completed the inductive and deductive coding process in Dedoose, I exported the content associated with each code into separate files on my computer. For example, I had a file titled “Power and Authority” that contained all of the text across the nine transcripts associated with the code “Power and Authority.” Again, this served as an organizational tool and allowed
me to immerse myself in each code to understand its strength and the relationship between codes for the purpose of grouping and theming.

As I continued to refine my codes, I was able to categorize them into themes related to tactics for resistance. The most prominent tactics were related to curriculum, policy, power-sharing, and student support, but I later realized that curriculum and policy tactics were connected under the umbrella of power-sharing, and student support including mentoring and scholarship were infrequently mentioned by participants. I also shifted the curriculum category to diversity narratives, as I understood the related categories extended beyond curricular content to include power-sharing maneuvers in the classroom aimed at lifting diverse perspectives.

While I grappled with how to organize the stories my participants shared, the experiences of two participants who experienced significant backlash stuck in my mind. I decided to apply Labov’s structural analysis technique to understand how these two faculty members engaged in the storytelling process and made sense of their experiences. This technique provided me with a deep level of connection to participant stories and led to significant analytical insights.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an important element of the qualitative research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used several strategies to establish confidence in my use of sound qualitative research methods, including journaling and memoing, thick descriptions, and reflexivity. Member checking is another commonly used strategy for developing trustworthiness in qualitative research. The process involves soliciting participant feedback as a way of confirming that the researcher’s interpretation of data aligns with the participant’s experiences. Based on my use of a critical framework and structural narrative analysis, I did not use member checks in my study (Foste, 2020). As Foste (2020) explained, participants may have
found my analysis of their interview emotionally difficult and interpreted the findings as an attack against their character instead of a critique of the powers of whiteness.

Because qualitative research is about understanding the human experience, and human experiences are unique, replicating research results is not the goal. Instead, to develop confidence in the researcher’s process, it is important to demonstrate a clear relationship between the data collected and the study’s conclusions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One way to accomplish this goal is through research journaling. Throughout the research process, I kept a journal that included my reflections, questions, and decision-making so I could incorporate some of those details so readers understood how I interacted with my data and arrived at my findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used researcher memos to capture my developing insights during data collection. After each interview, I reflected and documented my thoughts to ensure critical insights were not lost. Additionally, I heavily incorporated participant quotes in my analysis to provide the reader with confidence that my analysis aligned with the participants’ stories. While I included information about the setting and participants, I limited these details to protect participant identities. Still, the incorporation of this information helped to provide research consumers with insights about how the research applies to situations familiar to them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Peer debriefing is another procedure for establishing trustworthiness and is often used in critical research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). As a doctoral student, collaboration between me and my dissertation advisor was built into the research process. Feedback from my advisor, who has research experience and expertise in whiteness studies, proved essential to guiding me throughout the process, challenging my assumptions, and ensuring I used sound research practices (Creswell & Miller, 2000).
My research on White faculty dismantling whiteness in educational spaces was not free from bias, and my analysis could not be separated from my experiences and history. However, I managed the bias using several techniques prevalent in qualitative research. As I explored the role of whiteness in educational spaces, it was critical to demonstrate reflexivity, a process whereby I continuously examined and identified where and how my biases and epistemologies interacted with the data analysis process (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I continued to examine myself and my beliefs about race and racism in relation to the research, participants, and social and educational systems. I also critically considered how my whiteness impacted data collection and analysis throughout the process. In the following section, I discuss my positionality in relation to this research study.

Importantly, I also considered that each interview I conducted was a co-construction between me and the interviewee (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Riessman, 2008). I reflected on the implications associated with the fact that both the participants and I identified racially as white, which introduced assumed social location into the study (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Assumed social location refers to the potential of my participants to assume they and I share similar racial perspectives due to our positioning within the dominant White culture (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). The belief in a shared perspective about whiteness has the potential to influence interviewee responses and to further rather than challenge White normativity (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). In the case of this study, I believe that assumed social location enhanced participants’ comfort with sharing their stories with me.

Positionality

To provide transparency in the ways my biases and epistemologies show up in this research study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008), I share a bit about
who I am in relation to this study on dismantling whiteness in social work educational spaces.

For seven years, until recently, I worked in a graduate social work department at a public university, primarily supporting applicants through the admissions process. As a former social worker, I brought years of experience working with families overcoming the traumatic effects of poverty, sexual abuse, substance use, homelessness, and underfunded education systems. I had most recently led an organization dedicated to helping public school students, primarily Black and Brown students, en route to college. At the university, I found myself on the other end of the spectrum, reading admissions applications and making decisions that kept “unqualified” students out. Seeing the admissions disparities fall across racial lines, I quickly became entangled in a web of uncertainty and critical reflection that led me back to the classroom and, eventually, to Critical Whiteness Studies.

Along the way, I have learned much about myself and the beliefs that I held as truths rather than human constructs. I have watched myself and my White colleagues struggle to disentangle the complexities of whiteness embedded in us and our policies and practices. I have witnessed what I imagine to be the exhaustion of my Black colleagues who have experienced and confronted our ignorance and failings along the way. I have seen the reproduction of the powers of whiteness at work even as we struggle against them.

Today, I continue to work through the intricacies of the operations of whiteness, engaging in self-reflection, conversation, readings, and research to illuminate and reshape my thinking and practices. As I moved through this research, I carried the ideas of critical scholars alongside my belief in higher education as a place for transformative thought and contesting the status quo. I center my learning, research, and practice on these principles.
Summary

This chapter reviewed the methodology and study design I will use in this research study. I provide evidence for the use of narrative inquiry as an appropriate research method for investigating the experiences of White Social Work faculty dismantling whiteness in academia. I discussed the strategies I will use to build credibility in my research and analysis. I concluded by providing readers with insight about my orientation to the research including my experiences working to dismantle whiteness in social work academic spaces. In the next two chapters, I will present the study results.
Chapter 4

In this chapter, I explore whiteness from various lenses based on stories and perspectives shared by the nine White faculty participants in this study. I begin with a section that profiles each participant and considers contextual factors related to their personal histories and current work environments. Then, I examine participants’ understanding of whiteness and its operations. Specifically, I explore how faculty defined whiteness by looking for themes across the content and structure of their descriptions. Then, I use a process of restorying to highlight in concise form, participants’ testimonies of the manifestations of whiteness in their institutions. In the final section, I use thematic analysis to examine the two primary tactics social work faculty used to dismantle whiteness in their academic spaces, including amplifying diverse perspectives and changing policies. I incorporate aspects of success, challenge, and tension in discussing the tactics.

Participant Profiles

The faculty in this study brought unique perspectives of self and expressed perceptions of how others see them. Throughout my conversations with them, however, a set of shared social work and educational values emerged. Many participants pointed to their tendency to ask critical questions and challenge inequitable systems, which seemed to serve as the backbone of their orientation to social work and the way they moved in the world. They were systems-oriented, attending not only to individual well-being but also to the health of communities, organizations, and society. They communicated the importance of macro thinking and policy analysis in all areas of social work practice. As deep thinkers attuned to the sordid histories of exploitation, exclusion, and injury embedded in social work and academia, numerous participants discussed their complicated relationships with both. They described times of “disillusionment,” “moral
injury,” loss of respect for the profession, and “trade-offs for…your soul.” As much as they used critical reflections to challenge harmful systems, they also understood the value of self-reflection, and some named it as a tool they teach their students and practice themselves as a form of resistance. In the following paragraphs, I sketch out the profiles of four participants as a way of communicating a set of shared values and distinctive positioning in relation to dismantling whiteness that is shaped by their histories, identities, and political environments. I exclude significant details from the profiles to protect participant anonymity.

**Isabel “The Change Agent” Has Nothing to Lose**

Isabel described herself as someone who thinks “in systems” and never accepts defeat. She was raised by hippy parents who exposed her to social movements growing up and encouraged her aptitude for critical thinking and advocacy. She majored in history as an undergraduate and began her career working in finance, which Isabel noted was misaligned with her values. Isabel’s self-proclaimed tendency toward optimism translated in our conversation to an emphasis on stories of progress over barriers, which she preferred to describe as getting “stuck.” When I asked Isabel what being a social worker meant to her, she firmly held up social workers as “change agents” and described how hearing those words affirmed her decision to become a social worker.

Isabel positioned herself as a “fairly non-compliant” critical thinker who questioned rules from a young age. She shared stories of cleverly utilizing the rules to push against “stupid” and unhelpful conventions. She exclaimed, “It was if this is the rule, we should work on changing it, but until we get that done, how are we going to work around it?” She likened her approach to the phrase, “hoist them on their own petard,” meaning she operated within the rules but used them to
“get around things” and fight against the system. In her educator role, she frequently played the role of “devil’s advocate” and questioned department and university policies.

Despite perceiving academia as “the most political of places” and hearing stories of harm from her colleagues of color at other universities, she did not feel constrained by the fear of personal or professional consequences.

What are they going to do? Fire me. Okay. You give it your best shot. That's the noncompliant piece of me, right? You bring it, you bring that because I don't know. I was raised to walk my talk, and I try to do that as much as I can, knowing that I am sure there are times I've missed it.

Isabel’s positivity and nothing-to-lose attitude reflected both her self-identified “noncompliant” personality and her acknowledged privilege as a White woman in the academy. She felt that she did not “second guess that [she would] be taken seriously or listened to” as compared to a “couple of really close friends” of color from other institutions who had shared “heartbreaking and frightening” stories about “how little awareness some of our White colleagues have and the lengths that they will go” to protect their privilege. She praised her university’s investment in equity initiatives, which potentially bolstered her confidence in engaging efforts to dismantle whiteness at her university.

**Samantha “The Weaver” Operates Under the Radar**

Samantha demonstrated a strong commitment to structural change. She admitted, “I’m the annoying social worker that reminds people that they have a wider responsibility” to examine the systems that create the problems individuals and communities face. Samantha grew up “surrounded by social work.” She had her “own child welfare experience and felt pretty fortunate that things eventually worked out and with limited damage.” Her biological sister, however, “had
a very different experience” that led to a brain injury and the need for lifelong care. Her personal experience and exposure to social work values from her adoptive mother, who is a social work educator, influenced Samantha’s belief in creating “systems that work for everyone.”

As an adjunct professor in a politically conservative state with anti-critical race theory legislation, Samantha navigated the complexities of teaching and promoting anti-racist concepts without naming them outright. She said, “I find ways to kind of weave around” words like White supremacy even though she taught White supremacist culture characteristics in the workplace and how they operate in helping relationships. She explained, “I do that a lot where I try to avoid the emotional issue or the thing that’s inflammatory” as a way of teaching concepts and challenging systems of power and authority while remaining under the political radar. Samantha received support from the deans at the schools where she worked, allowing her the freedom to “share content and have conversations that I think are potentially borderline on what the legislature would like you to be doing in state institutions.”

Despite political challenges and traditional thinking among many of her university and department colleagues, Samantha is motivated by a sense of hope and “belief that it can happen.” Her stated philosophy was, “If I can think of it, I can create it.” She also harvested energy from the attitudes of the “young people who want to do this work.” She perceived a shift in her student population, many of whom she said are committed to transformative justice and believe “we can do things differently.”

Sara “The Sleeper” Comes in Low and Slow

Sara described herself as someone who comes in “low and slow,” meaning she leads by listening rather than showing up in spaces as an expert. She prefers to find “authentic connection” with those around her and assumes “the people I work with in any setting are the
experts on their lives…. And so, I try to listen and be present.” Sara explained, “These are natural things for me. This is who I’ve always been,” but acknowledged that her “growth point in academia” was “understanding my power, understanding how to use it, and then I always say whenever I can, using that power for good…” Sara’s client-centered approach aligned with what she identified as the core of social work – “service.”

As an “accidental academic,” Sara admitted to entering academia without understanding all that was involved with being faculty. She elaborated, “I knew the bookwork that would go into being an academic, but I really didn’t understand the rest of the game.” As someone who has been in the system for many years, she admitted to being jaded by her experiences of competitiveness and “running to keep up.” It’s a “rough space socially, politically, yeah…it’s just exhausting…. Bad behavior abounds.” Despite the challenges, Sara believed in the value of academia. She said:

Let me just be clear. I always loved the learning. I love the space. I think it's a space of radical transformation. I think it is the space where we have room to dream the dreams that haven't been thought of yet.

She credited her mom with providing perspective on the fortune of her position when she reminded Sara, “You realize they're paying you to think. Do you understand how few people in the world get paid to think?”

Now an experienced faculty member, Sara found ways to work within the system. She called herself an “outside insider.” She fit the part of an insider because she was an educated, white, now upper-middle-class female who people expected to “engage a social script and a set of behaviors related to centering everything around myself and thinking very little about the impact of what I say and how that works on others.” In contrast, she understood herself as an
outsider who refused to play that role. She believed her colleagues saw her as a “sleeper,” but she preferred to see herself as someone who leads with humility and consistency. Sara described herself as “someone who says what I really think is true. If I'm going to speak, it's going to be the truth, or I'm not going to speak. That's my basic rule.” She later explained, “That's an act of resistance is to just be clear about what's happening and name it.” She said, “I don’t go out picking a fight,” but she believed in speaking truthfully and acknowledged her unwillingness to remain quiet in the face of harm.

**Alexis “The Disruptor” Challenges the Status Quo**

Alexis emphasized the importance of social work’s commitment to disrupting the status quo and pushing for social justice. She understood in practice, however, “that social work really historically is about the status quo” and was built on racism, capitalism, and the intersection of the two. Alexis believed that her resolute commitment to dismantling oppressive systems in her department and university earned her a reputation among her colleagues as being “too radical.” But Alexis understood her position as a tenured professor allowed her to “take risks that other people can’t take” because “people need to work.”

From a young age, Alexis questioned the inequities she saw in her urban neighborhood. “They’ve been just the questions that have guided my life,” she supposed. Alexis felt compelled to move toward a deeper understanding by getting “involved in things that would help me learn about it.” She spent time engaged in community organizing and other outreach efforts before moving abroad. Her immersion in cultures outside of the U.S. provided her with diverse worldviews that enhanced her commitment to human rights and community practice.

As a professor at a conservative university, she described her efforts to challenge entrenched systems of racism and oppression as “lonely” and “really tough.” She has learned to
navigate the complexities of her institution by strategically separating herself from her department and seeking like-minded colleagues across the university. Alexis also found refuge by retreating to nature and remaining involved in various activist groups dedicated to radical social work. She is also energized by “new career academics” engaging abolitionist perspectives. To push through difficult times, she reminds herself of the need to educate others about social and economic injustices and to promote critical analysis in social work education.

