FOREWORD

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Making Meaning of Whiteness by Alice McIntyre is a much needed book at this historical juncture. In this era of the post–Civil Rights movement we are witnessing the turning back of the clock, as white people increasingly believe that not only was racism remedied during the 1960s and 1970s, but also that people of color now have systematic advantages over whites. "When," I hear more and more from students, "are we going to talk about how I am now at a disadvantage because I'm white? When will we do something about reverse discrimination?" On many college campuses efforts to preserve gains of the Civil Rights movement are yielding a growing white backlash, as white students fear that they are now the victims and targets of systematic racism.

Yet abundant data illustrate the persistence of institutional white racism, and persistent gaps between the rhetoric of progress and actual evidence of it. Although people of color have closed the gap in years of educational attainment, large gaps persist between whites and people of color on indices such as poverty rates, average income, average household net worth, access to health insurance, and so forth. One need only peruse U.S. government statistics on the World Wide Web to locate the most current data documenting these patterns (http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup).

At the same time, Americans of all races have experienced massive job loss and downward mobility over the past two decades as industrial jobs have been replaced by service and "high-tech" jobs due to

increased automation, and as jobs have been shifted to Third World nations where workers are paid a fraction of what they were paid in the United States. People experience this national shift in the economic structure in a very personal way. In 1979, the average white male income in the United States was $32,030, and the average Black male income was $23,260. By 1991 both had dropped: The average white male income was $30,270 and the average Black male income was $22,080 (U.S. Census Report, 1992). In this context of job loss and income reduction, white people increasingly are turning their frustration toward people of color, attributing white losses to presumed gains among people of color as a result of Civil Rights legislation and policies such as affirmative action. Most white people seem unaware of the racial disparity in incomes mentioned above, and even when presented with such information, remain skeptical. Rather than coming together to address common concerns and to challenge elite power that has manipulated laws and economic policies for its own advantages, racial groups in the 1990s are targeting each other, with white America scapegoating Black and Brown America.

Addressing both institutional racism and the worsening conditions of all Americans will require action directed toward the roots of our problems in the economic and political structure. This action, in turn, requires coalitions that are able to get beyond scapegoating, agree on an analysis of common concerns, share a trust level, and work together. Coalitions depend, in turn, on dialogue that confronts injustice, racist history, and racial divisions, and that builds on our common humanity and shared interests. I am suggesting here that it is in all of our best interests to learn to engage in cross-racial dialogue about racism, for the expressed purpose of dismantling institutional racism, and addressing needs and issues that most people share.

Cross-racial dialogue about racism, which involves white people, however, is rare and difficult to develop and sustain. Dialogue requires that people be able to articulate some analysis of racism and one's own position in a racist structure, one's own feelings and experiences, and the choices one has for acting differently. Most white people do not talk about racism, do not recognize the existence of institutional racism, and feel personally threatened by the mention of racism.

This past week students in one of my courses illustrated this problem. One of my Cultural Diversity courses turned out to be all-white this semester, despite the racial diversity of the student population. The few students of color who initially enrolled dropped the course, explaining to me that it would be too frustrating to spend all semester being one of the only voices of color in a sea of "white talk." I have focused

much of the course on examining racial oppression, and exploring our own identities as cultural beings. The course has indeed taken on the character of "white talk," with me pushing students beyond their comfort zones while trying not to lose them in the process. This past week a group of students of color volunteered to join the class to participate in a simulation and follow-up discussion. In the discussion, the students of color tried to engage the white students in talking about race, an experience everyone found frustrating because most of the white students were silent. After class, white students told me that talking about race was new to them, and they were not sure what to say. But most also wanted to continue the process of dialogue because they recognized the importance of building bridges among themselves.

Dialogue requires two-way participation; the students of color wanted the white students to open up, and the white students experienced difficulty finding a voice with which to talk about racism that was different from the tacit acceptance of it they have grown up with. They also feared the frustration they felt in the students of color, and were worried that dialogue might turn into confrontation. There is relatively little writing articulating white perspectives that are critical of white racism and might help to raise consciousness and provide an alternative white discourse: some helpful works do, however, exist (e.g., Frankenburg, 1993; Gaine, 1987; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996; Kivel, 1996; Schutte, 1995; Stalvey, 1988; van Dyjk, 1993; Wellman, 1993).

In this excellent book, *Making Meaning of Whiteness*, Alice McIntyre has given us a very helpful teaching tool. She presents a fascinating "inside look" at the "white talk" of her own teacher-education students. In all-white environments, white people articulate notions about race that we often sense are adverse to the perspectives of people of color, even as we try to make meaning of race in constructive ways. As McIntyre skillfully shows us, white people fear being thought of as racist or as "bad people," yet at the same time usually do not experience the outrage at racism that would move us to act differently. White people have grown up learning racial stereotypes that inform their thinking whether they consciously like it or not, and usually lack an awareness of the institutional racism in which they participate in everyday. While in an abstract sense white people may not like the idea of reproducing white racism, and in a personal sense, do not see themselves as racist, in their talk and actions, they are.

We, as white people, can talk and act differently from people of color, though, a direction in which McIntyre wants to take us. But to prod us, she lays bare our own taken-for-granted "white talk" and white sense-making about race, so that we can see it, name it, critique it,

and move forward. In her book, we can hear our own voices and recognize the dualism that is embedded in white consciousness: believing ourselves to be good, caring people, on the one hand; while on the other hand, believing that the social system is relatively fair, and not wishing to jeopardize our own comfort and advantages by questioning it. This dualism comes through clearly in the words of the students as they are *Making Meaning of Whiteness*.

By holding up to us our own words, McIntyre strives to deepen our own responsibility for race relations. As she notes in this book, some white students can recognize the racism in "white talk" if it is held up to them. By recognizing racism in our own way of making sense of whiteness, white people can begin to examine ourselves critically and listen to alternative perspectives. In so doing, we pave the way for learning to engage in dialogue across racial boundaries, and learning to act differently. McIntyre has produced a volume that will surely help many of us, as whites, to look at ourselves and our sense-making critically.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s, during the height of the racial tension in Boston around the issues of busing and desegregation, I saw a photo on the cover of the morning paper that I have never forgotten. It was a group of angry white people from South Boston heading down a main street toward a line of yellow school buses. In the foreground was a white male marching down the street, holding a bat, in defiance of Judge Garrity's ruling that called for busing and the desegregation of the city's schools. Beside him was a young, white male, who looked about 5 years old with the same angry face, same stride, and the same type of bat in his white hands. I was shocked. I was angry at the sight of what "these white people" were doing "in the name of their children." "What about the rights of the children?" they demanded. The *white* children is what they meant. The rights of the *white* children. No one seemed to care about the rights of the Black children.[1]

I experienced a moment of racial awakening as I saw that photograph. I realized that I was insulated in, and by, my own skin color. Everyone I knew and had grown up with was white like me. Everyone I played with as a child was white like me. Everyone that I became friends with later in my childhood and into my adolescence was white like me. Every teacher I had in school was white like me. Every babysitter, store owner, relative, neighbor, and family friend who I came into contact with was white like me. And, like others before me, I never thought about it. No one ever asked me about my whiteness. Being white remained an invisible, yet powerful force that was as much a part of my make-up as my gender, my ethnicity, my religion, and my social class. I just never really saw it.

Then I entered the teaching profession where I had numerous occasions to "see" my whiteness and to experience the ways in which race and racism shaped my life, my teaching, my politics, and my understandings of privilege and oppression, especially as they related to the educational system in the United States. Whether I was teaching in an inner-city school in Boston or in a rural school in Vermont, I saw the effects of an educational system that benefits some students at the expense of others and I found ways, both inside and outside of my classroom, to address what I considered to be inequitable practices in the schools in which I taught. Many of those inequities went beyond discriminatory policies and practices based on "race"[2] and had everything to do with socioeconomic class, gender, exceptionalities, sexuality, and religion. But no matter what they had to do with, they were all embedded in the system of whiteness—a system that is largely invisible to those of us who benefit from it.

After 12 years of classroom teaching, I returned to graduate school. During those 12 years, I lived with/under the challenges of conservative Republican policies. I saw the ascendancy of "the right," an increase in racism on college campuses, and in the country as a whole, and watched people in this country grow increasingly intolerant of "difference." In recent years, I saw the beating of Rodney King and the aftermath that followed. I heard the Mark Fuhrman tapes and watched the visible reemergence of white supremacy groups in this country. I saw the wellspring of support for David Duke's run for the Senate in 1990 and the reemergence of anti-Semitism in this country. Recently, I have seen the burning of over 40 Black churches in the South and listened to contested debates about dismantling affirmative action in the United States. Through all of this, I have seen whiteness continue to function as a system that accepts and exacerbates multiple forms of racism within our society.

As a graduate student supervising white female middle- to upper-middle-class student teachers, I "saw" whiteness from a different perspective. During that time, I became very concerned about the assumptions that many of them had about both the students of color and the white students they were teaching in their preservice teaching sites. I found myself increasingly drawn into conversations with them about race, racism, education, and our roles as white teachers. Like my own experience growing up, these students didn't appear to "see" their whiteness. These particular student teachers, like many other college students, are young, bright, idealistic, hard-working, eager, and in a very real sense, want to make a difference in the lives of the children they teach. At the same time, they uncritically embrace a discourse

about race, racism, and teaching that serves—many times—to reinforce a white, class-based Euro-American perspective on life. Such a perspective marginalizes and oppresses people of color while it continues to privilege them, as white people, and the white students they teach. I hoped that by examining that discourse with a small group of white student teachers we could begin a process of deconstructing whiteness and racism, thereby gaining a better understanding of how whiteness influences and informs our teaching practices, especially within the area of multicultural education.[3]

This book describes that process. In it, I present a participatory action research project in which we (the participants and myself) explored white racial identity, examined the meaning of whiteness, and confronted the difficulties in thinking critically about race and racism. By whiteness, I refer to a system and ideology of white dominance that marginalizes and oppresses people of color, ensuring existing privileges for white people in this country (see e.g., Frankenburg, 1993; Helms, 1993; Lopez, 1996; Roediger, 1994; and Sleeter, 1995a for further discussions of whiteness). By white racial identity, I am referring "to a sense of group or collective identity based on one's *perceptions* that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms, 1993, p. 3).

What do those definitions mean for us, as white teachers? What exactly does it mean to be white? How do white people/teachers make meaning of whiteness? What impact does one's white racial identity have on one's notion of what it means to be a teacher? Those are questions I/we sought to explore through this research and ones that launched us on a challenging journey of self- and collective reflection about the intersection of whiteness, racial identity, racism, and teaching. This book invites you to join us on that journey.

THE INTERSECTION OF SOCIAL LOCATIONS

Many scholars in the field of education have positioned "race" as critically important for consideration when we are examining pedagogies and the need to be reflective in our teaching strategies (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Nieto, 1996; Paley, 1979; Sleeter, 1992; Tatum, 1992). In addition, numbers of feminist scholars have succeeded in moving the study of racial identity, particularly in women, "from the margins closer to the center of social science disciplines" (Stewart, 1994, p. 13). Stewart suggests that what has emerged from feminist theorizing over the last two decades is a number of strategies that can serve as guides for better

understanding "what has been overlooked, unconceptualized, and not noticed" in the lives of women, men, and children. One of those strategies is to "look for what's been left out" (p. 13).

What has been left out of much feminist theorizing over the years, and what has been missing from much of the educational discourse in U.S. society, is the question of what it means to be white—a white feminist, a white researcher, a white woman, and in this case, a white teacher. This racial meaning-making is co-constructed within the context of one's gender, age, social class, educational experience, and other less visible identities that inform and influence how we understand the world. Furthermore, these contexts are embedded within multiple systems of privilege and oppression that, as Patricia Hill Collins (1990) suggests, form "an interlocking matrix of relationships" (p. 20) all of which function to both conceal and illuminate our understandings of ourselves and others.

In this research project, I highlight one aspect of that matrix. I explore "what's been left out" by those of us who are white educators, feminists, and researchers. I focus on what it means for a group of white middle- and upper middle-class females to be white and how that relates to their/our understandings of whiteness. At the same time, I acknowledge the importance of the participants' multiple positionalities. As the data in this book reveals, making meaning of whiteness for these young women—both individually and collectively—was complicated and paradoxical, highly contradictory, and deeply influenced by their gender, social class background, age, educational experiences, and familial relationships. For the purposes of my research, I "zeroed in" on an analysis that would contribute to my/our understanding of the multiple meanings of whiteness. Notwithstanding the significance of other identifiers and social positions, and their impact on the meaning-making process, choosing to analyze "whiteness" provided us with an opportunity to begin a process of unravelling the complexities of our racial locations as whites. In addition, it gives us a glimpse of the ways in which other identified positions interrelate (i.e., social class, education, gender, age) as we continue to define and redefine ourselves as white women and teachers.

WHY WHITE TEACHERS?

Why study white teachers? The National Education Association (1992) reports that 88 percent of the teachers in the United States are white. In addition, Sleeter (1992) suggests that "the teaching force is

becoming increasingly white, and given the lengthened time it is taking to complete teacher certification programs, it may also be becoming increasingly middle class" (p. 208). Concurrently, the student population in our country continues to become more diverse. A "new majority" of students is emerging consisting of African Americans, Latinos, Asian/Pacific Americans, Arab Americans, and Native Americans (Campbell, 1996). Given these changing demographics, it is essential for students in teacher preparation programs, specifically white students, to be well prepared to teach and interact effectively with diverse student populations.[4]

One way for these student teachers to teach more effectively is to develop a range of insights about their own socialization processes and their own locations as white female student teachers. Reflection on their attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences, and an examination of how these forces can oftentimes work to limit their understanding of the multiple forms of discriminatory educational practices that exist in our schools, is an important first step. By examining our racial locations within this society, the participants and I began to recognize the importance of our own racial identities as determinants in how and what we teach, especially within the framework of multicultural antiracist education. In addition, I, as a participant-facilitator, tried to contextualize our locations as white women within the political and ideological field of whiteness. In doing so, I hoped to engage the participants in the task of understanding a system of privilege and oppression that structures many of our institutions, shapes U.S. culture, informs our beliefs, and restricts our understandings of what it means to be white in this society.

In chapter one I link multicultural antiracist education to white racial identity and the system of whiteness. I suggest that one strategy for pulling together multicultural antiracist education, whiteness, and white racial identity is through positioning the white teacher as an active agent of change who is implicated in the teaching/learning process that she/he creates out of the convergence of theory and practice. Cochran-Smith (1991) argues that student teachers can be activists and reformers in the struggle for educational reform. She defines reformers as those who "include alternative ways of documenting and measuring learning, transforming and constructing curriculum, and thinking through issues of race, class, and culture" (p. 306). I add to Cochran-Smith's analysis by suggesting that white student teachers need to be intentional about being self-reformers—in other words, *purposefully thinking through their own racial identities as salient aspects of their thinking through the racial identities of the students they teach*. I also suggest that this kind of self-conscious critique cannot be achieved without also

looking at how we, as white individuals, are intimately connected to the pervasive system of whiteness that continues to advantage the dominant group in our society, while oppressing this society's people of color.

This move from acknowledging our white racial identities to locating ourselves within the system of whiteness to teaching multicultural antiracist education was—and continues to be—a profoundly challenging experience. One needs a set of tools that allow white teachers to not only reflect on, but to reinvent, their notions about their racial identities. One needs to also examine the discourse of whiteness that profoundly influences our educational institutions.

In chapter two, I describe a research methodology that provided the participants of this project with a way of reflecting on white racial identity and the meaning of whiteness. I lay the groundwork for how we, as a group of whites, engaged in a dialogue about issues related to race, racism, and whiteness. In addition, I describe how I envisioned this research project as a vehicle for facilitating change. In chapter three, the reader moves *with me* as I elaborate on *my* personal engagement as a white participant-researcher in this PAR project. I use my field notes and personal journals as data for engaging in my own "autocritique" (Ewick, 1994, p. 107) describing how I made meaning of my own whiteness and how it constrained and facilitated the ways in which I engaged the multiplicity of my roles within this experience. In chapters four through six, the reader moves *with the participants* as I present *their* experiences engaging in this project. In these chapters, I examine the principal ways that the participants both illuminated and distorted each other's understandings of the meanings of whiteness. In this section, I invite the reader to "sit in on the group sessions" and listen to us coerce, cajole, collude, and compete with one another for the creation of a collective narrative about the multiple meanings of whiteness. Although the interpretations are mine, I allot considerable space in these chapters to the participants' texts.