**Explanations of Whiteness**

When asked to define whiteness, participants struggled to articulate its contours, sometimes going astray as they searched for words and experiences to bring the term to life. Several participants named the complexity with statements like, “That's a very good question and a really hard answer,” “Well, sometimes it's a hard one to name,” and “Gosh, that is a much harder question than you would think.” One participant admitted, “I've never thought of a definition,” while another joked, “I knew what you wanted to do with your research question, but then I was like, well, wait, what is that exactly?” Overall, White Social Work faculty used a combination of concepts, including race, ancestry, genetics, visible or perceivable characteristics of White ethnicity, cultural dominance, power, and privilege. With a few exceptions, participants discussed what whiteness does for White people while neglecting what it does to those “outside” of whiteness. In the following paragraphs, I detail the ways White Social Work faculty discussed how they define and understand whiteness. I focus not only on the content of their message but also on the delivery as a means of highlighting the ambiguousness of whiteness.

**Simply Put**

Most prominently, White Social Work faculty centered their explanations of whiteness on concepts of privilege and power. Mimi and Alexis both fit into this bucket, one focusing on
privilege and the other on power. They were unique among other participants, however, in their use of concise descriptions of whiteness. Mimi stated simply, “whiteness is the unearned power and privilege that I, as a White person, have in the world.” Similarly, Alexis succinctly explained, “So, I define whiteness as power, right? The power that controls our society socially, culturally, economically, that sets the agenda, that wants to maintain itself in power, whether that's interpersonally, but also structurally.”

Though similarly brief, I interpret Mimi’s and Alexis’ use of short descriptions differently based on the context of the full conversation I had with each participant. Throughout my interview with Mimi, she expressed the emotionality associated with her work to understand and disrupt whiteness. She used words like “heartsink,” “vulnerability,” “shame,” and “embarrassment.” Mimi was open in sharing stories about personal learning moments in the classroom when students challenged her teaching materials and practices. Mimi’s framing of whiteness as privilege reflects her present position in understanding whiteness, and her brief description may reveal her fear of making mistakes.

Alexis, unlike Mimi, named the structural existence of whiteness. She described “whiteness as power” and noted the power of whiteness to shape and control how individuals and systems operate. In the interview, Alexis shared numerous stories and antidotes that demonstrated her firm commitment to disrupting the “status quo” and shifting the balance of power. She called out White supremacy, injustice, racism, ableism, elitism, and inequity in pointed language that connected the operations of whiteness to harm. Alexis’ briefly stated definition of whiteness parallels her decisive, no-nonsense approach to resistance.
**Searching for the Words**

Researchers have noted the complexities and ambiguities in describing and demonstrating whiteness (Applebaum, 2016; Cabrera et al., 2016; Mohajeri, 2022a; Omi & Winant, 2015). Two participants, Jakov and Sara, illustrated these densities as each traversed through a maze of thoughts, one circular and the other jagged in nature. Jakov, eventually, seemed to resign to their uncertainty and ended mid-sentence with “Whiteness is, that’s all I’ve got.” In a summary statement of sorts, Sara proclaimed, “It's like the Supreme Court's definition of pornography. People know it when they see it.” I discuss the content and structure of Jakov’s and Sara’s explanations of whiteness separately below.

Jakov started by acknowledging the “many different parts” to whiteness. He drew on concepts of privilege, race, and culture. As he worked to untangle his thoughts, he metaphorically walked in circles, repeating ideas and ending up where he began. The unaltered text below demonstrates the repetition and circular pattern of thought in Jakov’s description.

There's sort of a visible piece because sort of visible privilege is certainly a component of whiteness. So, moving through the world as a White person being read as a White person, that also entails communication styles, attitudes, values, beliefs that might be informed by sort of a larger White supremacist culture that we live in. There's the cultural component of whiteness that I think might often be missed, and whiteness includes a cultural component. Whiteness includes sort of a racial or ethnic identity component. Whiteness includes how one is perceived or read either by physical appearance or how one shows up, whether it's mannerisms or patterns of speech or beliefs or values. Whiteness is also, I mean, I guess, kind of connected to the cultural piece. Whiteness is, that's all I've got.
As the above excerpt shows, Jakov struggled to parse out the nuances of whiteness in relation to one’s prescribed White racial categorization and perceived White racial identity through visible and cultural manifestations of whiteness. He moved between physical, social, and behavioral characteristics. Breaking down the key elements of the content above, Jakov defined whiteness as a privileged identity reflected in one’s behaviors and physical appearance and connected to the “larger White supremacist culture” – or cultural norms. In the context of my entire conversation with Jakov, he articulated insights into the vast operations of whiteness that evaded him within the constraints of providing a definition.

Just as Jakov’s thoughts got stuck in a loop, Sara was trapped in her own disruptive thought pattern. She went in numerous directions, leaving fragmented thoughts scattered like dead ends, as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

I think it's a social construct. I mean, I'm just going to be clear with you. I think whiteness is a social construct. And so, I don't know that I have a great, don't know that, a great definition. I can give you very academic definitions, and I could, if I wanted to, and I'm not going to because I don't believe this, what I'm going to say, I could say, well, I'm Irish, which is true. And at one point, Irish weren't considered white. I'm also English. And so, I'm pretty sure that's always been white. So that's why I'm not going to, I understand the games that people play around wanting to be perceived as less white. And so, I think whiteness, and well please, I'll be honest with you, but it is a thing….

Sara’s disjointed thought process demonstrated in the text above is both similar and distinct from other parts of her interview. Sara often moved quickly from one thought to the next, sometimes asking me to hold a place for her to return to an event she wanted to share. However, Sara was also very poetic in her storytelling. She used language that hung in my mind long past our
recorded conversation. Her phrasing was expressive and invoked visual imagery when she said things like “in-between spaces,” “accidental academic,” “outside insider,” “secret spaces,” and “low and slow.” Her candid nature was only interrupted by her need to protect her colleagues’ identities and her own. Though Sara’s stories curved in different directions, they were held together by her firm desire to impart humility, consistency, and truthfulness in her words and actions. The excerpt above is not a reflection of hesitancy to name whiteness; rather, it stands as evidence of the depth of its obscurities.

**Naming the Harm**

While some participants incorporated issues of power, most references to power were framed in terms associated with the privilege of being white. A few participants, however, expanded their understanding of power to incorporate the harm associated with whiteness. Beth, for example, said:

> I think that whiteness has been the cause of a lot of harm, and not just to people of other races, but like we were saying in terms of the disability community and affecting everybody through to a norm…. Everybody has to be homogenous, and that's very detrimental to us.

Beth was the only person to include the disability community in her definition of whiteness, although Alexis also referenced injury to students with learning disabilities when describing the ways whiteness shows up in academic spaces. Echoing Beth’s sentiments about conformity, Alexis insisted, “But we continue to offer a vision of what higher education means that's very narrow, and that doesn't include worldviews that aren't European, and I would say Northern European more than anything, but European in general.” Beth and Alexis incorporated White
normativity into their understanding of whiteness and pointed to the harm experienced by those who don’t fit into the limited and prescribed ways of existing produced by whiteness.

Like Beth, Samantha’s discussion of whiteness included an exploration of those impacted by the power of whiteness, which she called “the default setting.” She explained whiteness in terms of power and authority and examined how it manifests in organizational culture and helping relationships. Samantha stated:

And that is helping people, that's not senators. I mean it is, but it's not just the boss. It's not just people in labeled positions of power. And so, it impacts then the way that we work together. It impacts the way we work with communities. It impacts actually what we provide to clients and our ability to individualize our approach as opposed to giving the “I'm in power, I know what the right answer is.”

Samantha reflected on systems of whiteness and how whiteness works through systems and individuals to create and maintain power. She included the “powerless,” those who are impacted by power, and stressed that whiteness runs through the masses, including helping professionals. Unlike most participants, Samantha acknowledged that there are damaging consequences to whiteness.

**Manifestations of Whiteness in Academic Spaces**

In this portion of the chapter, I review participants’ responses to a question I posed about how whiteness manifests in the spaces where they work. Despite somewhat limited definitions of whiteness, participants articulated many ways that whiteness operates in educational spaces, in and outside of the classroom. Faculty identified overt and subtle ways across the academy that function as exclusionary spaces and work to uphold dominant White narratives about who belongs in academic spaces and about who holds power.
In the following section, I apply a restorying technique to demonstrate these key themes. I present four brief restoried narratives told by faculty participants that include three stories of their own experiences and one retold story initially shared by a student. The narratives relay systems of exclusion, racism, ableism, hierarchy, and harm.

**The Honors Program**

Alexis, a faculty member from a private Catholic university with a significant population of Black and Brown students, talked about pushing for changes to make her university’s honor program more equitable and inclusive for students of color. She met with the head of the board of trustees to convey concerns that the program was “not really open to our students of color.” Below, I present a restoried version of what Alexis shared about her advocacy efforts. I present the story in a dialogic format between Alexis and the former honors program director. The dialogue begins with Alexis’ voice.

The honors program is perpetuating a European worldview. Well, students of color come, but then they leave. Yes, of course, they leave; you don’t offer them a space. Look at who’s teaching—not one person of color. The curriculum is the same as it’s always been. There’s nothing there for them. You don’t recruit from [city] high schools. But those students wouldn’t be able to be in the honors program. You just can’t believe that in 2020, these kinds of practices were continuing to go on.

Though atypical in narrative analysis, I condensed Alexis’ story into the above narrative to center the key concepts and draw attention to the harmful perspectives shared by Alexis’ colleague. The first statement about students of color not remaining in the honors program highlights the blame that the colleague placed on students of color regarding their participation in the program. From their perspective, students were welcome, but they chose not to stay. In Alexis’ telling of the story, her colleague seemed to avoid attempts to critically reflect on why students of color left and instead remained fixed in their perception. Alexis’ story included a
second racist and exclusionary assertion made by her colleague, one that assumed academic deficiencies in students from predominantly Black and Brown city schools.

While the outcome of Alexis’ advocacy remained unclear from this brief excerpt, she divulged multiple practices by the honors program that pointed to the embeddedness of whiteness through Euro-centric curricula, exclusively White faculty, fixed ideologies, and racist recruitment strategies. The next story I present invokes whiteness as ableism.

Accommodations

Beth, a faculty participant who identified as deaf-disabled, was talking about the various forms of gatekeeping in academia, including hiring and publishing. She noted the difficulty of finding scholarly work “produced by people in the community” because of ableism and gatekeeping “in terms of what academic journals believe is worthy of publishing.” She labeled the academy one of the most ableist spaces and said we put up barriers for people.

- You have a disability.
- Out yourself to student accessibility services.
- Out yourself to your professor.
- Feel bad.
- They’re doing something special for you.
- You’re not really wanted in this space.

In restorying Beth’s narrative, I changed the perspective from a fourth-person point of view to a second-person point of view. Doing so allowed me to emphasize the emotional harm she conveyed in her reporting on the experiences of individuals with disabilities in academia. She identified the “subtle messages” that folks receive about their place in the university. Beth disclosed her own experiences with gatekeeping and discrimination in hiring. She conveyed that “it’s really, really hard” to get a full-time faculty position “if you don’t fit into a specific category or…if you have a disability.” Elaborating, Beth explained, “Sometimes someone will call and want to set up an interview, and then when they get my relay system, they go, ‘Oh, never mind.
We don't need…We don't need to do…never mind.” Beth admitted that “it’s hard to feel like you need to make people care…and educate people.” She concluded, “Ableism is just so baked into the American way.” Beth’s story highlights how ableism, like racism, is connected to whiteness and how ableist narratives reinforce what is considered “normal.”

**It Started with the Colonists**

In my interview with Rachel, I asked for her perception of how whiteness shows up in social work, her institution, or her classroom. She first mentioned the majority White student, faculty, and administrative bodies at her institution. She also cited research on racism and ageism in social work licensing exams. As a third example, Rachel turned to her teaching in a policy class the day before about the history of the social work profession. She recounted a discussion that criticized centering White colonial women as the founders of social services and attempted to highlight indigenous systems of care.

That is a crock of shit.
We had many nations here taking care of each other.
People taking care of each other.
Tribes with well-developed democracies that our founding fathers stole.

In the restoried account above, I pulled a few key concepts from Rachel’s narrative about challenging the revisionist history embedded in social work education. To Rachel, it was important that her students understood that indigenous systems of care existed long before White colonial women began settlement houses and charity organizations. She also engaged students in discussions about segregation and bias rooted in social work and early efforts to “keep people off the welfare rolls,” “demonizing people who needed help,” and “blaming the victim for their poverty.”
I Studied This Stuff

In the excerpt below, I present a restoried account of a story Alexis received from a student about his experience in a history class with another professor at her university. In her telling of the situation, the professor dismissed the student’s knowledge of Congolese history after the student challenged the professor’s interpretation of events.

A student from Africa was in a history class. They were talking about colonization. “It wasn’t all bad. Some people got to go to Europe to study.” “How can you say that? King Leopold. Genocide. The Congo.” “What do you know? I studied this stuff.”

Like the previous narrative, “I Studied This Stuff” demonstrates the whitewashing of history but goes a step further by exposing the injury experienced by an African student in the class. Alexis’ shared story is a retelling of their student’s experience in a history class at their university. As a retold story, it is difficult to know exactly how the student conveyed the experience and how much of the retelling is the professor’s interpretation of what the student shared. Still, this twice-told narrative, voiced first by the student and then again by Alexis, resonated as significant to both the student and faculty member who exposed it. The short excerpt uncovered the hierarchical power at play between teacher and student in the classroom. In this scenario, the knowledgeable professor dismissed their perceived lesser-knowing student who brought an alternative perspective to the class that threatened their authority.

The excerpts I shared above from a few faculty interviews provided additional context to participants’ understanding of whiteness. While precise definitions eluded many participants, their discussions about the manifestations of whiteness in social work, their classrooms, and their universities revealed the depth and breadth of their insights. The short, restoried narratives reveal distorted histories told in university classrooms. They expose structures of hierarchy and power operating in classrooms and research that control the development and distribution of
knowledge. They also highlight exclusionary practices established through racist and ableist thinking and provide glimpses of the resulting harm for those who do not fit into the established norms of the university.

In this next section, I continue to explore the operations of whiteness in social work and higher education but shift to stories that participants shared about their efforts to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, and universities.

**Stories of Dismantling Whiteness: Subverting Power Structures**

In my conversations with faculty, I asked them to share stories of times when they effectively engaged in dismantling whiteness and times when things did not go as planned or resistance arose. Their stories were wide-ranging, stretching across academic spaces and through varied states of emotion. In some cases, faculty perceived their efforts as small acts of resistance. Some expressed hope and optimism in their labors and students’ changing social attitudes, while others were jaded by ongoing systems of power and oppression that refused to move.