This shift from me (chapter three) to them (chapters four through six) requires a change in perspective. The analysis of the participants' group talk becomes the focus in the latter half of the book. Although I illuminate the multiple ways *the participants* made meaning of whiteness in these chapters, *I* remain an intrusive participant throughout the text revealing the ways in which I/we moved in and out of engaging in problematic talk during the group sessions. By illustrating the collective process of meaning-making, I reveal how all of us constructed a dialogue—sometimes critical, sometimes not—about the discourse of whiteness.[5]

In the last chapter, chapter seven, I discuss the significance of what can be learned by conducting a PAR project with white female student teachers aimed at making meaning of whiteness. I advocate for reimagining research methodologies and pedagogical practices, and rethinking what it means to be white, thus, creating a more critical lens through which to investigate—and dismantle—the oppressive ideology of whiteness as it influences educational discourse.

The central thesis of this book is the meaning of whiteness and how we, as white educators and researchers, can develop teaching strategies and research methodologies aimed at disrupting and eliminating the oppressive nature of whiteness in education. It is about how similarity can blind us to our own complicity in the perpetuation of racist talk and the uncritical acceptance of racist actions. It is about the need to learn by doing—to engage and reengage whites in discussions about whiteness and to continue to develop strategies for critiquing the very discussions we generate. It is about publicizing and politicizing our whiteness—being vulnerable and "fessing up" to how we contribute to the routinization of racism in our teaching practices.

As I continue in my own journey of "fessing up" and finding ways to combat racism in my personal and professional life, I have become—and am becoming—better able to "live in accordance with the principles [I am] advocating" (Sleeter, 1992, p. 212). I've made mistakes in that process—some of which you will read about in this book. I've learned from them—which is not to say that I still don't make them, or that I won't again. I do and I will. My hope is that by sharing those mistakes, as well as some of the more successful "aha" moments in this research process, I can assist the reader in her or his own self-reflection and provide some helpful hints about how to engage white students in discussions about whiteness and racism. For, as Maguire (1993) suggests,

> reflection on the flaws and inadequacies, and even the modest successes of *attempting* this [work] will help us, deep in the seriousness of our critiques and criticisms, to come up for air to examine and find ways to encourage small-scale efforts. (p. 158)

MULTICULTURAL ANTIRACIST EDUCATION AND WHITENESS

MULTICULTURAL? ANTIRACIST? EDUCATION

Multicultural education emerged out of the protest movements which occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Gay (1983) three forces converged during this time, giving rise to an approach to education that was aimed at social change and empowerment for minority groups. These included: "new directions in the civil rights movement, the criticism expressed by textbook analysts, and the reassessment of the psychological premises on which compensatory education programs of the late 1950s and early 1960s had been founded" (p. 560).

During this time, many African Americans and other people of color focused on restructuring educational and social policies, revamping school curricula, developing strategies for redistributing power and representation in schools, and inserting their cultural identities in educational institutions. It was evident to most educators of color that white teachers, especially, knew very little about the lived experiences of students of color and that their teaching practices reified the myth that difference meant deficiency. Early advocates of multiethnic education (as it was often called then), saw curriculum reform and inclusionary practices as strategies for educating teachers about diversity and for addressing the heretofore neglected histories and cultures of marginalized peoples.

Multiethnic education was seen as a beacon for those who wanted to cross the educational borders and challenge existing forms of institutional and cultural racism. African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups demanded that educational institutions reform their cur-

ricula, hire minority teachers, create ethnic studies programs, and give more control to communities over how their schools were structured. They saw their work as being antiracist in nature and as being situated in a sociopolitical context. Thus, their challenges to the educational system were also seen as challenges to the existing ownership of knowledge and to the larger issues of the distribution of power and wealth in our society.

Initially, this alternative educational approach was met with optimism and a readiness to address the inequities within the educational system. New laws were passed supporting bilingual education. Funding was being provided for multiethnic curriculum development. Students with disabilities were required to be mainstreamed. Feminists were pushing for revisions in the curriculum and, overall, the vision of equality seemed to have captured the educational community.

This apparent success brought with it seeds of discontent and a ubiquitous language that has suffered considerably at the hands of educators and policy makers alike since the mid-1980s. "Multiethnic education" became known as "multicultural education." The focus still centered around issues of ethnicity and racial group representation, but a broader view of culture was added in hopes of providing a more inclusive forum for dealing with the intersection of ethnicity, race, class, culture, gender, and exceptionalities within the educational system.

Watkins (1994) suggests that what is occurring in education *today* is that, "Multicultural education operates under the protective canopy of egalitarianism, inclusion, and social justice" (p. 99). Under this "virtuous" canopy, multiculturalists have had to define, redefine, and defend the meaning of multicultural education. Much like the splintering of feminism into feminisms as a result of women of color critiquing the claims of universality in white feminists' notions of what constitutes "equality" and "power," so too, multicultural education has been subject to challenges and critiques about its content, its character, and its universality. Is it about culture? Is it about ethnicity? Is it about race? Does it include an analysis of class? Is it aimed at individual transformation or is its purpose to dismantle educational policies and practices that are racist and discriminatory? Has multicultural education fallen prey to a type of political correctness that has removed most of its power to transform the infrastructure of our school systems?

Many antiracist educators in the field today believe that multicultural education needs to be pervasive and provide open access to marginalized groups on multiple educational levels with "a major aim of the field [being] to restructure schools, colleges, and universities so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will

experience an equal opportunity to learn" (Banks, 1992a, p. 273). Those who support multicultural education question its relationship to school reform, to racial politics, to the distribution of wealth, power, and knowledge in this country, and do so *by making racism, and the problematic of race*, its core tenets (see, e.g., Banks, 1996; Grant, 1995; Larkin & Sleeter, 1995; Martin, 1995; Nieto, 1996; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995).

Sonia Nieto (1996) reminds us of the importance of racism as a core construct in multicultural education when she states:

> it is easier for some educators to embrace a very inclusive and comprehensive framework of multicultural education [because] they have a hard time facing racism. Issues of class, exceptionality, or religious diversity may be easier for them to face. . . . Racism is an excruciatingly difficult issue for most of us. Given our history of exclusion and discrimination, this is not surprising. Nevertheless, I believe it is only through a thorough investigation of discrimination based on race and other differences related to it that we can understand the genesis as well as the rationale for multicultural education. (p. 7)

Who Defines? Who Decides?

Today, "multicultural education is entrenched in highly selective debates over content, texts, attitudes, and values" (McCarthy, 1994, p. 82). Simultaneously, we are witnessing an increased emphasis on the importance of teachers developing multicultural skills in order to effectively educate immigrant, non-English-speaking students, and children from diverse racial and ethnic groups (see, for example, Banks & Banks, 1993; Banks, 1995; Mallory & New, 1994; Martin, 1995; Ng, Staton & Scane; 1995; Nieto, 1996; Sleeter, 1995b). This increase in the diversity of students, along with the increased demand for teachers to teach to diversity, coincides with the increasing number of educators, policy makers, and academics who are looking for a multicultural cure.

As one reviews the history of inclusive education within the last 30 years, one observes that the meaning of multicultural education has a great deal to do with *who* is doing the defining and, in a more pragmatic sense, *who* is actually implementing the multicultural perspective. An added question for consideration is *where* is this kind of education being lived out—in what context? under what conditions? Today, when the advocates for multicultural education are African Americans like Banks (1991; 1992b; 1995), Tatum (1992; 1994) and Gay (1993), or Latinas and Latinos like Nieto (1994; 1996) and Diaz (1992), or Asian

Americans like Pang (1992), the discourse[1] is more likely to include a macroanalysis of the structure of social institutions and the need to dismantle hierarchical systems that consolidate power and knowledge construction into the hands of a few—the few usually being middle- to upper-class whites. This is not to say that due to the subordinate status of these racial and ethnic groups that they all speak the same "multicultural language" or that they all place racism as a core variable for analysis. Quite the contrary. They speak from their own individual class, race, ethnic, and gender positions and offer unique perspectives on the role of multicultural education in our schools. They are not to be seen as representatives of their race or gender or class, nor as educators who are automatically opposed to the dominant discourse due to their marginality. As McCarthy (1994) notes, "minority cultural identities are not fixed or monolithic but multivocal, and even contradictory" (p. 82). Nonetheless, their contributions are important as their identities as educators are located outside the dominant educational discourse—a location that is reserved for the white males and females who occupy most of the positions in our educational systems. The authors cited above have developed a critical perspective due, in part, to their positions as educational "outsiders."