Throughout our discussions about dismantling whiteness, an overarching theme emerged related to attempts by participants to disrupt established systems of power. For some, this meant teaching students to analyze power dynamics and view policies and systems through historical lenses. For others, it meant shifting traditional structures of authority in academia and social work by challenging hierarchies and providing space for diverse perspectives in curricula, classrooms, helping relationships, and decision-making arenas.

Ultimately, participant stories from inside and outside of the classroom revealed two primary tactics under the umbrella of subverting power structures, including amplifying diverse perspectives and changing policies. Alongside their acts of resistance emerged a range of personal and interpersonal tensions related to the embeddedness of whiteness in individuals,
social work departments, and universities. In the following paragraphs, I use thematic analysis to discuss the stories that faculty shared about their work to dismantle whiteness in academic spaces. I present their stories below in two sections that align with the tactics of resistance: Diversity Narratives and Policy Narratives.

**Diversity Narratives**

The most common strategy that the faculty discussed for pushing against whiteness was related to promoting diverse perspectives and amplifying non-dominant voices. Tactics for doing this took shape primarily in the classroom, but for Sara, Beth, and Mimi, this also meant not centering themselves and their ideas in conversations, meetings, and practice. In the following paragraphs, I discuss diversity narratives in four subsections, including curricular content, sharing the mic, classroom counterstories, and client as expert. Within each section, I will draw connections between the tactic and the overarching theme of subverting power.

**Curricular Content.** Numerous participants, including Isabel, Beth, Jakov, Mimi, and Kacey, discussed their selection of course materials and readings as a way of amplifying multiple perspectives in their classrooms. Isabel said, “I've worked hard to decenter my syllabi. I don't use the word decolonize because I've read [Decolonization] is not a metaphor, and they make some really, really good points. And so, we're not doing that.” Here, Isabel refers to an article by Tuck and Yang (2012), that criticizes the overuse and distortion of the term decolonization in pedagogy and scholarship.

As a disability advocate, Beth said she uses “a lot of work of disabled people of color, especially when I talk about disability justice.” She added, “I feel like if we're not intentional about amplifying everybody's voices, they get drowned out…. We need to make sure that everybody's getting a chance at the microphone” and include those who people do not “expect to
be a giver of knowledge.” She understood her position as a professor gave her the opportunity to share “alternative viewpoints” and saw that as a key role.

Similarly, Jakov said he worked to “center non-dominant perspectives” and is guided by questions like, “Who is writing the articles that I'm having my students read? What kinds of media am I bringing in? Whose experiences are we talking about?” Mimi also claimed a multi-pronged approach to incorporating the voices of folks who have been historically marginalized in academia. She disclosed that she once received feedback from a Latina student who didn’t “see herself reflected in the literature” and now “work[s] hard” to incorporate articles and books written by authors “who reflect the student population.”

Kacey shared a story about a time when her attempt to incorporate diverse perspectives into the classroom did not go as she had planned. She was teaching a small group of students, including one Black student and five White students, in a course about anti-oppressive social practice. She explained:

We listened to the 1619 project, and there's a lot of really great educational resources that Nicole Hannah Jones has created, or somebody on her behalf has created these. So, I use some of the questions from that resource as part of their assignment, and we talk about that. And what was really helpful for me…the [Black] student was really, I mean, she was really open about it, which I thought was great, but she's like, I don't need to hear this. I'm fully aware of how shitty it's been. And I was like, that is a great point. This is White history, not Black history, and the students who need to hear it are the White students.

In this narrative, Kacey highlighted the complexity of infusing learning materials from non-White academics into the classroom while avoiding teaching centered around White students. Based on her students' feedback, Kacey is now “more inclined” to use a podcast called *Doin' The
Work: Frontline Stories of Social Change and allow students to choose pieces that resonate with them. Students then lead discussions about what they learned. In addition to a way of incorporating multiple perspectives, Kacey identified her pivot away from the 1619 Project as a power-sharing move that gives students more control over what they learn. In Kacey’s example, she also reorganized the assignment to position students as educators in the classroom, shifting the traditional teacher-as-educator dynamic. In the next section, I will discuss a similar power-sharing move motivated by providing space for multiple voices. Using a phrase uttered by my participant, Sara, I call this section “sharing the mic.”

**Sharing the Mic.** Some faculty participants moved beyond the curriculum to consider the dynamics of power functioning in different academic settings. Mimi and Sara, for example, discussed their efforts to step aside and open space for multiple perspectives in meetings. Mimi said she is “mindful of who’s speaking in a room and what the dynamics are.” She was attuned to the power she held because of her White racial identity and said she tried to make sure she was “not taking over a space.” Likewise, Sara talked about trying “not to take all the oxygen in the room.” She explained, “When I say to take the oxygen out of the room, I mean ideas, I mean experience…I’m listening. I don’t assume that I have the answers… every thought I have in my head isn’t special.” She described this as a way of respecting others’ perspectives and shifting power. In Chapter 5, I will provide an in-depth look at a scenario when Sara used this power-sharing move in a department meeting and things did not go well for her. In the remainder of this section, however, I turn to a story shared by Jakov about a time when he felt good about building trust and creating space for students with marginalized identities to share their experiences.

**Classroom Counterstories.** Jakov, who worked at a university with a racially diverse student population, described his comfort in having conversations about whiteness and
facilitating critical conversations in the classroom. As a classroom strategy, he regularly analyzed classroom dynamics and managed class discussions in a way that provided room for multiple voices. He was hesitant to say he had “successfully” disrupted whiteness but believed there were times he was “actually leveraging the platform” he had as a professor in a way that centered the voices and experiences of students of color and aligned with his values.

As an example, Jakov reflected on a time when he instructed a summer class on sexuality and a Black woman’s counter-narrative sparked energy and conversation and uplifted the experience of students of color in the class. They were discussing “how much harm” the “medical industrial complex” caused to communities of color, and “specifically Black folks.” He recalled:

But I remember this [Black] woman saying, “I don't have any White providers. My doctor's Black. My dentist is Black. My therapist is Black. I have no White providers. I do not trust White providers.” And she's saying this to her White professor and White peers in the room. And you know how when a student says something, all of a sudden, the energy in the room shifts, and people just like you hear all this murmuring and all this agreement and all of this verbal feedback? It kind of just erupted into this conversation where White folks in the room kind of retreated from the conversation so that other folks could have a conversation about not trusting White folks. But that was a moment where I was like, I know that I have a rapport with this student. I know that the student likes me, and that the student likes this class, and the student is coming here and sort of leading a conversation where people are openly saying, “I don't trust White folks.” Great. Talk about that; and White folks in the room here, why might this be?
Jakov viewed his classroom as a place for troubling whiteness. In the account above, his students of color shared their experiences and led a conversation that exposed alternative truths about history and medicine in the U.S. He said, “That felt really…humbling…. That felt important.”

**Client as Expert.** Positioning clients as experts in their own lives represents the final tactic under the umbrella of diversity narratives. Like curricular content and sharing the mic, I consider client as expert another way that Social Work faculty attempted to challenge power structures upheld by whiteness. As discussed in earlier chapters, the social work profession has historically been heavy-handed and narrowly white-minded in approaches to helping marginalized communities. The client as expert narrative serves to shift power from the social work professional to the client; it acknowledges that people’s values and experiences are central to the work and relationship. Beth, Kacey, Samantha, and Sara each utilized depictions of clients as experts. I share their insights below.

Beth teaches online and works as a licensed clinical social worker. She explained that she views her role as “someone who walks alongside people on their paths in life.” She noted that while she may have “specialized knowledge,” she is not in charge of her clients’ lives. Rather, she insisted:

I tell my clients all the time you're the boss. I'm not the boss. You're the expert in your own life. I'm the expert about things that are in the DSM, but that's not you. You're the boss of you and you're the expert, so you need to teach me so that we can work together to help you reach your goals.

Beth’s sentiments of client as expert were echoed by Kacey and Samantha who discussed issues of power in their classroom to help students understand power dynamics in helping relationships. Using power analyses, Kacey helps students think and analyze power – “Who has it, who doesn’t
and why?” She continued, “inherent in every social work client relationship, the social worker has more power, and it's important to...equalize that by thinking about the client as the expert [who has] more information about what works for them than you do.”

Sara, whose work is more community-oriented, centered clients as experts by bringing client and community perspectives to the work she does. Sara recounted the “stigma, bias and discrimination” that existed early in her career “against the very people that we were trying to help.” She recalled that “people were only asking professionals” for their perspectives while completely discounting the experiences of those impacted by mental health issues. She elaborated:

But we didn't think they had a place at the table. By we, I mean the field, I do not mean me. Yeah, that's kind of the subversive part of my work. I'm always somebody who's just going to be very interested about what people impacted by a particular challenge, what their view is.

For Sara, disrupting whiteness included destabilizing long-standing attitudes about professionals as the holders of knowledge and clients as the receivers of knowledge.

Overall, faculty discussed a variety of ways they worked to shift the balance of power in educational spaces and helping relationships by de-centering dominant White perspectives, including their own, and promoting diversity of thought. In this next section, I will examine faculty’s narratives about dismantling whiteness through efforts to change policies.

**Policy Narratives**

Many faculty participants identified academic policy changes as tactics for disrupting power structures upheld by whiteness. Faculty understood existing policies for class attendance, late assignments, program dismissal, and standardized testing to be oppressive and often
inequitable. Some faculty held autonomy over classroom policies and applied their own
guidelines for class attendance and assignments. In other scenarios, faculty believed that policy
changes were needed to improve equity but got caught in the complexities of perceived
competing priorities that led to stagnation. Finally, some faculty disclosed how university
structures halted policy change. In the following paragraphs, I discuss the successes and
challenges of changing inequitable policies in social work departments. I present the information
in three sub-sections, including successes, burdens, and ideological and organizational tensions.

Successes. Several participants described personal commitments and success in creating
more flexible, student-centered approaches to traditional attendance and deadline policies. Mimi
explained:

I tell students, I'm here to support you. I don't need a note from your doctor…. If you
can't come to class, don't come to class. And if you want to meet to talk about the
material that you missed, let's do that.

She identified her approach to student attendance as a way of disengaging from extensive
policing that happens in social work and education. Jakov also said he balances flexibility
“around things like time and attendance and deadlines” while “holding a container” to maintain
some structure. He endeavored to avoid “adhering to these very sort of strict ways of being in the
world that don't work for everybody.”

Similarly, Samantha shared her thoughts and practices around flexible assignment
deadlines. She recognized that students have “things that get in the way because they're working
full-time or they're single parenting or they're trying to muddle through some of this really scary
and chaotic things that go on in our community.” In creating flexibility for students, she believed
she was modeling behavior and developing their social work skills. She elaborated:
My rule is ‘communicate your needs and let's make a plan’ because…it’s super important that people who are social workers, who eventually are going to help people understand how they feel and be able to ask for what they need.

Further, Samantha perceived the “very aggressive” policies enforced by her colleagues as holding up traditional power dynamics. Samantha shared a story about a conversation that took place in a faculty meeting about arriving late to class:

We were talking about the language around the late policy around coming into class late or whatever. And [a colleague] said, if something happened on the way to class, I understand that. But if you come in with a bag of food, then I know you chose to stop to get a meal instead of being on time for class.

Samantha emphasized the abusive behaviors that show up in “power and authority settings.” She stressed, “You're a hero if you choose not to eat, if you forego all of your needs.” In Samantha’s view, the professor-student relationship shouldn’t be ‘I make the rules because I’m the teacher.” Instead, it should be about “actually communicating and figuring it out together.” She said, “I'm not a commander, I don't know everything, but I think academia is kind set up that way.” By eliminating strict classroom policies and shifting the balance of power, Samantha, Jakov, and Mimi believed they were subverting White ways of operating in academia.

**Emotional Burdens.** One faculty member, Kacey, got caught in the emotional complexities that resulted from her efforts to equalize power in her classroom. She recalled a scenario from a summer class she taught where students had trouble meeting the deadlines:

I swear there was probably six students that shared a chapter of a novel about why they couldn't get their assignment in on time. I came to class, and I said, I have to apologize. I have not been holding up my boundary as your instructor very well. I want you to hear
this. I don't necessarily need to know all of the details about why you can't submit something…. I can't hold 20 students' details. I mean, I'm just trying to hold on to my personal life and the loved one's details. And so, I was very much like, I don't need to know the details of your life. If you can't hand something in just, you can take a bank day or read the syllabus and you know exactly what happens when you don't hand in something but stop.

For Kacey, the flexibility she extended to her predominantly White students translated into an emotional burden of having to “hold” her students’ stories while managing her own life. She admitted longing for “some of the older school ways of, I just want to be in a position of authority where you're kind of too afraid to tell me why you can't get your assignment in.”

Digging deeper, she described herself as someone with “rescuer tendencies” and continued to relay her story as if she was talking directly to her students:

Stop appealing to me…I want to make things. I want to make things right. I want to fix things. I want things to be easy for you, but it's at the expense of my own energy reserves and I can't do it.

The weight Kacey felt in carrying her students’ stories was illuminated by her use of the words “stop” and “I can’t do it.” In a sort of comic twist, Kacey jokingly and frustratingly remembered getting “fired up” about one student’s reaction.

And so, I had that conversation with them, and then one student was like, I felt like that was directed at me. Can we have a zoom call? I really want to emotionally process this.

And I was like, you totally just missed the point…. This is not about you.

In addition to emotional strain and student self-centering described above, Kacey talked frequently about getting caught between “the tension of opposites,” meaning opposing
ideological forces or competing demands. I will discuss these ideological and organizational tensions as they relate to policy changes in more detail in the next section.

**Ideological and Organizational Tensions.** Common threads emerged in faculty discussions about policy that demonstrated ideological and organizational barriers to creating equitable policies. For example, Kacey and Isabel were caught in their own philosophical uncertainties and by slow organizational processes. Kacey mentioned her department’s attendance policy as “an ongoing struggle that we’re constantly getting, trying to navigate.” She noted the tension of creating a fair policy that simultaneously acknowledges that situations arise for students while also keeping in mind “what students need to be successful.” In this situation, opposing forces emerged between fairness to students and obligations to clients and the profession.

Isabel shared a similar story about ongoing conversations around her department’s dismissal policy, which currently boots a student out if they fail a course or, as she derided, for “failure to live up to our academic standards.” Again, the primary tension, she explained, is how to navigate and balance professional gatekeeping responsibilities while providing accessibility and equity. Despite her proclaimed tendency to “question policies” as an act of resistance, she admitted:

I don't know what that answer is. We have talked about this for probably 10 years, and regardless of where we land, I'm always the devil's advocate because I don't know. I really don't know. And I think these are really complex issues. I think I am the person on our faculty that questions them the most, like, is this really what we want? Here are the consequences. Is that equitable?
But, like Kacey, she conceded, “They're not easy questions to answer.” Isabel divulged additional insights into a specific situation in their master’s program where they dismissed a student even after the program voted to eliminate the policy, but the policy hadn’t made its way through the university governance process. Unsettled, she disclosed:

Here's a student who's asking for an appeal couched in a language of equity and health issues, and [they identify] as someone with a disability, ‘Is this what you want? I don't know that it is.’ I don't know. That isn't, I think this is hard.

Isabel’s story exposed the tension of getting caught between opposing responsibilities and bureaucratic processes, even in the face of practices the department had identified as inequitable.

In another example, Isabel pointed to the power of one individual to halt a departmental decision to eliminate the standardized testing requirement. She explained, “We had a lone holdout that felt so strongly he was able to get people to say, ‘Okay, I don't want to argue with you anymore. Fine. Whatever you want.” She said that individual has since “left” and added, “I think we’re moving towards getting rid of the standardized test; fingers crossed.” Her use of the words “I think,” “moving towards,” and “fingers crossed” hinted at uncertainty in the fate of the policy decision and an awareness that change is slow.

Other faculty lent insights into the complications of moving from policy conversations to enactment. Mimi disclosed, “Oh, there's a lot of conversation, but I've not seen anything change.” She noted people’s desire for explicit direction. She explained, “People want instructions… They want to be told. If your client says this, you say that. We know that theoretically, as professionals, and I think in this work, people want the same thing. They want to know what to do.”
Sara offered a more critical perspective on the difficulty of changing departmental policies, blaming people’s unwillingness to give up control. She told a story about “a lot of fighting” going on in her department over eliminating the GRE requirement in admissions. She focused on a particular moment when tensions were high and her “White colleagues were getting defensive,” but they were unwilling to “name the thing” that was happening. Sara interpreted her White colleagues’ actions as a response to “losing control over who entered their program;” thereby, potentially opening the doors to those perceived as not belonging in higher education spaces.

In another story of holding tight to convention, Samantha shared a story about the debate that unfolded at a university committee meeting about adding Juneteenth to the university’s holiday schedule. Samantha contributed to the conversation by defining policies as “reflections of values.” She considered that if the university valued creating “space and time for people to have time with family” that would lead to the policy decision. As she previously confessed to doing, Samantha tried to be “non-inflammatory” and avoided “talking about whether or not Juneteenth is valuable or not.” She said she received “about a 50-50 reception” and was shocked that faculty members emailed her afterwards “about how awful my statement had been and bringing up, I mean, then it became about Jesus, and it became about, I mean, it was like, what is happening?” She also described the “secondary” layer to the conversation about whether they would need to take away a different holiday. She recalled, “So are we going to have 13 holidays…. Well, you can’t take Christmas away…. You couldn’t take Columbus Day away.” She relented, “I don’t know if you can win or lose these things,” but noted that the university made Juneteenth a campus holiday.
I asked Samantha what she learned from this scenario about whiteness and how it operates. She articulated:

I think it highlights the complexity of how we unwind this, and it comes back to those deeply internalized attitudes of how things should be because even in mental health, safety is found in familiarity, in routine. We regulate our nervous system to have things be anticipatory. That's how we feel safe when there's predictability. It's no different in any of this other stuff because we hang on to it because it's what we know. It's how we know we can maneuver ourselves to maintain our power. It's where people feel the safest in collecting, and that change is hard.

Samantha pointed to the complexities surrounding tradition and human behavior and the need for people to hold onto what they were taught. She also acknowledged these moves as a way for individuals to hold tight to power and resist doing “our internal work.” By nature, she concluded that people want to go outside of themselves to assign blame rather than going inward. This hesitancy to self-reflect and make room for alternative perspectives provided another example of the ideological and organizational barriers to promoting equitable policies.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I provided profiles of four participants to demonstrate both their uniqueness and shared characteristics. I then explored how the White Social Work faculty in this study perceived the existence and operations of whiteness in their institutions through brief, restoried narratives. Lastly, I discussed the tactics faculty members used to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms and institutions. These tactics were all related to faculty attempts to subvert existing power structures and fell within the categories of diversity narratives and policy narratives. The narratives shared by faculty participants made clear that as tactics moved outside
of the classroom, resistance arose. I continue to explore these tensions in the next chapter by focusing on two participants who experienced significant hostility in response to their efforts to address racism in their departments.
Chapter 5

In this chapter, I focus on the stories of two White Social Work faculty whose efforts to dismantle whiteness in academic spaces outside the classroom resulted in personal and professional consequences. I present the stories using Labov’s analytic method of analysis using (Riessman, 2008). I conclude with a discussion of the unique meaning-making experiences that emerged from participant stories using the structural analysis technique.

Stories of Backlash

The participants whose stories I include in this chapter, Sara and Alexis, had multiple stories to share, each demonstrating the ferocity of whiteness and the strategies used in universities and colleges to maintain control. Their narratives also exemplified the educational violence operating against students and faculty of color in their social work departments. It is important to note that I anonymized information by removing personal and geographic details that could expose participants’ identities. I also excluded segments of participant accounts that revealed a level of detail that could jeopardize participant confidentiality. I signify areas of modification in the text using traditional ellipses and brackets. When I decided to exclude a significant segment of text, I acknowledged that in the text or description.

In analyzing the narratives, I found similarities across the stories related to the settings, the emotional and physical operations of whiteness, and the consequences faced by the participants. Sara’s and Alexis’ stories occurred in private meeting spaces with colleagues and college deans. When the actors in the stories, including Sara and Alexis, challenged existing policies and power structures in efforts toward racial equity, the individuals holding power – although situated in different institutions – remarkably struck back in parallel ways. In addition to emotional retaliation, the players with power hid behind policies, engaged higher-level
authorities and systems of power, and resisted change. As a result of the events that unfolded in these spaces, both Sara and Alexis faced a range of distressing personal and professional consequences. They talked of lost relationships, acts of exclusion and isolation, and loneliness.

While commonalities existed between Sara’s and Alexis’ stories, structural narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) brought to light the different meaning-making experiences of the two participants. Sara’s story is filled with reflections demonstrating contemplation and insight throughout the layers of complicating and consequential events. In contrast, Alexis’ stories focused largely on the details of the conflict and the resulting harm, highlighting the extent to which Alexis continues to live in the pain and isolation of the backlash she has faced in her department.

**Labov’s Analytic Method**

Labov’s approach to narrative analysis examines the structure of participant stories to understand meaning beyond that which is told (Riessman, 2008). They use a six-point framework to analyze the structure, content, and linguistic features of spoken narratives. The six components include an abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. As Sara and Alexis’ stories demonstrated, structural elements do not unfold in a linear sequence. Narrators may move back and forth between storied details, complicating actions and meaning-making, and may or may not incorporate all six elements as described by Labov. I explain the six components of the framework in the table below.

**Table 3**

*Six Elements of Labov’s Structural Narrative Analysis Method with Descriptions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Component</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Summary of main points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Sets the scene by introducing characters and setting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sara’s Story

In the following section, I present Sara’s story of backlash in three acts using Labov’s structural analysis framework (Riessman, 2008). Although I have separated the narrative into acts below, the original conversation unfolded in one continuous interview reflection by Sara, except for a single probing question I asked near the beginning of Act III about lessons learned. After each section, I discuss the dialogue and reflect on Sara’s presentation of the events and of herself. I also consider Sara’s movement from reflection to greater meaning-making that occurs at the end of Act I.

Below is an extended account of events that unfolded in a department meeting, as shared by Sara. The meeting took place after a series of other controversial occurrences involving various faculty members in the department. To protect the anonymity of her colleagues of color and herself, Sara avoided explicit details about the events leading up to the department meeting.

**Act I: The Radical Act of Listening**

Sara: So, let's just say we hit a period around 2020 where, as many places, where, we were really focused on the impact, the racial awakening and everything that's happening in the justice system, everything, the risks that we're really focused on, the risks that Black people experienced, Black and Brown people experience in their everyday life. Right? [OR]

Now, this is not news, as you know, to the people of color on our faculty. This was not news to those of us who are following and focused on what is happening to people of color in the criminal justice. [EV]
But as you might expect, it was great news to many of our White colleagues. [EV]

And there was a space for radical transformation, and my colleagues, they took it, and they led it, and it was beautiful. [AB]

And there was a moment where the system let 'em. [EV]

And then some…of my colleagues resisted [using systems set up to protect people] [AB, CA]

So, we could deconstruct this all day. But the bottom line is because my colleagues are radical, well on both sides are radical, but in different ways. My colleagues of color, just amazing. [EV]

So, they knew it was coming, they were ready, and they're going, and we have this…meeting where they bring it out. [OR]

They're like, no, we're going to remember, I have colleagues who are like, we're going to name the thing that's happening here. [CA]

That's a critical step. And I can see I now incorporate that I learned the power of naming something, right? [EV]

So anyway, they're naming things and they brought this to the…meeting. [CA]

It was amazing. It was amazing. [EV]

And wow, we're talking about the thing that's happening that we never talk about. [CA]

And they said… Here's what we did, here's what happened, and this is resistance. [CA]

And then they named the thing. [CA]

We knew it was coming. We knew that White rage would happen. We knew that these practices would be resisted. [EV]

And I was just sitting there in awe...of the power, of the fierceness, of the bravery of my colleagues. And I was, the brilliance of just like, we're going to name the thing, we're going to talk about it right here. We're not going to let this keep happening in these back rooms, these secret back rooms. [EV]

And amazingly enough, the person who made the complaint...launches and verbally vomits, [CA]

please, you can see this is a difficult space. These people still are acting violently against anybody who spoke up about this. [CA, EV]

By these people, I mean mostly predominantly colleagues who are White in positions of power here [OR]

they just went on to justify why they were, what they did, and just undercutting, [CA]
not undercutting. It's not undercutting. There's no word that's enough to explain the harm created. So I'll say creating more harm in that moment by trying to justify that what they did was actually about equality. [EV]

If they've just been willing to say, I don't like, it makes me feel unsafe, that's one thing, but that's not what they're saying. They're in this space but reproducing this harm. And I am actually not a particularly brave person, but I am a person who can't tolerate, who gets tired of BS at a certain point and gets, I can't stand scripts that go on. [EV]

And also, we've just been through a series of conversations as a faculty where the faculty of color talked about how hard it was for them to be in these predominantly White spaces; the harm it was doing to them. [OR, EV]

And I listen, and maybe the radical act is listening and believing people. [Coda]

It's like when people give you their experience, listen to them and believe them. That's what active resistance is in the spaces I work in. [Coda]

And it's such a little thing. It's not enough, but it's something that I do that maybe some of my colleagues, if they do it, they don't then act on it. [EV]

Sara sets the scene beautifully, situating her story in time and social context using descriptors like “2020,” “racial awakening,” and a time when people were “focused on the risks...Black and Brown people experience in their everyday life.” She provides an overview of the story early on, explaining that her colleagues of color seized the opportunity “for radical transformation,” acts that were eventually “resisted” by colleagues she later identified as predominantly White and in positions of power. Because of the volatility of the situation, which continues to stir in her department, Sara was cryptic in her telling of the story. She did not provide details about the “revolutionary” ideas or acts of her colleagues of color, and she cautiously moved the story forward, explaining that if she said too much, I would not be able to use her story in my research. Sara was careful not to share identifying details and reminded me of the threat exposure posed to her colleagues and herself.

After a brief evaluative summary of her “radical” colleagues, Sara reoriented the story to the specific day the events unfolded. It was a departmental meeting where her colleagues of color decided to call out the acts of resistance happening against them. She explained that they “named
the thing” that was happening. Although Sara does not reveal the details of the practices her colleagues engaged in that led to a complaint against them, an underlying assumption of racism exists based on the setting Sara established at the beginning of the story. Even without detail, the intensity of the situation is made clear through Sara’s assessment and foreshadowing: “We knew it was coming. We knew that White rage would happen.”

The next complicating action that Sara presented was further opposition from a colleague who launched a verbal attack, reportedly without insight or consideration of the harmful consequences of their words. Sara explained that their defense aimed to “justify” their actions under the guise of fairness. In telling the story, Sara searched for words to describe this action before she resigned, “There’s just no word that’s enough to explain the harm created.” As she did throughout her storytelling, Sara took time to reflect on the situation, moving from consideration of others’ behaviors to self-evaluation and then to a moment of clarity.

She started with an evaluation of her White colleagues, “If they’ve just been willing to say, ‘I don't like, it makes me feel unsafe.’” Then, she engaged in a moment of self-examination, admitting, “I am actually not a particularly brave person,” but acknowledging her intolerance to “BS,” especially in the face of injury. In her evaluation, Sara briefly returned to the setting and situations leading up to the faculty meeting. She recalled that they had engaged in ongoing conversation and learned about the difficulties their colleagues of color faced in predominantly White spaces. The combination of reflection and reorientation of how things unfolded seemed to bring new insight, as Sara pronounced, “And I listen, and maybe the radical act is listening and believing people. It's like when people give you their experience, listen to them, and believe them.” In a sort of a conclusionary statement that brought the story into the present, Sara added, “That's what active resistance is in the spaces I work in.”
The second part of Sara’s story, which I label “Act II: Giving the Mic Back,” is presented immediately below and is a continuation of the dialogue. Without any probing questions, Sara explained the next sequence of events from the department meeting, where she spoke up against the extensive harm she witnessed. To protect participant identities, I have excluded details of what Sara said and how those in power responded. I have also removed conversation related to the final details of what happened. Instead, I include Sara’s initial evaluation of the Act II events and allude to the consequences she faced from what she described as “one act.” From there, I enter Act III to share Sara’s overall analysis and summative coda.

**Act II: Giving the Mic Back**

**Sara:** So that's how I can show up as I try to think about spaces where, how can I, as a White person, help to disrupt? Just help. Because all I was really doing was giving the mic back, stopping a moment, or helping to slow down a moment and didn't stop the harm, helping to slow down a moment or stem the bleeding from this very harmful interaction, and do it in a way where the White people in the room who cared could hear something. [EV]

[comments about personal and professional consequences] [RE, Coda]

[comments about being excluded] [RE, Coda]

**Act III: The Violence of It All**

**Sara:** So, you have to be comfortable with some things. I can't worry about, I think, if I'm as a White person, if I'm worried about if I'm being invited to those secret spaces, they're not secret. Everybody knows about them. If I'm not focused on, I'm getting an invitation to those spaces, then I can do things like I did in that...meeting. [EV]

Right. I'll stop there just in that. I could go on for another hour about that one thing. [Coda]

**Jeanan:** Yeah. I mean that's really powerful. What did you learn about how whiteness operates, I guess, through that situation? Or what did you learn from that experience?