White proponents of multicultural antiracist education like Ahlquist (1991), Cochran-Smith (1991; 1995a; 1995b), Ellsworth (1989), Paley (1979; 1995), Sleeter (1992; 1994; 1995b), and Weiler (1988), though committed to the same goals, don't pretend to see the landscape through the same lens. Both educators of color, and white educators, may work simultaneously to challenge existing educational policies and practices that discriminate against certain racial and ethnic groups under the umbrella of multicultural education, but this challenge is grounded in different life experiences. Being white educators, and having benefited from the present educational structure, we have to be careful not "to reproduce the very practices of domination that we seek to challenge" (Patai, 1991, p. 147). One way to avoid the tendency to reproduce those practices is to commit ourselves to interrogating whiteness within the framework of multicultural antiracist education.

The Teacher as "a" Definer/Mediator of Multicultural Education

Cherry Banks (1992) reminds us that multicultural education is

> a process, an idea, and a way of teaching. . . . Multicultural content and insights should permeate the entire social system of the school, because specific norms, values, and goals are implicit

> throughout the school's environment, including its instructional materials, policies, counseling program, and staff attitudes as well as its hidden and formalized curricula. (p. 204)

Although Cherry Banks addresses important issues in multicultural education, this perspective, like others, ignores the racial identity of the classroom teacher and the system of whiteness that is the bedrock of the education system in the United States. Though there is an underlying assumption that teaching to diversity automatically makes one sensitive to the Other (however the Other is defined), the reality is that the white classroom teacher can "perform the multicultural tricks" while never having to critique her positionality as a beneficiary of the U.S. educational system.

As Nieto (1996) suggests, "many people may believe that a multicultural program *automatically* takes care of racism. Unfortunately this is not always true" (p. 308). Many multicultural education programs may address culture, race, ethnicity, and gender but they "mute attention to racism (and ignore patriarchy and control by wealth), focusing mainly on cultural difference" (Sleeter, 1994, p. 5). The central construct, as Sleeter suggests, becomes cultural difference when it needs to be "white racism and racial oppression [constructs that] disappear from consideration in the minds of white educators" (p. 5) as we/they develop and implement multicultural programs and policies. White educators are implicated in the norms, standards, and educational models set by white academics and institutions. Subsequently, we frame our perspective of multicultural education in such a way that it loses its original critique of the multiple levels of miseducation for children of color, and of white children as well, and the unequal distribution of wealth and power that exists in our nation and is partially lived out within the confines of our educational institutions.

Reeducating Ourselves

Many of us, as white educators, have only responded to the issue of cultural difference, diversity, and multicultural antiracist education because of historical events that have challenged us to rethink the education being provided to the children of this country. Over the years, people of color have forced "us" to reform, restructure, and rethink exclusionary practices that exist on multiple levels in this society. As white educators, we have been advised by many to teach ourselves (hooks, 1990; 1994) but oftentimes, we remain unwilling to do so.

One strategy for becoming more critical about multicultural edu-
cation *as antiracist education* is for white teachers to be more self-reflec-
tive about our own understandings about race and racism and for us to
challenge our own constructions about what it means to be white in
this country. How do we, as white teachers, become more self-reflective?
How do we learn to acknowledge our own sense of ourselves as racial
beings actively participating in the education of young people? How are
we to take action *against* discriminatory educational practices and take
action *for* liberatory educational practices? How do we become multi-
cultural antiracist people?

There is no absolute panacea for the challenges raised by these
questions. However, an examination of how white student teachers
make meaning of their whiteness and how that meaning informs and
influences their beliefs about race, racism, and multicultural antiracist
education is needed. What has emerged for me in thinking through
these issues is the notion that we, as white educators, need to examine
our racial identity in hopes that such an examination will contribute to
new ways of teaching and learning that disrupt racist educational prac-
tices. Examining our racial identities *and* problematizing the system of
whiteness in which those identities are created leads to what Terry
(1975) calls "a *new white consciousness*: an awareness of our whiteness
and its role in race problems" (p. 17). Terry states that "Too many whites
want interpersonal solutions *apart from* societal changes" (p. 2). The
consciousness I suggest must go beyond the "interpersonal solutions"
and enable white teachers to perceive educational inequities that exist in
our schools as being related to larger societal inequities and to mobilize
for change.

WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY

The lack of self-reflection about being a white person in this soci-
ety distances white people from investigating the meaning of white-
ness and prohibits a critical examination of the individual, institutional,
and cultural forms of racism. As Katz & Ivey (1977) suggest—and it
continues to ring true today—being unaware of one's racial identity
and being unable to conceptualize the larger system of whiteness "pro-
vide[s] a barrier that encases white people so that they are unable to
experience themselves and their culture as it really is" (p. 485).

For white educators, in particular, this invisibility to one's own
racial being has implications in one's teaching practice—which includes
such things as the choice of curriculum materials, student expectations,

grading procedures, and assessment techniques—just to name a few.
What is necessary for white teachers is an opportunity to problematize
race in such a way that it breaks open the dialogue about white privi-
lege, white advantage, and the white ways of thinking and knowing
that dominate education in the United States.

Being White

What exactly does it mean to be white? Terry (1981) suggests that,

It is a question . . . that confounded my life and launched me on an
exciting and, at times, frightening odyssey. . . . To be white in
America is not to have to think about it. Except for hard-core racial
supremacists, the meaning of being white is having the choice of
attending to or ignoring one's own whiteness. (pp. 119–120)

Katz (1978) posits that,

Because United States culture is centered around White norms,
White people rarely have to come to terms with that part of their
identity. Ask a White person his or her race, and you may get the
response "Italian," "Jewish," "Irish," "English," and so on. *White
people do not see themselves as White*. (p. 13)

Helms (1993) notes that,

if one is a White person in the United States, it is still possible to
exist without ever having to acknowledge that reality. In fact, it is
only when Whites come in contact with the idea of Black (or other
visible racial/ethnic groups) that Whiteness becomes a potential
issue. (p. 54)

In interviewing a group of white teachers, Sleeter (1993) quotes
one of her interviewees as saying:

What's the hangup, I really don't see this color until we start talk-
ing about it, you know. I see children as having differences, maybe
they can't write their numbers or they can't do this or they can't
do that, I don't see color until we start talking multicultural. Then
oh yes, that's right, he's this and she's that. (p. 161)

Sleeter goes on to say that "white teachers commonly insist that
they are 'color-blind': that they see children as children and do not see

race" (p. 161). She then asks a poignant question of these white teachers: "What does it mean to construct an interpretation of race that denies it" (p. 161)?

Another white educator, Peggy McIntosh (1992), "thinks that whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege" (p. 71) and that "many, perhaps most, of our students in the United States think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see 'whiteness' as a racial identity" (p. 79).

These authors, among others, contend that white people's lack of consciousness about their racial identities limits their ability to critically examine their own positions as racial beings who are implicated in the existence and perpetuation of racism. This invisibility to their own race allows white people to ignore the complexities of race at the same time that it minimizes their way of thinking about racism and about race as being "important because white Americans continue to experience advantages based on their position in the American racial hierarchy" (Wellman, 1993, p. 4).