**Sara:** The violence of it all. [Coda]

And [faculty colleague] is somebody who's really always pushed me to see violence outside of just physical acts, like direct acts of hitting someone. She was one of the first people to say to me, “Poverty is violence,” and I read it, but it's having somebody that you care about say it to
you and then to receive that and consider it not just to automatically reject it. Right. That's powerful…[Coda]

I was stunned. [EV]

I was stunned by the audacity. I was stunned. I wasn't surprised by my colleagues' behavior after in terms of the extent to which they excluded me. [EV]

Because remember, I'm someone who says what I really think is true, if I'm going to speak, it's going to be the truth or I'm not going to speak. Right? That's my basic rule. [Coda]

I notice it. I'm going to think it is the truth. I recognize that it may not be a universal truth, but I'm going to think it's the truth. [Coda]

And so, I'm used to people being kind of put off by like…they say, “You remarkably do not filter what you say.” And I'm like…I'm remarkably consistent that I don't code switch, that I don't go in one space and act one way and go in another space and act another. I just try to be authentically me wherever, and I try. I'm not perfect, but I try. [EV]

But I carry that. That moment was a real eye-opener for me, and I didn't do the things that you might think I did. I've learned enough at that point to I go and say, are you okay to, I didn't. Didn't make my colleagues of color take care of me in that exchange. I certainly wanted to go to some of my friends and be like, but I understood they carry that situation that they experienced that violence in a direct way. I was a witness to the violence, and I was trying to disrupt it and not perpetuate it. [EV]

And I'm a part of the system that creates that balance. [Coda]

So it's also a lonely space. [Coda]

So, if I live my principles of not asking people who are more vulnerable than me to take care of me, and yet to live in a space where I resist whenever I can, [EV]

and I'm sure I miss as many chances as I get, [EV]

and I get tired, and I don't show up to spaces, and that's a privilege not showing up to spaces. [EV]

So, I'm not a hero, and I'm not perfect. I know that. [EV]

And I think it's important that I say that because there are heroes in the story of what's going on [in this region]. [Coda]

I'm just somebody who's in the choir. I think it was like, I'm a church person, so there could be a minister and a preacher, there can be people to lead, and then there can be people who support. [Coda]

And I think where I can contribute is to be in the choir and support people living their authentic lives to support people so they can be successful by decoding things, by disrupting typical
structures whenever I can, by using my power to extend who's at the table and who gets a chance
to talk at the table. [Coda]

But it's lonely, because, so my friends aren't here. [Coda]

So I would imagine I might've called [a friend], I don't remember exactly what I did after, but I
would imagine I would have called [a friend] or one or two of my other friends who are
white….I would go in that situation to somebody with similar identities to myself who also is
trying to do the work of being a colleague, being an ally, and at least reducing the harm that is
happening. [Coda]

The second part of Sara’s narrative is filled with reflection and present-day perspectives.
Sara discussed figuring out her role in disrupting harmful systems and expressed hope that her
words might influence other White colleagues who care. She seemed to understand the spectrum
of whiteness, knowing that some of her White colleagues could walk away having learned
something about themselves or the injurious consequences of whiteness; others will continue to
hold tight to what they know, unwilling to part with their power. She emphasized that not
concerning herself with being excluded from “secret spaces” opened room to take risks. In the
story's context, I understood “secret spaces” to mean places where her White colleagues and
others in the department with power met to discuss their plan of action for reporting their
colleagues of color. When I asked Sara what she learned about whiteness from that experience,
she pointed to “the violence of it all,” which seemed to reinforce her commitment to being
forthright, truthful, and consistent in her actions.

Sara’s final reflections accentuated the ongoing heaviness of the experience. She
admitted, “I carry that. That moment was a real eye-opener for me.” She also shared a sentiment
about academia that I heard from numerous participants in this study, including Samanth, Alexis,
and Jakov, when she remarked, “It’s a lonely space.” Sara adamantly noted that she did not rely
on her colleagues of color to support her through the aftermath of the experience. She returned to
a place of insight and humility, coinciding with her claim that she lives by her principles. As
much as she works to “resist whenever I can,” Sara admitted to missing “as many chances as I get.” She confessed, “I get tired, and I don't show up to spaces; and that's a privilege, not showing up to spaces. So, I'm not a hero, and I'm not perfect. I know that.” In this statement, Sara acknowledges that as a White woman, she can choose not to participate in resistance without experiencing consequences. Her comment suggested that she understood that the stakes of not resisting are much higher for her colleagues of color, who she emphasized are the “heroes in the story.”

Later in our conversation, Sara shared additional insights about the status of the situation and the ongoing mechanisms of power working to control and manipulate actors and outcomes. These tactics have pushed Sara “to lay low this year” as a means of avoiding significant professional consequences. Sara elaborated that laying low means not showing up at “big stakes” meetings where decisions are made. She also alluded to her inability to remain quiet in the face of unfairness when she added, “If I’m there, I just know me.” She conceded, “So the system takes,” but insisted she will continue resisting in the ways she can for now. She explained, “I think I have found a way that I can be an ally…to individuals and groups in my school. I think I found a way to play a part.”

**Alexis’ Stories**

I chose to present Alexis’ stories in three parts following the order of our conversation rather than reorganizing the story chronologically. I did this for two reasons. First, I wanted to preserve the structure of Alexis’ storytelling and her reflection on the conflicts she has faced in her faculty and chair positions. Reordering the story would have limited my ability to understand how Alexis made sense of her experiences. Second, Alexis’ narratives sometimes moved across timeframes, making it difficult to piece together a clear timeline of events. Thus, I decided that
maintaining the original order of our conversation provided the most reliable approach to analyzing the structure and content of the accounts Alexis revealed.

Throughout my conversation with Alexis, she sprinkled short stories of injustice that followed a similar pattern: Alexis perceived an act of injustice; Alexis spoke up to challenge the injustice; actors in Alexis’s department struck back. These events, which unfolded over several years, eventually led to Alexis stepping down from her position as chair, losing a long-term friendship with a faculty colleague, and isolating herself as a form of self-preservation. I title and order Alexis’ narrative below using these three punishing outcomes.

Unlike Sara, who detailed the events surrounding one departmental meeting in a continuous narrative, Alexis shared her story in segments, likely based on my follow-up questions that led our conversation in a different direction. In part one, Alexis commented about her department’s inequitable application of policies for students of color and White students but did not provide details about the policies or the students impacted by the policies. Instead, she discussed the tension she experienced working to change the policies. Later in our conversation, Alexis elaborated on the inequities by telling me two additional stories. Those two stories constitute part two of her narrative. Finally, part three represents Alexis’ response to my inquiry about what keeps her going in the face of ongoing challenges.

**Part 1: Stepping Down as Chair**

The narrative below, part one of Alexis’ stories, grew from a request I made to Alexis to talk about what being a social worker means to her. She began with a discussion about the profession’s commitment to social change and social justice but quickly noted the profession’s history of upholding the “status quo.” Alexis stated firmly her belief that social work should be about disrupting the status quo and quickly expressed that doing so can be “lonely” and “really
tough.” She noted that her position of power as a tenured faculty member allowed her to take risks that were not available to others. She stressed that “People need to work,” meaning that not everyone has the privilege of challenging the system despite the threat of retaliation and losing their jobs. Alexis highlighted the constraints of pushing back while working within the “constraints of the system.” The conversation moved to the Council of Social Work Education’s new anti-racist educational standards, which Alexis noted as performative. This is where I begin Alexis’ story below.

Alexis: We live in a racist society. We all have to fight against that all the time. And I think that's true in social work in general. [OR]

And that is, again, so I think [the changes to EPAS are] really performative. There's really nothing that's been done that has pushed back significantly. [EV]

So, there's language in there that's great, and there are good people taking that to heart. There are good programs…[that] have done some really good work…[OR]

but I was chair, I had to step down being chair because of these issues. [AB]

I said I, I went to a meeting, [OR]

I said, what do you think, we talked about coming out with an anti-racism statement. “Well, there are other ways that people are discriminated against” and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. [CA]

I said, I'm not saying that they're not. I'm just saying I think we should think about…So what if we talked about a value statement? [CA]

So, diversity, which I don't like that term so much, [EV]

but I thought, okay, I'm going to, well, people wanted to opt out [CA]

Jeanean: Of putting that in their syllabus?

Alexis: Or even having that discussion as a department. [CA]

And then I was noticing that we were applying policies that I think are unfair, but we are applying them differently to our students of color than to White students as well. [CA]

And every time I kind of questioned what was going on, people would run to the dean to rat me out. [CA]
And the dean just said, I think you need to follow the policy, or you need to change the policies. [CA]

And I'm like, yeah, that's great, but no one will change the policies. [EV, CA]

If I come in and I say, I'm changing the policies, then they're going to boot me out…they're going to make life hell. [EV, CA]

And they did. That's exactly what they did. They made life for me really difficult, and I had to step down as chair [RE]

because it just was costing me too much to continually be confronting the racism and White supremacy in the department that people were just not willing to confront. [EV]

I've been on…leave [RE]

…and so I'm really dreading going back…to be honest. I'm like, ah. We have some new faculty this year though, so I'm excited about that. [Coda]

In this brief narrative that began nine minutes into our 67-minute conversation, Alexis relayed a series of events that resulted in her resigning from her position as department chair. Alexis conveyed attempts she made to promote racial equity in her department that her faculty colleagues resented and reported to the dean. In studying the structure of Alexis’ narrative, I found it difficult to distinguish her analysis of events from further complicating actions. In other words, her evaluation of some situations seemed to simultaneously serve as a new source of tension. For example, Alexis said, “If I come in and I say I'm changing the policies, then they're going to boot me out…they're going to make life hell.” This sentence could be interpreted as an evaluation that illuminates Alexis’ perception of what might happen if she attempted to change her department’s racist policy. It can also be taken as a continuation of Alexis’ conversation with her dean and therefore labeled as a complicating action. The entanglement of analysis and complication implies that Alexis’ reflections on the conflicts she experienced serve to further complicate matters in her mind. The phrase, “they’re going to boot me out,” may be an evaluation of retaliatory punishment Alexis might receive and, as such, constitutes a new
Alexis appears caught in the stress and intensity of the conflicts she experienced, preventing her from processing the situation and finding new meaning. Alexis’ conflicts with her colleagues and the dean resulted in a lot of pain that she conveyed throughout our conversation. In the story above, Alexis used words like “really difficult,” “dreading going back,” and “costing me too much.” The terms reflected the emotional harm and damaged relationships that resulted from her attempts to challenge racist ideas and support students of color in the program.

This next story unfolded later in my conversation with Alexis but served as an extension of the story above. In the previous dialogue, Alexis mentioned noticing that the department applied policies differently for students of color and White students. When she revisited the topic of inconsistent policies, she shared two stories that exemplified her claim. Importantly, Alexis identified both policies she discussed as problematic. The inconsistent use of the policies for Black students and White students caused her additional distress. Again, I use Labov’s structural analysis to develop a deeper understanding of Alexis’ process of meaning-making in the face of backlash from her colleagues.

**Part 2: Losing a Friend**

**Alexis:** Let me tell you two stories.

One was we had a summer where we had two students who were doing internship work, and they went missing. [OR]

One was a White Latina woman…who had gone back to [her country of origin] for a death in the family but hadn't let the professor know anything. [OR]

The other was a Black woman from [city] whose child was in the ICU at [hospital]. [OR]

The White Latino woman was permitted to finish her internship hours after the semester had ended. The Black woman was not. [AB]

So, when I asked what the difference was between the two, and I was chair at the time, when I asked what the difference was between the two, I was told that well, the Latino woman was less combative. The angry Black woman; the trope of the angry Black woman. [CA]
Can you believe it? I mean, I couldn't even believe it. [EV]

And again, this is where the dean, and I said to the dean, I understand what you're saying, go by the policy, which I don't agree with. [CA]

And I actually said to the student, [CA]

and they were so pissed at me that, oh my God, there's so many stories. Other ones are coming to mind. [EV]

I said to the student, if you were in my class, I would definitely work with you. [CA]

Which of course was a big problem because I wasn't sticking up for my colleagues and I stick too much up for the students. [EV]

And again, as chair, you're supposed to support your colleagues. I get that. But if they're wrong, they’re wrong. [EV]

So that's kind of one example. That student then had to retake classes both summer classes because they're linked classes, the practice class and the internship class, and we weren't offering them again for, I don't even know how long. [RE]

So I pushed the dean, I said, can we do independent studies at least so she can get out and doesn't have to wait a year? Because a relatively small program, we don't offer every class every semester. So that's one. [RE]

Alexis begins with the story above with an orientation to the main characters, “a White Latina woman” and “a Black woman” who “went missing” during their summer internships. She summarized the story in clear terms, noting that the White Latina woman received permission to complete her internship while the Black woman did not. When Alexis challenged the inconsistent use of the policy, which she opposed in and of itself, a colleague must have reported her to the dean. Complicating things further, Alexis sided with the student, which was “a big problem.” Alexis alluded to breaking an expectation, or perhaps an unwritten rule, that the chair’s duty is to “support your [faculty] colleagues.” She understood her actions as a problem in her colleagues’ eyes and reinterpreted her action of sticking up for her students through the lens of not supporting her colleagues. Alexis left the story partially unresolved as she noted that the student had to retake two classes but did not clarify whether the student had to wait a year or if the dean approved the student for independent study, as requested by Alexis.
Alexis launched right into this second story without interruption from me. Again, I use Labov’s analytic framework to designate the structural elements of Alexis’ account.