Thus, white people's lack of consciousness about their racial identities has grave consequences in that it not only denies white people the experience of seeing themselves as benefiting from racism, but in doing so, frees them from taking responsibility for eradicating it (Elder, 1974; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Hacker, 1995; Hardiman, 1982; Katz, 1976; Moore, 1973; Wellman, 1993). Being unable to conceptualize "whiteness," white people are unable to see the advantages afforded to the white population within this country. Furthermore, they fail to see how these advantages come at the expense of the disadvantaged.[2]

The Emergence of a White Racial Identity

Over the years, many sociologists, psychologists, and educators have argued that racism is a white problem and a problem that needs to be addressed by the white community (see, e.g., Corvin & Wiggins, 1989; Feagin & Vera, 1995; hooks, 1994; Katz & Ivey, 1977; McIntosh, 1992; Ryan, 1976; Sleeter, 1993; Wellman, 1993; West, 1994). These authors assert that if white people would become aware of their own racial beings, accept the reality of white privilege that exists in the United States, and act to alleviate the forms of racism that emerge from this imbalance of color-power, then they would be more effective in dealing with the racism in this country. The focus, they argue, has to move from "blaming the victim" (Ryan, 1976) and looking at a "view of race . . . that still see[s] black people as a 'problem people'" (West, 1994, p. 5) to a view of white people as profoundly implicated in the main-

taining of racial oppression and deeply affected by white racism.

During the 1970s and 1980s, perspectives on racial identity centered on the consequences of racism on the victims. Rarely were the implications of racist attitudes for the dominant group considered. Though there were some scholars studying how white people view themselves as racial beings (Elder, 1974; Katz, 1976; Moore, 1973), it has only been within the last two decades that theorists have begun to investigate white racial identity and propose stage models of white racial identity development (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1993; Ponterotto, 1988). These models attempt to conceptualize the process by which white people come to understand their racial identity. Though the stages and phases may differ in name, the processes are similar in each model. The white person progresses through a developmental continuum of "statuses" where she or he is confronted on multiple levels with the issues of whiteness and its meaning in contemporary society (Helms, 1994).

This confrontation may take multiple forms, but is most clearly viewed in terms of its impact on one's racial identity. As Wellman (1993) so cogently notes, "What is crucial to American identity, . . . is not that Americans hate black people. Rather the fundamental feature of their identity is that they do not know who they are without black people. Without the black Other, the American [white] Self has no identity" (p. 244). Though Wellman situates the white identity in terms of its relationship to the Black identity, the formation of white racial identity, and the need for transformative strategies for thinking about whiteness, is not limited to the white-Black relationship.

As Wellman (1993) notes regarding his research for the book, *Portraits of White Racism*,

> Although this book focuses on the issues dividing black and white Americans, the analysis is applicable to relationships between white Americans and other peoples of color. The differences and relations between European Americans and Asian, Latino, or Native Americans are also rooted in the organization of racial advantage. (p. 4)

Similarly, the developmental stage models are investigations into what constitutes whiteness and are conducted, not in isolation, but in relation to white people's attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors toward people of color. Helms developed the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale to assess attitudes related to her stages of racial identity. Recently, the WRAIS has been used to study the relationship between

racial identity attitudes and counseling interactions (Carter, 1993; Helms & Carter, 1991; Sabnani, Ponterotto, & Borodovsky, 1991). Researchers have also begun to investigate the relationship between racist attitudes and racial identity among whites (Block, Roberson & Neuger, 1995; Carter, 1990; Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994; Claney & Parker, 1989; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994; Yang, 1992).

IN SEARCH OF THE MEANING OF WHITENESS

Though educational literature is inundated with new and improved suggestions for training teachers about multicultural education, what the literature lacks is innovative research into the relationship between white racial attitudes, beliefs, and how white teachers make meaning of whiteness and its relationship to multicultural education. Using the stage models of racial identity theories would be one strategy for examining white racial identity in white student teachers. Another method would be to investigate white student teachers' notions of their whiteness in relation to typologies that have been developed by Jones (1972) or Terry (1975). These typologists have presented various "white-types," attempting to examine how white people construct notions of themselves as "white."

In this participatory action research project (which from now on will be referred to as PAR), I examined white racial identity, and the meaning of whiteness, through a different lens. Rather than a developmental model consisting of statuses and various transitions to the formation of a healthy racial identity, or a model that relies on assessing the types of white people the participants might be, I looked at white racial identity as a social activity that is constantly being created and recreated in situations of "rupture and tension" (Minh-Ha, 1996). Like Cochran-Smith (1991), I believe that teachers are both critics and creators of the knowledge that circulates in their classrooms and that they are forever creating (and re-creating) their identities.

One way for white student teachers to become creators of their *racial* identities, is through a commitment to (1) investigating whiteness, (2) educating themselves about the relationship between their racial identities and the existence of racism within U.S. society, and (3) taking constructive action in the naming of racism and the renaming of what they can do about it within the context of multicultural antiracist education.

CHAPTER 4

WHITE TALK

What is so striking about whites talking to whites is the infinite number of ways we manage to "talk ourselves out of" being responsible for racism. As you will see in the next three chapters, whether the topic is defining racism, or what it means to be a white teacher, or the lived experiences of people of color, or how whites "feel" about being white, many of the participants' conversations continued to rigidify the discourse of whiteness. In the remainder of this book, I reveal how that rigidification occurred in our group sessions. I present some of the participants' struggles and illustrate how they, like myself, fell victim to the seduction of similarity, how they "worked the hyphen" of engagement and critique, how they grappled with learning about whiteness by doing something about it (or not), and lastly, how they struggled with "how far they would go" in making their whiteness public.

WHITE TALK

One of the most compelling and disturbing aspects of the group talk was the way in which the participants controlled the discourse of whiteness so that they didn't have to shoulder responsibility for the racism that exists in our society *today*. Just as I slipped into uncritical talk that reified myths about children of color, so it was with the participants who, many times, found themselves embroiled in what I refer to as "white talk"—talk that serves to insulate white people from examining their/our individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism. It is a result of whites talking uncritically with/to other whites,

all the while, resisting critique and massaging each other's racist attitudes, beliefs, and actions.

The discourse of white talk in this research experience was created, shaped, reproduced, and contested by a multiplicity of voices. It was an ongoing speech event, conjointly constructed and grounded in the assumptions that meaning-making—particularly as it pertains to racial issues—is inherently contextual, highly subjective, and deeply paradoxical. White talk is a discourse that, in many respects, happens "naturally" among white people in our every day conversations with each other, and with people of color. It's just that most of the time, we are unaware of how we contribute to its formation. In this case, white talk was generated when a group of young white women began to problematize their racial identities and critique the system of whiteness. I don't think it is a discourse that can be avoided.

During the group sessions, the participants used a number of speech-tactics to distance themselves from the difficult and almost paralyzing task of engaging in a critique of their own whiteness, some of which served to push the participants to be more self-reflective about being white and some that resulted in the perpetuation of white talk. These tactics are characteristic of white talk and consisted of: derailing the conversation, evading questions, dismissing counterarguments, withdrawing from the discussion, remaining silent, interrupting speakers and topics, and colluding with each other in creating a "culture of niceness" that made it very difficult to "read the white world." How the participants accomplished group commonality, for instance, profoundly shaped the discourse they created around the issues of race, racism, and their own white identities. "Caring" for each other, not wanting to disrupt the niceness in which they embed interpersonal relations, and not wanting to deal with the discomfort of personal racism, prevented them from naming injustice, holding each other accountable for injustice, or from enacting principles of equity and justice as these creep into consciousness (see Eaker-Rich & Van Galen, 1996, for a discussion of the complexity of care within interpersonal relationship and institutions of learning). The participants' repeated attempts to gain control over the discourse and to keep the discourse safe, revealed the deep complexities and dilemmatic nature of white talk. As noted in my own experiences, the dilemma—engaging white people in conversations about whiteness while simultaneously being cognizant of the strategies we use to derail those discussions—resists a simple explanation.

White talk among the participants flourished due to a host of reasons, many of which appear to be related to their educational histories. The participants of this PAR project were unfamiliar with how to ques-

tion preexisting knowledge about whiteness. They have been successful students in the traditional "banking" sense (see Freire, 1970, for fuller discussion), yet are unaccustomed to a dialectical process of critique. Much like me, the participants of this study had to be open to uncertainty and take responsibility for the direction of the discussions if they were to engage in a consciousness-raising process. They needed to relinquish their need to be *spoken to* about their own racial identities. Instead, they were being asked to *speak about* their racial identities and to challenge long-standing beliefs and ideas about their whiteness and their social locations as white female student teachers in this country.

The language of white talk actively subverts the language white people need to decenter whiteness as a dominant ideology. The language of the participants' white talk, whether it was intentional or not, consciously articulated or unconsciously spoken, resisted interrogation. Interruptions, silences, switching topics, tacitly accepting racist assumptions, talking over one another, joining in collective laughter that served to ease the tension, hiding under the canopy of camaraderie—these maneuverings repelled critical conversations.[1]

The themes created from the participants' group discussions that are most salient for the discussion of white talk are (1) how the participants constructed difference from "the Other," (2) how they reconstructed myths about whites and people of color, and (3) how they privileged their own feelings and affect over the lived experiences of people of color in our society. These themes worked to distance the participants from the difficult and almost paralyzing task of examining whiteness.

CONSTRUCTING DIFFERENCE: WE'RE AFFECTED BY RACISM, BUT WE'RE NOT RACIST

I knew from the initial interviews, and from the first group session, that the participants had a myopic view of what it meant to be white and/or a person of color in this country. I also knew that they had differing ideas about what constituted racism. As a way to initiate a discussion about racism during our second session together, I gave the participants packages of magic markers and pieces of poster paper and asked them to form small groups and create collective representations of racism that they then presented to the larger group.

After the groups had completed their presentations, and after we had discussed the myriad ways the participants made meaning of racism, I took the opportunity to "play teacher." I headed for the chart

paper ready to provide a more comprehensive definition of racism. Although I hadn't planned on "teaching a lesson," the participants' confusion over the multiple dimensions of white racism—which they interwove with discrimination, prejudice, and individual attitudes—required clarification. For some of the participants, the expressions of these varied dimensions of racism added up to a contradictory notion of racism that rationalized and justified the privileged location of white people. Their understandings of racism were more about prejudice and discrimination than they were about the institutionalization of racism. Thus, to help the participants gain a better understanding of the varied dimensions of racism, I followed up on the posters they had created by describing white racism as a system of power and advantage that manifests itself on individual, institutional, and cultural levels. We talked extensively about power relations and how power is a core variable when we examine the roots and causes of racism. We discussed how power and privilege metastasize within a system of white racism. Our conversation about the dimensions of white racism was a starting point for thinking more critically about our positionalities as white people in our society but was not necessarily accepted by the participants as the way to think about racism overall. There was an uncomfortable tension in our conversations about racism that brought with it a resistance to decentering whiteness and our racial locations in the midst of that system. The resistance played itself out in a number of different ways—one of which was to continually redefine racism in the group sessions so as to justify certain racist practices. The disparate views on what constituted racism worked to derail critical conversations that we attempted to have regarding white racism and frustrated me because hadn't I "taught" them what it was in session two? Didn't they hear me? I saw them nod in agreement. I knew that they intellectually grasped what I was saying. So why the resistance?

The participants told numbers of stories during our project that illustrated the difficulty they had understanding the nature of racism as a system that privileges and maintains the social practices, belief systems, and cultural norms of the dominant group, and believes in the superiority of that group over the inherent inferiority of others. Three of the stories that reflected the participants' understanding of racism are presented below.

Elizabeth shared her story during session five.

ELIZABETH: *I have to share this story 'cause I think it's just guilt inside of me and (laughs) it makes me, having to share this but I waitress at [a restaurant] right here at [the Square]. And um, there's a lot I mean there's plenty of*

white people around here but there there tends to be a lot - just I've noticed from being there since all summer, a lot of Black and a lot of different people I guess I should say. But I've noticed there are a lot of Black people that come in and um, you know, when I first started working there I noticed this without anyone saying to me, you know, telling me this what I noticed. But every time I had someone that was, it was basically just Black people, like the Black customer or family. They were horrible tippers (laughter) and I was kind of like, "Listen," (laughs) you know, but um, and I noticed it was really like a trend. It wasn't like OK, the occasional family that just doesn't tip good. It was every time I got a Black party whether it was a single person or a family of six, whatever. Bad tips. So I just kind of kept to myself well you know said, "Well, whatever" you know? But just thinking that I was like, "Well, am I just being racist or" you know? And I'm like "but isn't that kind of odd" (laughs) you know? And I I just didn't know what to think. And so one day, I was um, I don't know how it came out but another co-worker said this to me. They said, "Oh, I had a bad day of tips. Well, I had a lot of Black parties." And I said, "Well, why do you say that?" you know? And they said, "Well, every time I get a Black party" and so then now every time you know, you get a Black party, you think or just everyone there is like, "Alright, how good is the tip gonna be?" You just kind of expect a lower tip and every time I get a Black party I'm like, "What am I thinking? Did I think this" and I just, it's horrible 'cause I say to myself, "I am being racist in expecting a lower tip" or maybe trying to go out of my way to be extra nice and hope for a good tip or whatever. But it kills me 'cause I know that just thinking it is being racist, but I also know that I try my hardest not to be. I mean we're all sitting here talking about this and it's like I don't know. I don't know how to change those little thoughts when . . . it's like perpetual, you know what I mean?

LYNN: *Quick comment. Is that when I fight . . . with the definition of racism. Is that being racist or is that being stereotypical?*

ELIZABETH: *Well, see that's what I don't know*[

. . . .

ELLEN: *I I had another question was do you think that they would tip a Black waitress better?*

ELIZABETH: *Well, that's another thing. At you know, I go up to you know like say we get a party of 12 and if they're white people, I will think, "OK. Cool," you know? I'll have to work a lot harder but it's probably a real good tip. And if they don't tip well, I'm surprised. Whereas a party of 12 of Black people come in, I think, "I'm gonna work my butt off and not get a very good tip." And, I never thought anything like this before I started*

working there and it's, you know, it's just the trend I've noticed. It's not that I before I waitressed I (unint.) Black people tip horrible. I never even considered it you know? But it's I don't know. I just don't know if it's racist or I'm just noticing it and[(S5)

This story exemplifies how deeply ingrained racism is in "the souls of white folk" (Feagin & Vera, 1995). Elizabeth seems to "pick up racism" by osmosis. She notices that Blacks don't tip as well as whites "without anyone ever telling me." She describes it as a "trend" and that "you just kind of expect a lower tip" from Blacks. In addition, "it kills" her to be racist—to accept the stereotypes that have been created about Blacks by the white people in her restaurant. The "guilt inside of me" motivates Elizabeth to question her assumptions about Blacks. Her desire to "know if it's racist" to perpetuate the idea that "Blacks are horrible tippers," appears to stem from her need to be free of guilt.

As the discussion continued, Christine asked Elizabeth if she noticed whether men or women tip more or less and if so, does she categorize one group as bad tippers and is it sexist to stereotype like that? This led to a larger discussion where Gerry told a story about hostessing at a restaurant and being "really bothered . . . when older people would come in [because] if they didn't like a table or if there was a wait or something like that. . . . It was too much of a hassle." The group questioned the stereotyping of "old people" and wondered if all forms of stereotyping had similar effects. In an attempt to bring some clarity to the discussion I reminded the group about Peggy McIntosh's (1992) suggestion that there are interlocking systems of oppression and they are hierarchical in many instances but not experienced by all oppressed groups in similar ways. I asked them: "What is different about racism? What is different about Elizabeth's story?"

Rather than address those questions some of the participants immediately returned to Elizabeth's "plight," alleviating their own feelings of discomfort by refocusing on Blacks and failing to attend to how whites perpetuate racist behavior. They remained *engaged* in the conversation, but without any sense of how to *critique* their own speech.