Alexis: Another one is we have a capstone class, and it used to have this paper, and now we do it orally and the paper is due when it's due, and there are no extensions for any possible reason. [AB]

My first year [at the university], a student's mother was dying, and she asked for an extension, [OR]

which I thought was a good reason to ask for an extension, [EV]

and was told, no. [CA]

Now you can do a rewrite, but if you do a rewrite, your highest grade is a B. You start at a B, and it can go down; you have to get a C or above in all classes. This is like 80% of the grade, all of this stuff. [OR]

I was never in agreement with the policy in general. [EV]

And every year, and they got pissed at me every year for bringing it up. [EV]

This affected all students. [EV]

That first student I talked about was a White student, [OR]

and I finally was able to get them to make some changes, but not tons. [RE]

So, one year, it was my first semester as chair, two students were hospitalized. The day the paper was due, two Black women were hospitalized the day the paper was due. [OR]

And the professor who also didn't agree with the policy - [CA]

it was a department policy that you couldn't change, even though supposedly you have academic freedom in your class - [EV]

said to me, “Can I accept them? Their papers are done, but they've been hospitalized…” [OR]

I said, “I think you can.” [CA]

And you would've thought, I mean, it blew up. [EV]

“You can't do that. You cannot do that.” I mean, because “how will we know other people's reasons are not important?” [CA]

Well, if we can’t as social workers differentiate, right? [EV]

One, two, the people saying this are people who ask their students for grace all the time when they get papers and stuff back late to them, but they don't offer that grace to their students. [EV]
And then the very next semester, a White student was able to hand a paper in late, just a day late again, and I'm like, “do you not see the differences here?” [CA]

“No, we didn't say that she could. Her computer crashed.” [CA]

“But it's the same thing. You can't say it's a hard and fast deadline for these people who were hospitalized and not for this person whose computer crashed.” [CA]

And you could be a jerk, and I wouldn't be a jerk, but you could be a jerk and say, you shouldn't have been doing it the last night. [EV]

So, these are the stories. These are things that happened. And again, you just can't make this stuff up. [Coda]

And one of the things that one of people, someone who was one of my best friends for [many] years, and we're not friends anymore… [RE]

we were really close. [EV]

And when you wake up and realize, and her thing is, well, would you want them working with your children? And you know what? We don't want her working with our children or children of color. We wouldn't want any of them working with our children because they could do damage, because they're going to ask them to adhere to a way of the world that's just based on a White sense of how the world should operate. [Coda]

Again, Alexis sets up the story with some details of the setting, “my first year” and a summary of the problem, “no extensions for any possible reason” for the program’s capstone project. Admittedly, I found it difficult to follow the timeline of events for this portion of the story. Key elements took place across multiple academic semesters and years, and Alexis moved between evaluation, orientation, and the complicating actions.

Piecing the events together, Alexis presented a story about a punitive grading system that had existed in her department and that she had repeatedly raised to her colleagues as problematic. Her department had been inflexible around making exceptions to the policy on late assignments, paradoxically leaning on an equity narrative as the reason. Alexis presented the faculty’s argument as, “How will we know other people's reasons are not important?” In other words, how would one qualify one student’s story as more or less reasonable than another? Rather than give up the policy, faculty remained committed to a rigid adherence to the policy. Alexis pointed out
the double irony of the professors’ rigidity around this policy, as they themselves “ask their students for grace all the time” with grading papers.d t

At the heart of this story, Alexis revealed an inconsistent application of the policy for Black and White students. In one scenario, a White student whose computer crashed received a one-day extension. In another situation, Alexis told a faculty member they could accept late papers from two Black students who were hospitalized and “things blew up.” Alexis pointed out the inequity, but the results of what happened with the Black students and with the policy remained unclear. Instead, Alexis brought the story back to the present day, saying, “These are the stories…you just can’t make this stuff up.” Through this coda, Alexis illuminated the ongoing existence of the functions and harm produced by whiteness in her social work program.

In her concluding comments about these “things that happened,” Alexis revealed the loss of a long friendship with a faculty member whose office remained across the hall from hers. She reflected, “We’re not friends anymore…we were really close,” and then added a final thought about measuring the value of friendship through the lens of your children’s safety. She concluded that she and her husband were unwilling to expose their children to friends who would “ask them to adhere to a way of the world that's just based on a White sense of how the world should operate.”

Part 3: Isolation for Survival

Following Alexis’ reflection on her lost friendship, I asked her what keeps her going. She admitted, again, to having “really rough moments.” She clung to her time away on leave as a respite, calling it “amazing.” Below, I include the rest of Alexis’ response to my question.

Alexis: I actually am there as little as possible, and I am going to say, this is going to sound really weird. And luckily, I've long covid, which is not lucky at all, but gave me flexibility to be able to zoom into some meetings
and not have to be there in person. And so that really did help me because I could turn my camera off, I'll just be on mute or whatever and not have to sometimes deal with some of that. [EV]

Alexis’ final reflection on what keeps her going centered on acts of self-isolation, seemingly for survival. She resorted to physically separating herself from the department in order to persist and praised her medical condition for giving her the freedom to withdraw from interactions with colleagues. In another part of our conversation, Alexis admitted that she almost moved her office to another location but “decided to stay to try to play nice.” One point of optimism for Alexis existed in the possibilities offered by the department’s new faculty hires. In a brief statement at the end of part one, Alexis expressed excitement about their arrival. She later mentioned wanting to be there to mentor and support them. She added, “I don’t want them to be marginalized,” as she reflected on a scenario that “went really poorly” for a former colleague who challenged department policies and whose anti-racist research was ill-received. The potential for developing new relationships in the department offered a source of hope for Alexis in an otherwise threatening environment that promised acts of backlash yet to come.

Summary

In this chapter, I examined the stories of two White faculty participants from two universities in different regions of the country. Despite the physical distance, their stories came together through similar experiences of retaliation in response to their attempts to disrupt whiteness in their social work departments. Sara and Alexis told stories about the strategies their colleagues used to mask racism and maintain power over policies and operations that represented limited worldviews borne from White supremacy.

Using Labov’s framework for narrative analysis, I parsed out the unique meaning embedded in their experiences. Sara focused her narrative and reflection on the acts of resistance
she took to disrupt whiteness – listening and sharing the microphone – and the violence perpetrated against her colleagues of color by those with power. Throughout her story, Sara considered the impact of the events alongside her own actions. She was intentional in her storytelling, aligning her commitment to humility and authenticity with her presentation of self. Though the situations were similar in context, Alexis appeared suspended in the anger and anguish of the complicating actions in her stories. The conflicts that happened at her university remained entangled in Alexis’ mind as she imparted the accounts of injustice inflicted on her students and the resulting emotional trauma she faced. Together, these stories illustrate the unyielding powers of whiteness embedded in university settings, the ongoing harm inflicted upon students and faculty of color, and the tactics for upholding dominance.
Chapter 6

This study examined the perceptions and accounts of nine white Social Work faculty members who expressed commitments to disrupting whiteness in the educational spaces where they worked. Using a qualitative approach, I interviewed participants about their understanding of whiteness, how it shows up in their workplaces, and what tensions existed in troubling its operations. I begin this last chapter by reflecting on the study participants and their collective contributions to this work. I then discuss the significant findings in the context of the two research questions and in relation to the theoretical framework. I conclude the chapter by discussing the study's limitations and implications for social work education, policy, and research before sharing my final thoughts.

Fundamental Elements to Disrupting Whiteness

Nine white social work faculty members from diverse regions of the country participated in this study. They shared stories about who they were and where they came from and provided insights into the personal, social, and structural complexities of understanding and uprooting whiteness. Among their unique experiences arose shared commitments to challenging the status quo, troubling structural inequity, valuing client experiences, and amplifying diverse perspectives. For many faculty participants, a driving question behind their efforts was how to disrupt oppressive systems while working within them. This research does not propose answers to this complex question. The research is not about finding answers and telling people how to do the work. It is about sharing insights and perspectives so we can continue to develop our thinking and borrow from the wisdom of others. My hope is that the stories shared by white faculty participants build a sense of shared commitment, solidarity, and motivation to continue in what can be lonely and exhausting work. In the spirit of learning, I share three foundational insights
illuminated by my conversations with participants. They include the importance of critical inquiry and systems thinking, an awareness of the ambiguousness of whiteness, and a belief that there is a place for resistance within everyone. I discuss these insights in the paragraphs below.

Participants in this study, in addition to employing specific tactics, demonstrated a commitment to disrupting power structures through critical inquiry and systems thinking. This finding underscores the crucial role of critical education in anti-racism work. In today’s educational culture, students often prioritize skill development and expect to learn specific techniques for practicing social work. However, social work requires engagement in critical inquiry that inspires radical thinking. By encouraging critical education, we can foster a culture of resistance to white normativity that extends beyond anti-racism. Teaching students to examine self and systems creates opportunities for them to apply knowledge across multiple forms of oppression. Critical inquiry serves as the foundation for resistance.

A second fundamental element to disturbing structural racism is an awareness of the complexities and slipperiness of whiteness. If one’s central understanding of whiteness is one’s privilege as a white person, the work of upsetting whiteness remains limited (Leonardo, 2004). When interpretations of whiteness include examinations of systems, the work of undoing whiteness in social work and education becomes much more complex. This study's white Social Work faculty struggled to define whiteness but demonstrated a broad understanding of its influence within educational spaces. They connected historical inequities with present-day policies and practices and examined and upset systems of power. Their stories elucidated the damage created by whiteness through abusive policies, gatekeeping, social work licensing, and excluding people with lived experience. This finding demonstrates participants’ engagement with
racism concepts that include the harm produced by whiteness, which CWS scholars have noted as fundamental to the conversation (Cabrera, 2022; Matias, 2022).

A third important takeaway uncovered through participants’ stories and self-reflections is that everyone can practice resistance. The faculty in this study embodied different dispositions and performed unique maneuvers that contributed to the work of upsetting whiteness in important ways. Some participants viewed themselves as optimists, others as jaded. I found many to be deep thinkers stuck somewhere in the middle. The optimists shared stories of hope and success and believed their efforts to disrupt power structures represented progress toward change. They focused their energies strategically on winnable battles. Other participants were more cynical. They had been in the system for a long time and understood the games around power and resistance. The philosophers got stuck in the complexity of opposing forces, continuing to question the system and point out inequities but remaining caught in the stronghold of whiteness embedded in larger organizational constructs.

Some participants operated from places of privilege, benefiting from the support of the university or department administration. Others worked in conservative settings where the stakes of public resistance were much higher. Participants sometimes moved between subjectivities, operating differently depending on the environment within which they found themselves. For example, one faculty member worked in a state that had enacted anti-critical race theory legislation. They stayed under the radar and wove around provocative language due to political hostility but enjoyed freedom and support from administrators. Another participant lived in an in-between space, engaging in what they deemed as small acts of resistance because to do the work, they had to stay funded. Others remained bold-faced in the absence of threats to their professional livelihoods.
In summary, the faculty participants demonstrated that resistance takes many shapes. At its core, resistance involves radical thinking, but it is not always guided by extreme action. Just as racism is not limited to overt acts of harm, resistance against white normativity can be subtle and persistent. As several participants offered in their discussions, there is no one right way to approach this work. Next, I discuss the findings under the umbrella of each research question that guided this work.

Research Question 1: What are the Stories of Dismantling Whiteness?

The first research question in this study asked: What are the stories of white Social Work faculty endeavoring to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, institutions, and related work? In broad terms, faculty shared stories that spanned emotional and physical boundaries. I heard stories of hope and resistance, stories of leaning on and losing relationships, stories from inside and outside the classroom, and stories of in-between and secret spaces. The extensive narratives faculty told brought light to the mechanics of whiteness running through academic spaces.

For example, Chapter 4 included restoried narratives that conveyed overt and subtle systems of exclusion and harm. The accounts provided a glimpse into one classroom where traditional notions of the teacher as a knower were upheld, history was told through a white worldview, and the student's voice was dismissed. Other stories conveyed messages of exclusion, racism, and ableism at work in an honors program and through university accommodations practices. These manifestations of white normativity perpetuated long-standing notions about whose bodies and knowledge do and do not belong in academic spaces.

Faculty also told stories demonstrating a desire to honor the unique identities and experiences of those they worked with and for. They described the client-practitioner relationship
as a collaboration led by the client rather than the practitioner as the holder of knowledge and
dictator of behavior and actions. They incorporated power analyses into their classrooms,
encouraging students to examine the power dynamics inherent in helping relationships. Further,
faculty sought opportunities to engage community perspectives in research and talked about
shifting power by tuning in to conversational dynamics and sharing the mic to make room for
non-dominant perspectives.

Additionally, Chapter 4 incorporated stories told by faculty about times they successfully
engaged in pushing against whiteness and times when things went awry. Their narratives focused
on tactics to shift power in spaces historically dominated by white voices and fell into the
categories of diversity narratives and policy narratives. Through their accounts, it became clear
that faculty were most confident in their efforts to battle whiteness inside the classroom. As
faculty engaged in resistance outside of their classroom at the department or university level,
they experienced various forms of resistance. In the most extreme cases, faculty reported
backlash that compromised their personal and professional livelihoods. I will take up these
tensions in the next section under research question two. For the remainder of this section, I turn
to stories of resistance from the classroom.

**The Classroom as a Space for Resistance**

The classroom represented a distinctive space where faculty felt they engaged tactics for
dismantling whiteness. The participants talked about decentering whiteness in their syllabi,
creating flexible policies, diversifying assignments, amplifying voices, building trust, facilitating
conversations, and troubling social work policy and practice through historical lenses.
Participants saw teaching as a tactic for change and understood the classroom as a space for
shared learning, transformative thought, and counter-stories. Though engaging in anti-racist
pedagogy was not without tension, the classroom ultimately existed as a space where faculty possessed agency and could put their educational philosophies to work. Overall, participants demonstrated the desire to disrupt existing power structures and called out both curricular content and teaching practices as means for doing so. I discuss these strategies in relationship to my theoretical framework.

Some faculty worked to reshape knowledge through curricular content. Rachel talked about troubling longstanding narratives that center white colonial women as the founders of social work. She used the classroom as a place to uplift Indigenous systems of care and to expose the racism, paternalism, and bias of early white social workers. Samantha and Kacey integrated concepts of power and authority to help students understand the connections between individuals, systems, policies, and helping relationships. Beth, Jakov, Mimi, Kacey, and Rachel were thoughtful about selecting learning materials they believed represented diverse authors and perspectives. These approaches indicated an attempt to move conversations about race beyond the white privilege dialogue that has dominated social work classrooms and focused on educating on white learners.

In terms of teaching practices, participants named things like perfectionism, deadlines, attendance, academic writing, and hierarchies as examples of values reflected in whiteness. Some participants had agency over their classroom policies and created flexibility around attendance and deadlines. Mimi talked about incorporating diverse assignments to allow students to demonstrate learning in ways other than writing. Jakov and Kacey talked about subverting classroom power structures through physical classroom space and positioning students as facilitators and givers of knowledge. Participants who had racially diverse classrooms, including Jakov and Mimi, worked to maneuver classroom conversations in a way that created space for
diverse perspectives. They paid attention to who was taking up space in the room to facilitate and direct discussions. When students shared feedback regarding biased classroom materials and problematic teaching practices, faculty reportedly listened, reflected, and adjusted.

Less clear, however, is what their efforts look like in action through a critical lens. The stories told by white faculty, to me, a white researcher, remain uncontested. Although I view their stories through the lens of CWS, much remains unexamined. For example, how do their teaching practices unfold in the classroom? How do they manage their white subjectivities? Is the incorporation of diverse materials performative or does it reflect deep engagement in perspectives from scholars of color and other ways of knowing? How do students receive these practices? While an analysis of classroom content and pedagogy is beyond the scope of this study, at least one participant discussed the challenge of incorporating materials and practices that speak to diverse students. Indeed, the complexities of white faculty engaging in pedagogy that unravels the threads of whiteness are vast, especially when considering the multitude of student subjectivities.