FAITH: *I mean I understand totally what you were saying because I was a hostess for like three years and I would hear the waitresses come up and say, "No Black people tonight. I'm not in the mood." (laughter) And before I started waitin' tables I was like, me and my girlfriend, I was talking about this in my interview. We were like, "We are never gonna say that. We're gonna work so hard and every single Black people they're gonna give us the best tips. We're gonna be great. We're gonna be great."*

ELIZABETH: *It doesn't matter how good you are.*

? *It doesn't.*

ELIZABETH: *It doesn't. And that's what[*

FAITH: *It's so frustrating because you see them and then they go outside and they pull away in their Mercedes and then you're like, "I was giving you the benefit of the doubt that maybe you were like spending this all your money on the really nice dinner but then it's like I see you. I know you have money. I know you just I know I gave you excellent service."*

ELIZABETH: *Right.*

FAITH: *And I and maybe it I do do that. I know I do this. But I see a Black person in my station, I'm like, "Alright. I'm not gonna," I'm like, "I'm gonna give them exemplary service. Exemplary. There's nothing to complain about. I'm gonna make sure everything's great" and I mean that's what I should be doing with every table but, you know, I just do it and then there are times when I will get a great tip and then the one the time that stinks is, "You were the best waitress. You were such a great waitress.[*

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: *"Yeah." "Ohh."*

FAITH: *"Thank you so much. Here. Keep the change." It's like a thirty cents on like a fifty dollar bill, you know? And the it stinks because it's the money that you're taking home, you know what I mean? And it's hard. It's really it's such a struggle in your head but you know, I don't know. When you've been waiting tables for three years and it's like statistics. You can look at statistics. You can look at the numbers you know and lay it out and that stinks.*

ELIZABETH: *But the thing is like you wonder, "OK. Do these people just always tip bad like I'm sure there's plenty of white people that tip bad. Sometimes I wonder well, are they using their race as an excuse to not tip?" Do you know what I mean? Like I have noticed that the majority, I'd say out of every ten Black parties I get, nine tip horrible. I mean like we're talking not even 10 percent, you know? And out of like ten white tables, I'd say one might tip bad, you know? And it's just like like why is that? Do you know what I mean? (S5)*

I was disturbed by the direction of this conversation. It was one of those "engagement or critique" moments for me. I had already tried to generate a more critical discussion by questioning the substance of Elizabeth's story and my attempt had failed. As the conversation wore on,

I found myself waiting expectantly for one of the participants to intervene in the discussion and highlight the myriad racist comments being made. Using those remarks, I hoped that she would raise the consciousness of the others regarding the terminology they used in our discussions. Instead, the participants revert to a "white-as-victim" stance (something I discuss in chapter five) and rigidify the boundaries that get established when white people talk to white people without self- and collective criticism. Elizabeth states: "It doesn't matter how hard you work." No one disagrees with Elizabeth's comment or, if they did, failed to make it known. Faith expresses her own frustration over not being rewarded by a Black patron for her "exemplary service" and by suggesting there are statistics to prove her point that Blacks are bad tippers. Her indignation that "they" would "pull away in their Mercedes" leaving her "thirty cents on a fifty dollar bill" seemed justified. It appeared to me that the other participants accepted her reporting of such an incident as a common occurrence, thereby, facilitating the growth of white talk.

The participants' strong resistance to keeping the focus on themselves and on "us"—the white people—was difficult to interrupt. In an effort to refocus the above discussion and divert the participants' attention away from "them," I interrupted the above exchange again and asked the participants if we, as white people, use *our* race to *our* advantage? This *did* begin a lengthy, more critical discussion about white privilege that did not totally undermine the power of the participants' racist speech but momentarily managed to disrupt the "fixed gaze" (Fine, 1995) on people of color that seemed to prevail in many of our discussions.

Notwithstanding the disruption, Elizabeth and Faith shared stories and comments that were all too common in this project—stories that served to minimize the marginalized history of Blacks in this country, that perpetuated the white-as-victim syndrome, and that clearly showed how whites absorb the presumptions of racism. Once absorbed, many whites accept these presumptions as "truth," reproducing and cultivating an ideology that supports white racism. These stories—and the lack of critical intervention by the participants' themselves to *challenge* such stories—increased the ease with which the participants created a discourse embedded in racist thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes. As Essed (1991) suggests, "When dominant group members implicitly or explicitly rely on group consensus in support of anti-Black actions, they make use of an important power resource" (p. 41).

Gerry shared a story with the group shortly after "the waitress stories" that took a different view of "what and who is racist?" and generated a discussion that again, found the participants grappling with the definition of racism.

GERRY: *A few nights ago I was walking into [a store] down at [the Square] and I mean, I just had on like shorts and a T-shirt whatever. And um, as I was opening the door, they have a cop on guard there. I don't know if he's on there all the time or what. I've never noticed him before. Um, and there were three Black - they looked about high school age guys standing outside [the store] and they had just come out from buying something. And I overheard their conversation and they were like, "What's he lookin' at? He's lookin' at me 'cause I'm a nigger and he thought I stole stuff from that store." Goin' on and on about it. And they had another friend who was still paying for something and they were just like watching their friend to make sure no hassles went on or anything. And I would never even think number one, that the cop was even looking at me. If he was looking at me, that he was looking at me because he thought I stole something or my race or anything like that. And like it was so weird 'cause you never even think about it but the cop watched him the whole time and I just . . . I was standing in line just watching the cop do it and there was like 40 other people in the store and then he's focusing on the three outside the store. But it was just so blatant and it was like I would never even think that if a cop was looking at me like that, it would just kind of be like the thing that was going through my mind is, "Oh, he's watching me to make sure that like I'm OK or something."*

ALICE: *Now, would you consider that racist?*

GERRY: *Mhm.*

CHRISTINE: *No.*

ALICE: *. . . Can all people be racist?*

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: *"Yeah." "Mhm." "Mhm."*

. . . .

GERRY: *I was gonna say that I think that probably like when you get down to reality, white kids have probably stolen as much as the Black kids but the Black kids are caught because they're the ones being focused in on.*

ALICE: *And why are they being focused in on?*

GERRY: *And that right there is racism.*

ELIZABETH: *'Cause they're Black.*

GERRY: *Because of their color.*

CHRISTINE: *I think you can think anything you want whether it's stereotypical or whether it's racist. But what you do with it. It's blatant [action] about your thinking that shows that [it is] labeled as racism. You're being racist.*

ALICE: *What about what you don't do as blatant which is what she's talking about?*

FAITH: *So everything, every encounter that you have with someone of an oppo-site someone of a minority is racist? Every interaction? Whether it's blatant or intentional or whether it's blatant or not? I'm confused. (S5)*

Gerry clearly sees that what happened at [the store] was racist. For the participants, her story raises even more questions about the definitive characteristics of racism. Intentionality is equated with "bla-tant racism," thereby, exonerating the participants from racist thoughts and actions if those cognitions and behaviors are not premeditated and intentional. Such an analysis of racism excuses whites who "have little acquaintance with the parts of their psyches that are congruent with the spirit of the acknowledged racists" (Ezekiel, 1995, p. xviii).

Michelle attempted to clarify the positions of white people regard-ing racism at the end of session five when she shared a perspective on racism that she learned in one of her classes. Basically, she told the group that there was no such thing as an inactive antiracist; that in order to be antiracist, one had to take some kind of action. The following exchange occurred during session six and was in response to an ongo-ing discussion about racism that invoked a reference to the white racist typology presented by Michelle.

FAITH: *I guess I just see a person who is racist is a person who practices racism. That's how I perceive a racist to be. And I don't think that by coming here and by thinking about it all the time and things that I do, I think about it all the time. I think about things that I might do in my practicum. I make connections. I recognize things. I'm out there writing to my Congressmen. I'm not out there, I'm not in the streets. I'm not going to you know, all these movements and demonstrations. But I have my own goals that I have and that is my movement. That's my activity towards against racism. Do you know what I mean?*

ELLEN: *We're sitting here. We're 20 years old. We have so much time ahead of us to do and right at this point our life, we're still forming our thoughts and ideas and planning on what we're gonna do and thinking about what we want to do and what's really important to us - and it could be that we find out that racism isn't the most important issue to us and it could be that it is and that in the next 60 years of our lives, we could you know, we could do something to change that - or we could find something else that is really important to us and go for the gold on that, but[*

? *And that's OK.*

CHRISTINE: *But that's when we'll be the racist or antiracist. I think right now and what you're saying is that in planning towards what we're going to be acting or not acting I think um, that we can still be antiracist at this level. I mean without acting, without physically acting or teaching or conveying attitudes. You don't have to you're not racist if you don't, I don't know. I just don't agree with those.*

ALICE: *You don't agree with [what Michelle presented]?*

CHRISTINE: *No. . . . I just like I see racism as actively conveying racist thoughts. I don't know.*

. . . .