**Research Question 2: Tensions Beyond the Classroom**

The second research question in this study was: What tensions do white Social Work faculty navigate in their efforts to dismantle whiteness, and how do they manage these tensions? Their stories revealed a variety of stressors, but thematic analysis of the research interviews revealed policy debates as a common tension across participant stories. Also of critical importance to answering research question number two were the stories of backlash presented in Chapter 5 and analyzed using structural analysis. I discuss the policy debates and backlash in the following paragraphs.
Policy Debates

An area of tension discussed across participants' stories was policy. Participants named department and university policies related to admissions, academic dismissal, grading, attendance, and late assignments as steeped in white supremacy logic. They recognized attempts to change these policies as a way of pushing against whiteness, but often, their colleagues and their own unwillingness to let go of traditional modes of thinking and operating halted progress.

As demonstrated in Chapter 4, resistance existed both internally for participants who got caught in philosophical tensions and externally through department debate and conflict. Kacey and Isabel discussed the ongoing conversations in their department about attendance and dismissal policies. Faculty believed that creating equitable and student-centered policies would negatively impact students’ preparedness for practicing social work. This tension speaks to the challenge of trying to create localized change while operating within larger institutional structures – structures that uphold whiteness.

Specifically, faculty recognized that students had obligations outside of school. Samantha noted a number of challenges that students face, including work, caregiving, and managing the complexities of things happening in their communities. Many students do not have the privilege of prioritizing school, and upholding stringent policiespunishes those who cannot. In more practical terms, Kacey talked about students potentially getting sick or not being able to attend class because of winter weather. On the flip side, allowing flexibility in these policies, meaning allowing students to miss class, had perceived ramifications for learning outcomes and competencies required for accreditation standards, and university academic expectations.

In a related story, Samantha shared a story about a colleague who questioned a student’s commitment to their schoolwork because they showed up late to class with food. Isabel
discussed the dismissal policy in her department. She recognized the policy as inequitable and noted that one student who was dismissed identified a disability and a health issue but was still dismissed for not living up to the university's expectations. Again, this dismissal policy was not centered around the needs of the student but rather dictated by longstanding assumptions about education, hard work, deservedness, and meritocracy. It punished a student regardless of their situation and sent an exclusionary message that they didn’t belong in school or the social work profession. Mimi noted her departments’ ongoing conversations about modifying inequitable practices but were unable to move from conversation to action. Similarly, two faculty discussed department debates about eliminating the GRE from admissions requirements, one that spanned years and remained unchanged. Historically, data informs us that such gatekeeping policies have long disproportionately disadvantaged students of color and economically disadvantaged students, yet such practices continue to persist.

These narratives demonstrate deeply engrained ideas that maintain inequitable power structures and work to organize and control human behavior and create educational harm. As Kacey stated, “The systems live in us, and we live in the systems.” Even when faculty participants and their colleagues saw the need for change, they got stuck in the embedded ideologies of whiteness that uphold systems that produce inequitable educational outcomes. Examining these policy narratives through the theoretical framework allows us to see the power of whiteness in individuals and systems to hold tight to singular ways of knowing and operating that serve to maintain authority over academic operations. They represent an unwillingness to make a change if the change requires a reimagination of the order of things and letting go of epistemologies and values steeped in white supremacy thinking.
**Backlash**

In Chapter 5, I presented in-depth stories from two participants that further captured the educational violence present in some social work departments. Both Alexis and Sara shared stories of backlash from colleagues when they spoke up against racism in the department. These stories unfolded differently from the policy debates, likely because the individuals involved perceived threats to their character and authority.

In Sara’s story, her colleagues of color were targeted after seizing the opportunity for racial progress. During a department meeting, they spoke up about the retaliation they experienced and named the racialized resistance. Sara described the resulting white rage from her white colleagues and an unwillingness to acknowledge the harm they perpetrated.

Alexis’ stories were also closely tied with attempts toward racial justice. In one scenario, her endeavor to develop an anti-racism statement was rejected by the department. She was later told that it was not within her role as department chair to speak for the department. On other occasions, Alexis raised concern that the department applied policies differently to students of color and to white students. When she called out the racism and stood behind her students, colleagues reported her to the dean.

Sara’s and Alexis’s stories exposed retaliation against progress toward racial equity. Department colleagues perceived threats to the established order, which in turn threatened their status and privilege. They refused to step outside their worldviews to imagine a different way of doing or interpreting. Rather, they allowed their fear and anger to guide their actions.

These scenarios demonstrated clear injury to students and faculty of color that went unacknowledged by those creating the harm. Alexis and Sara both experienced professional consequences related to their acts of resistance. Alexis stepped down as chair and Sara was
laying low to protect her faculty position. Alexis and Sara talked about the exclusion and isolation they faced in their departments following these events. They and other participants described the work as lonely and exhausting, with several admitting that they disengage from the work at times, noting that as a privilege of their white identities. Ultimately, faculty found motivation to continue to push for change by connecting with like-minded people, engaging in radical debate and activism, reflecting on the power of education, watching alumni pushing political change, and instilling hope in young minds.

Limitations

I now move to this study’s limitations related to methodology and data analysis. In the discussion, I include researcher bias, the dialogical nature of narrative inquiry, transferability, and time constraints.

Narrative research relies heavily on the interpretation of the researcher, which inherently introduces bias into the analysis (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Riessman, 2008). As all researchers do, I came to this study with a set of experiences, passions, and beliefs that shaped the research design and my interpretation of the stories and reflections participants shared with me. As a solo researcher, I analyzed data solely through my own subjectivity. As a white researcher, I worked from a white imaginary (Stokas, 2023), which inevitably impacted all stages of the research study. As such, the study is limited by my whiteness. At times during data analysis and discussion, I had difficulty applying a critical lens to participants’ stories because I felt connected to them through my own experiences. I became so engrossed in their stories and the excitement of shared radical and abolitionist perspectives that I moved away from analysis of the potential to center whiteness and reproduce harm. I held compassion for the human
experience and felt the pain of the isolation and loneliness many participants shared. I had to remain reflective and remind myself of the purpose of the research.

Additionally, the conversations I had with participants were co-produced, meaning that my presence in the conversation, the way I asked questions, and the way I responded to participant dialogue shaped the flow of the conversation. In other words, as a dialogic process, conversations do more than convey information (Riessman, 2008). They are multi-vocal, meaning that stories travel through different subjectivities and communicate the experiences and interpretations of the teller, the listener, and the reader. Like the game Whisper Down the Lane, as stories journey through individuals, they take different forms and do not end in the same shape from which they began. In this way, the trustworthiness of both the researcher and participants came into play. In the case of this study, participants told uncontested accounts of their experiences, and I reported and analyzed them.

Because this narrative study focused on individual stories and their unique situations, readers should not generalize the findings to the broader population. Instead, scholars have proposed using strategies that help readers determine the transferability and reliability of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, the research consumer has the autonomy to determine how the research applies to situations familiar to them. Qualitative studies that include rich details about the setting, participants, and findings provide readers with information to assess transferability. In this study, I incorporated profiles of several participants and used extensive quotes to enhance the reliability of my interpretation of the data. However, to protect participant identities, I excluded specific details about the settings and, at times, removed narrative and participant details to protect anonymity. These strategies for protecting identity may make it difficult for readers to assess the transferability of the information.
Finally, this study is limited by the short amount of time I spent in conversation with each research participant. Because qualitative research aims to understand human experience, gaining a deep level of insight is important. Additional interviews and member-checking would have increased the reliability of the participants’ accounts and my interpretation of those accounts. I was unable to incorporate these steps due to time constraints.

Implications

This study offers several important implications for consideration. In this section, I highlight recommendations related to social work education, social work and educational policies, and future research on whiteness.

Implications for Social Work Education

This study provides insights that inform implications for social work education. Faculty participants in this study appeared to move beyond educating white students about privilege, representing forward movement in race-related social work content. However, educators should carefully assess who their curricular content targets. Faculty are incorporating diverse sources of literature and learning materials in their classes, but there could be a slippery slope toward performative efforts to amplify diverse voices that mirror diversity celebrations of past social work pedagogy.

Additionally, if white social work educators want to decenter whiteness, they must create a new narrative centered on ways of knowing from BIPOC communities. While uprooting the racism that exists in social work practice and highlighting revisionist histories is important, the work should not stop there. Educators must engage in moving the center of educational content to the margins to highlight the beauty, strength, and potential of systems of care developed by communities and scholars of color. I admit that in my own research in this study, I focused my
literature review on uncovering white revisionist stories in social work and neglected to uplift the work of Black and Indigenous social workers. As white educators and researchers, we must constantly check ourselves and assess our tendency to recenter whiteness.

Finally, I make a case for the necessity of critical pedagogy in social work education. Given the current educational culture and demand for practical skill development, students’ ability to develop insights about themselves, others, institutions, and the world becomes constrained. As the social work faculty in this study demonstrated, critical inquiry is foundational to social work and systems thinking. Despite the ongoing debate about the purpose of education, the classroom continues to exist as a space for critical inquiry.

**Implications for Policy**

As demonstrated in this study, the classroom represents a space of academic freedom and a place where Social Work faculty and students can disrupt racial narratives and help students think critically about the connections between policy, practice, self, and society. The anti-CRT legislation that is exploding across the country has significant implications for academic freedom. The legislation threatens to restrict the exploration and discussion of topics related to race, racism, and social justice within educational institutions, including higher education.

Specifically, those who oppose CRT endeavor to inhibit educators from teaching critical perspectives on history, society, and systemic inequalities, thereby limiting their ability to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of complex issues faced by the marginalized populations that social workers serve. Constraining the scope and content of academic discourse is a tool to silence the voices of those who have existed in the margins of whiteness (Hazel, 2023) and stands in contrast to the intellectual diversity essential to transforming social work and higher education. Social work educators must remain vigilant of
these and other political issues that threaten progress toward racial justice. They should engage social work students in inquiry about CRT and efforts to stymie diversity of thought. Both social work students and faculty should work to find ways to fight legislative efforts and protect academic freedom within their universities and states.

Additionally, the departmental policy narratives shared in this study exposed the deeply engrained ideologies that impede progress toward racial equity and the dismantling of oppressive systems. Even social work educators who uphold social justice and cherish systems thinking can remain immobilized by the narratives of whiteness living in themselves and in institutions. As I offered in this chapter, transformative change requires a shift in resources and power that must move beyond department meetings and classrooms. While these efforts are crucial to progress, the willingness of those who hold power to redistribute power in new and meaningful ways can push organizations to reimagine the educational landscape. I encourage social work educators to use equity as a driving force for policy decisions. The results will shape new ways of thinking, knowing, and being.

Implications for Future Research

The classroom represented a primary place where faculty engaged in efforts to dismantle whiteness. They discussed educational content, teaching practices, and flexible policies as ways of shifting power dynamics and amplifying diverse perspectives. Collectively, faculty shared moments of progress and missteps that took place in their classrooms that demonstrated humility and self-reflection. Still, faculty shared these stories through their individual perspectives and white social imaginaries. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, further investigation is needed to explore what is happening in the classroom. Qualitative studies could examine faculty teaching practices, educational content, and student feedback. Future examinations of white social work
educators' efforts to dismantle whiteness should also collect data on the student demographics of the classroom and universities as an important element of understanding social identities.

Further, I encourage white scholars exploring similar research questions to engage in collaborative research. This could include BIPOC colleagues and others versed in the theoretical constructs of CWS. Research to decenter whiteness and critique white ways of knowing would benefit from diverse subjectivities and perspectives.

Finally, it is recommended that further explorations of the impact of anti-CRT and anti-DEI legislation on educational institutions and social work classrooms be undertaken. Critical investigations of racism and other social “isms” are at the core of transformative thought, as demonstrated by the national backlash against it. The legislation poses threats to academic freedom, and social workers should engage in research that exposes the risks and the responses from social work and higher education.

Summary

This chapter discusses the results of the study in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework. Participant stories demonstrate that the logics of whiteness continue to grind in social work departments and universities, upholding white normativity and resisting change. The faculty in this study used numerous tactics to dismantle whiteness across university spaces, but the classroom represented a distinctive place for challenging the status quo. When participant efforts to disrupt whiteness moved outside of the classroom and beyond their own agency, multiple forms of resistance arose.

Beyond specific strategies for tackling whiteness, participant stories shed light on a few grounding principles of addressing structural change. In alignment with social work’s value of the dignity and worth of everyone, I have come to learn that there is no right approach to
disrupting whiteness and that we are indeed stronger together. Battling the extensive harm created by oppressive systems takes the collective efforts of individuals willing to take risks, engage in difficult conversations, examine self and systems, share power, lend support and insights, encourage curiosity, ask critical questions, trouble the status quo, name the harm, listen, and believe.
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Appendix A

Recruitment Email to Social Work Colleagues

Hello Social Work Colleagues,

As you may know, I am completing my doctoral studies in the Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education Administration at [Redacted]. Using narrative inquiry and a Critical Whiteness Studies framework, I will explore what is happening on the ground in educational spaces as White Social Work faculty endeavor to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, institutions, and related work.

I ask that you consider sharing information about my research study with any social work colleagues external to WCU who may be interested in participating in the study and with any relevant Social Work social media groups to which you belong.

Specifically, my research will explore the stories of White Social Work faculty answering calls within the profession to decenter White ideologies and undo systems that perpetuate racism. Participation in the study is voluntary. Each eligible and consenting participant will engage with me in an individual conversational interview via Zoom. I expect interviews to last 90-120 minutes. The interview will include questions about the participant’s interest in, relationship to, and experiences with efforts to dismantle whiteness within their classrooms, departments, post-secondary institutions, and related work. I may request follow-up interviews with participants as needed to gain clarification or additional information to understand each participant’s story more fully. Follow-up interviews are expected to take 30 minutes or less.

Interested participants may email me at [Redacted] or complete this [Redacted] Form, which contains the eligibility requirements and informed consent process. Please also see the attached Research Flyer.
I thank you for supporting my research endeavors.

With appreciation,

Jeanean Mohr, MSW

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, protocol IRB-FY2023-365
Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer

SEEKING SOCIAL WORK FACULTY RESEARCH STUDY ON DISMANTLING WHITENESS

Participation includes:
- 90-120-minute conversational interview via Zoom
- Potential follow-up Zoom interview (30 min. max)

Benefits:
- Insights into the experiences of white Social Work faculty answering calls to disrupt systemic racism within the profession.

To participate, you must be a Social Work faculty member who:
- Is 18 years or older.
- Holds a graduate degree in Social Work or related field.
- Is currently employed at a CSWE-accredited social work program in the U.S.
- Identifies as white.
- Is working to dismantle whiteness in your classroom, department, institution, or related work.

Questions?
Contact: Jeanean Mohr

IRB Approval #
IRB-FY2023-365
Appendix C

Qualtrics Interest and Consent Form

Dismantling Whiteness in Social Work Educational Spaces

Start of Block: Survey Overview

Survey Overview
Welcome!
This survey contains a series of seven eligibility questions. If you meet the eligibility requirements, you'll be asked to review information about the research study and consent to participation prior to being asked for contact and demographic information. Should you not meet eligibility requirements, you'll be immediately taken to the end of the survey. The entire survey, including consent process, should take about 5 minutes.

End of Block: Survey Overview

Start of Block: Eligibility Requirements

Q1 Are you at least 18 years of age?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)
Q2 Do you hold a graduate degree in Social Work or related field?

- Yes, I hold a graduate degree in Social Work or a related field. Enter degree area if other than Social Work. (1) ________________________________

- No, I do not hold a graduate degree in Social Work or a related field. (2)

Q3 Are you currently employed as a faculty member for a social work graduate or undergraduate program accredited by the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q4 Are you currently employed at an institution of higher education in the United States?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q5 Do you identify as predominantly white/European American/Anglo American?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
Q6 Are you working to dismantle whiteness in your classroom, department, institution, or related work?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q7 Are you employed as a Social Work faculty member at West Chester University?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

End of Block: Eligibility Requirements

Start of Block: Informed Consent: IRB-FY2023-365

INFORMED CONSENT  Project Overview

Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being done by Jeanean Mohr as part of their Doctoral Dissertation to explore the stories of white Social Work faculty engaged in efforts to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, institutions, and related work. Your participation will take about 90-120 minutes to engage in a conversational interview with Jeanean Mohr via Zoom. You may also be asked to engage in follow-up interviews with Jeanean to provide clarity or additional details about your responses and the stories you shared. We ask that you grant informed consent through Qualtrics, provide demographic data, and share stories and any related artifacts about your endeavors to dismantle whiteness.

There is minimal risk of experiencing negative emotions such as discomfort, anxiety, guilt, frustration, or depression related to your story sharing about whiteness and race-related experiences and perceptions. To minimize these risks, you may skip any question(s), take a break, or end the interview at any time. There is no direct benefit to you as the participant, but this research will help the social work community gain insights about what is happening on the ground as white social work faculty answer widespread calls within the profession to decenter white ideologies and undo systems that perpetuate racism. Your stories will be used to better understand the current battle for racial justice and shed light on the tensions and institutional challenges to help inform change.

The research project is being done by Jeanean Mohr as part of their Doctoral Dissertation to explore the experiences of white social work faculty engaged in efforts to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, institutions, and related work. If you would like to take part, West Chester University
requires that you agree and sign this consent form. You may ask Jeanean Mohr any questions to help you understand this study. If you don’t want to be a part of this study, it won’t affect any services from [redacted]. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

**What is the purpose of this study?**
To explore the stories of social work educators at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) engaged in efforts to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, and institutions.

**What will I be asked to do?**
If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview, which will take place via Zoom and take about 90-120 minutes of your time. You may also be invited to participate in a follow-up conversation to provide clarification or additional details to understand your story more fully. Follow-up interviews are expected to take 30 minutes or less.

**Are there any experimental medical treatments?**
No

**Is there any risk to me?**
Possible risks or sources of discomfort include negative emotions such as anxiety, guilt, frustration, or depression related to your story sharing about whiteness and race-related experiences and perceptions as faculty member working to dismantle whiteness. If you become upset and wish to speak with someone, you may contact the National Mental Health Hotline at 1-866-903-3787 as well as the primary Principal Investigator, Jeanean Mohr, [redacted]. If you experience discomfort, you have the right to end the interview and withdraw from the study at any time.

**Is there any benefit to me?**
There is no direct benefit to you as a participant. Other benefits include the opportunity to help the social work community gain insights about what is happening on the ground as white social work faculty answer widespread calls within the profession to decenter white ideologies and undo systems that perpetuate racism. Your stories will be used to better understand the current battle for racial justice and shed light on the tensions and institutional challenges to help inform change.

**How will you protect my privacy?**
The interview will take place using Zoom password-protected software in a password-protected Zoom room. Before the interview begins, you will be asked to select a pseudonym and rename yourself in Zoom using that pseudonym. The interview will be audio recorded and video recorded using Zoom software unless you prefer to remain off camera. A back-up audio recording will be made using Jeanean Mohr’s iPhone Voice Memos application that will be deleted after upload to a password-protected folder on a password protected laptop immediately following the interview. All recordings will be stored as encrypted files in the password-protected folder. Your records will be kept private. Only Jeanean Mohr, Dr. Orkideh Mohajeri, and the IRB will have access to your name and responses. Your name will not be used in any reports. Only pseudonyms will be reported and any individually identifiable information will be anonymized. Records will be stored anonymously using password protected files on a password-protected laptop immediately following the interview.
protected computer. Research records will be destroyed after manuscript development, but no less than three years from the conclusion of the study.

Do I get paid to take part in this study?
   No

Who do I contact in case of research related injury?
For any questions with this study, contact:
Primary Investigator: Jeanean Mohr at 610-436-2096 or jmohr@wcupa.edu
Faculty Sponsor: Orkideh Mohajeri at 610-436-2941 or omohajeri@wcupa.edu

What will you do with my Identifiable Information?
We will keep your identifiable information in a password protected folder for the required retention period and then destroy it. Your identifiable information will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

I, (enter your name in the box below), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

IRB

Approval Number: IRB-FY2023-365

☐ I agree to participate in this study. (1)

☐ I do not agree to participate in this study (2)

Q8 Please provide your name in the box below:

________________________________________________________________
Q9 Please provide me with up to three pseudonyms that you would like me to utilize when referring to
you in future analysis and writing of this data:

○ Pseudonym 1: (1) __________________________________________________

○ Pseudonym 2: (2) __________________________________________________

○ Pseudonym 3: (3) __________________________________________________

End of Block: Informed Consent: IRB-FY2023-365

Start of Block: Contact Info

Q10 Please provide an email address and cell number that I can use to contact you regarding this study.

________________________________________________________________

End of Block: Contact Info

Start of Block: Demographics

Q11 The following is a short series of demographic questions that will take 1-2 minutes to complete.
Answers to these questions are optional. Please note that this information will only be reported in
aggregate to describe the scope and background of the study participants. No personal information or
school names will be shared with other study participants or with the general public.

________________________________________________________________
Q11 At which type of institution are you employed? Check all that apply.

☐ Alaska Native Serving Institution (ANSI) (5)
☐ Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) (3)
☐ Historically Black College/University (HBCU) (1)
☐ Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) (7)
☐ Native Hawaiian Serving Institution (NHSI) (6)
☐ Predominantly White Institution (PWI) (2)
☐ Tribal College/University (TCU) (4)
☐ Public (10)
☐ Private (11)
☐ For-profit (12)
☐ Non-profit (13)
☐ Research (14)
☐ Ivy League (15)
☐ Other (9) __________________________________________________
Q12 How do you identify your race?

__________________________________________________________________

Q13 How do you identify your gender?

__________________________________________________________________

Q14 What is your age?

○ 18-24 (4)
○ 25-34 (5)
○ 35-44 (6)
○ 45-54 (7)
○ 55-64 (8)
○ 65 or older (9)

__________________________________________________________________

Q15 What year did you earn your graduate degree in social work or related field?

__________________________________________________________________
Q16 How many years of experience do you have teaching social work in post-secondary settings?

Q17 How many years of social work practice experience do you have?
Appendix D

Participant Recruitment Email

Dear [ ],

I am contacting you at the recommendation of [recommender name] to inquire about your potential interest in participating in my research study. I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education Administration at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, studying whiteness in social work and higher education. My research will explore what is happening on the ground in educational spaces as White Social Work faculty endeavor to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, institutions, and related work. [Recommender name] identified you as someone who is doing this important work.

Participation in the study is voluntary. Each eligible and consenting participant will engage with me in an individual conversational interview via Zoom. I expect interviews to last 90-120 minutes. The interview will include questions about participant’s interest in, relationship to, and experiences with efforts to dismantle whiteness within their classrooms, departments, post-secondary institutions, and related work. I may request follow-up interviews with participants as needed to gain clarification or additional information to understand each participant’s story more fully. Follow-up interviews are expected to take 30 minutes or less.

If you are interested in participating, please email me at jmohr@wcupa.edu or complete this Interest Form, which contains the eligibility requirements and informed consent process. Please also see the attached Research Flyer.

I’m happy to answer any questions you may have about the study and welcome any recommendations for potential participants.

I hope you will consider supporting my research endeavors.
With much appreciation,

Jeanean Mohr, MSW

This study has been approved by the [redacted] Institutional Review Board, protocol IRB-FY2023-365
Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

SCRIPT: Participation in this research project is voluntary. I anticipate this conversational interview will take about 90-120 minutes. I may also ask you to engage in a follow-up interview to provide clarity or additional details about your responses and the stories you shared. There is minimal risk of experiencing negative emotions such as discomfort, anxiety, guilt, frustration, or depression related to your story sharing about whiteness and race-related experiences and perceptions. To minimize these risks, you may skip any question(s), take a break, or end the interview at any time. There is no direct benefit to you as the participant, but this research will help the social work community gain insights about what is happening on the ground as White Social Work faculty answer widespread calls within the profession to decenter White ideologies and undo systems that perpetuate racism. Your stories will be used to better understand the current battle for racial justice and shed light on the tensions and institutional challenges to help inform change.

If you consent to participate, the interview(s) will be audio and video recorded. If you prefer to remain off-camera, I will ask you to turn your camera off before I begin the recording. I will also ask you to provide a pseudonym for anonymity that you can enter in the Zoom nametag. If you would like to take part, West Chester University requires that you re-consent to participation. You may ask me any questions to help you understand this study. If you don’t want to be a part of this study, it won’t affect any services from West Chester University. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

Do you have any questions?
Do you consent to participate in this study?

*If the participant does not consent, I will not move forward with the interview.*

*If the participant agrees to participate, I will ask them to enter a pseudonym in the Zoom nametag.*

*I will ask the participant to turn off their camera if they prefer.*

**QUESTIONS**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. Where are you from, and how did you find your way to the social work profession?
   
   - *What does being a social worker mean to you?*
   
   - *What do you think it means to be a good social worker?*

2. Tell me broadly about your graduate training and about work experiences you’ve had as a social worker.
   
   - *Where did you go to school?*
   
   - *What did you like?*
   
   - *What was challenging?*
   
   - *What do you consider your areas of expertise?*

3. What led to you becoming a faculty member?

4. Tell me about your current educator position.
   
   - *At what type of institution do you work?*
   
   - *What courses do you teach, if any?*
   
   - *What other roles within the department or university do you hold?*
5. As you know, my study is centered on the stories of White Social Work faculty endeavoring to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, institutions, and other areas. Before we dig into the details of your efforts to disrupt whiteness, tell me a little bit about how you define whiteness.

- *What does whiteness mean to you?*

- *How does whiteness show up and operate in social work? At your institution?*

- *Are there any relevant stories about your exploration of your whiteness that you might want to share?*

6. Tell me about the ways you attempt to dismantle whiteness at your university.

- *Admissions*

- *Curriculum*

- *Policies*

- *Practicum*

- *Institutionally*

7. What influenced your commitment to do this work?

8. Tell me a story about a time when you effectively engaged in work that disrupted whiteness at your school.

- *Where were you?*

- *Who else was involved?*

- *What were the tensions, if any?*

- *What were the consequences?*

- *What did you learn (about whiteness, or social work, or activism)?*

9. Tell me a story about a time when you experienced resistance and things didn’t go well.
• **Where were you?**

• **Who else was involved?**

• **What were the tensions?**

• **What were the consequences?**

• **What did you learn (about whiteness, or social work, or activism)?**

10. What motivates you to continue doing this work?

11. We know this is not easy work without challenges. When you run into challenges, what stops you from doing this work?

• **Are there boundaries you’re unwilling to cross?**

• **Personal/professional consequences?**

• **Systems of power at play?**

12. Have you seen a shift over the last few years since the so-called “racial reckoning” of 2020 and subsequent changes to the EPAS (Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards)?

• **Has the conversation changed in the spaces you’re working in, whether at the university, within your department, or in the classroom?**

• **Have you experienced any changes or tensions in discussing or disrupting whiteness related to ongoing legislative attacks on critical education?**

13. What do you want people to know about this work or about White allyship?

14. Is there anything I should have asked you about this topic that I haven’t included?
Appendix F

Scholars Outreach Email

Dear [ ],

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education Administration at [ ]. Your work on whiteness in social work closely aligns with my research interests, compelling me to reach out to you. Using narrative inquiry and a Critical Whiteness Studies framework, my research will explore what is happening on the ground in educational spaces as White Social Work faculty endeavor to dismantle whiteness in their classrooms, departments, institutions, and related work.

I am wondering if you know any self-identifying White Social Work faculty from your department or professional networks actively engaged in efforts to dismantle whiteness who may be interested in sharing their stories as part of this study. Participation in the study is voluntary. Each eligible and consenting participant will engage with me in an individual conversational interview via Zoom. I expect interviews to last 90-120 minutes. The interview will include questions about participant’s interest in, relationship to, and experiences with efforts to dismantle whiteness within their classrooms, departments, post-secondary institutions, and related work. I may request follow-up interviews with participants as needed to gain clarification or additional information to understand each participant’s story more fully. Follow-up interviews are expected to take 30 minutes or less.

Interested participants may email me at jmohr@wcupa.edu or complete this Interest Form, which contains the eligibility requirements and informed consent process. Please also see the attached Research Flyer. I appreciate you sharing this information with potentially interested faculty colleagues.
I thank you for your contributions to critical whiteness studies and the social work profession, and I hope you will consider supporting my research endeavors.

With much appreciation,

Jeanean Mohr, MSW

This study has been approved by the [Institutional Review Board, protocol IRB-FY2023-365]
Appendix G

IRB Approval Letter

Oct 5, 2023 3:37:26 PM EDT

To: Jeanean Mohr


Dear Jeanean Mohr:

Thank you for your submitted application to the West Chester University Institutional Review Board. Since it was deemed expedited, it was required that two reviewers evaluated the submission. We have had the opportunity to review your application and have rendered the decision below for Dismantling Whiteness in Social Work Educational Spaces.

Decision: Approved

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Sincerely,

[Signature]

IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB00005030
FWA#: FWA00014155