CHRISTINE: *You can be actively against racism in yourself and not have to be projecting to others your beliefs[*

MARIE: *Can I say something? I just wanna be play devil's advocate and I just think it's funny that we're sitting here as a white people and like con-trolling like what happens to racism. Like that's --- we're sitting here trying to like you know, when's it a good time for me to like when's it con-venient for me to do this. (laughter)*

JULIE: *That's so true. (S6)*

Marie's comment about how we, as whites, control the discourse about what constitutes racism was insightful. Still, the convoluted dis-cussions concerning racism left me wondering to what extent these par-ticipants, as white student teachers, will enact antiracist pedagogy when they are so tranquilized by the power of white racism in U.S. society. Repeatedly, the participants shadowboxed the idea of being racist. Rather than admit that we, as whites, have all internalized various dimensions of racism, the participants persistently rejected that notion. They opted to exercise "privileged choice." As Ellen suggests, "And it could be that we find out that racism isn't the most important issue to us." Only white people can exercise such an option when it comes to dealing—or not—with white racism. That is a disturbing thought for me, both as a white person and a white educator. It's distressing to think that we are educating young white teachers and failing to "teach" them that racism is a form of injustice and that we, as white educators, must redress that injustice—whether it's *convenient* for us to do so or not.

The group sessions ended with some of the participants—not all—experiencing more clarity around the multiple dimensions of racism in our society. Many of them continued to shift locations between seeing

racism as attitudinal and grounded in one's personality, and viewing racism as a collective white problem grounded in power differentials and maintained by multiple forms of individual, institutional, and societal structures. Their resistance to conceptualizing racism in terms of power and privilege reinforced the construction of difference between whites and people of color—a difference that proved to be difficult, but not impossible, to address. For many of the participants, the seeds of doubt were planted. They began to doubt the constructions of racism that had informed and influenced their lives. They began to think about racism differently. For instance, Mary arrived at the last session with a different outlook on racism than the one she brought to the project—an outlook partially created by her commitment to engage in the group dialogue.

I came into this I was like, "I am not racist. I just am not and that's how I'm going to be when I'm a teacher and that's that." But I kind of realized that's not the case and I sort of see it that that like in my mind I see that there's a problem and I see that somewhere there's probably a solution. Don't know what it is. Know what the problem is but . . . (S8)

Likewise, during session five, Julie struggled with understanding her classed and raced positionalities and how they intersected with her notion of racism.

It's so hard for us to acknowledge that we are as a class, privileged and um, it's like it's hard to admit that you're a racist 'cause you don't wanna be. I don't wanna think that you know, I hold these stereotypes against people of other races but I think there are also times when you know, things run through my head that are racist and I'm like, "What am I thinking? Why is this going through my head?" You know? So, I mean it's like I don't wanna say that I am a racist but in essence, I think as a product of society maybe there's a little of that in all of us. (S5)

Kathleen shared with the group her own doubts about what it means to admit one's privilege and acknowledge one's racism.

I thought when I came in here that admitting that I had a lot of privilege and that I was like was better off than other people was very racist, 'cause I didn't want to [be racist], but I've learned that you have to not, I mean I have to admit that, to come up with a solution and I think because of that I feel like I'm now walking around with a magnifying glass and everything I look at or everything I hear, it just gets magnified and like,

"Oh, no. What does that mean? What does that mean?" And I don't know. I haven't decided if that's good or bad because maybe that's what we need to do. (S8)

These examples illustrate how the participants began to get tangled up in the very white talk that they were creating. They also provide us with glimpses of how critical dialogue *can* provoke possibilities for (re)thinking how we, as whites, conceptualize racism, thus, moving toward developing strategies for addressing it.

IF THEY GAIN, WE LOSE

I remember listening to the tapes of the sessions one night and being (re)struck by how concerned the participants were about "having" and "not having" and about "sharing their privilege" but not wanting to "give it up." Even though they didn't want to admit that they have unearned skin color privilege (McIntosh, 1992) they were definitely concerned about losing what goes along with it. Another paradox—they couldn't admit to having "it" but they didn't want to lose "it." That paradox added to the formation of white talk and informed how the participants constructed difference between themselves and people of color. The participants felt that if they were going to make things equitable for people of color, they, as whites, would have to "lose something" (Mary). This idea of "losing something" is especially significant at this moment in time as white middle- and upper-middle-class workers experience levels of economic insecurity that have contributed to rigidifying further racism. The participants see the effects of "downsizing" on their parents' generation and worry that they may not achieve the same level of comfort their parents have achieved. They fear "not having," which contributes to a kind of zero-sum thinking that positions "we"—the whites—as "having" and "them"—the nonwhites as "not having." We create a "we" versus "them" situation that polarizes any substantial discussion about the incredible amount of time and energy that we, as whites, spend on maintaining racial stratification in this country.

Many whites see nothing positive in demystifying this "we/them," zero-sum system of thinking. As Feagin and Vera (1995) suggest, "This kind of zero-sum thinking leads many white Americans to take imaginary threats very seriously. Unexamined myths of this sort help to keep America balkanized along racial lines" (p. 3).

This zero-sum mentality was evident in a discussion the participants had during session four while discussing white privilege and how that manifested itself in their lives.

MARIE: *If we're not gonna maintain a white status and we want people of minority to be equal to us, we have to, as white people, as individuals, and as a race as a whole, give up something. Like something has to give and that's what you're saying. Like you're willing to give individually, you're willing to give your white privilege to someone else and to someone who doesn't have it.*

. . . .

MICHELLE: *I I'm not willing to give up my privilege. I just want someone to have equal privilege. I don't want to sacrifice mine own. I mean[*

? But then we won't get anywhere[

MICHELLE: *I know it's self-centered but realistically I mean, I like being privileged. I would hate to be not privileged and I wouldn't want to give up my privilege. I just want somebody else to be able to have privilege too[*

MARIE: *But that's what all white people think and that's why we maintain status. I I feel exactly the same way you do to be completely honest[*

MICHELLE: *I mean if we could give up I mean if that was possible then you know, we might solve a lot of problems but it's not possible like[*

(ct)

ELIZABETH: *(unint.) the whole "we-they" thing though. It's like why are we giving up something like why can't they just have it? Like why do we have to be giving up something?*

. . . .

FAITH: *I don't know how my life would change, my own personal life by helping someone of a minority. Do you know what I mean?*

ELLEN: *Yeah, what if what if they had a job you wanted? . . . Wouldn't you rather go out and get the job or would you rather help them out, that's the whole thing of giving up something for someone else for helping[(S4)*

Challenged by the thought of racial equality, the participants encase themselves in their own white privilege and embed themselves in a white-on-white discourse that was sustained by shared similarity. Decentering their white privilege resulted in feelings of vulnerability that fuels zero-sum thinking. Michelle's contradictory comments: "I'm not willing to give up my privilege. I just want someone to have equal privilege. I don't want to sacrifice my own," illustrate the tension around *speaking* equality and actually be willing to *live* equality.

It was also during this session that the participants examined white privilege itself—a topic that resulted in complicated and frustrating discussions for both me and the participants. Along with their conversations concerning white privilege—what it is and what they should "do with it"—came this idea that white privilege was a fixed commodity—something that could be measured and dispensed. During session five, Marie suggested that privilege could be conceptualized like water in a drinking glass.

MARIE: *. . . The other thing is that I wanna say, I, the analogy I thought of was like I feel like there's like two glasses of water and like this glass is three-quarters full and this glass is a quarter full and this is the white [3/4s] and that's the Black [1/4] and you can't add any more water like you can't put any more privileges into the glass. Like you have to mix the stuff that's already there to make it even. You can't add more.*

MICHELLE: *. . . I understand your analogy to the cup where you have only that much to work with in the water and you have to like level 'em out and if you're leveling them out, you're thinking that you're lowering your privilege but I'm thinking there's gotta be something we can do where we can reconstruct the entire social system. (S5)*

The participants were not ready to think about reconstructing the entire social system. Their concerns centered around negotiating a space where they could live comfortably with their advantaged positions, while at the same time, allow people of color to share some of the advantages they, as whites, experience. They framed this shared advantage around the notion of leveling the playing field, which created an uncertainty about what would happen to them—and their privilege—if that logic became a reality. Would they lose something on an individual level? Would the entire white race lose something? What would happen to privilege as a construct? "I just think privileges wouldn't be if everyone came up to a higher level. It just wouldn't be considered a privilege anymore" (Kerry).

The impact of the participants' socioeconomic backgrounds on their understandings of "who has" and "who doesn't," and the lack of critique about how whiteness and social class function to polarize discussions about racism and what it means to be white, cannot be overemphasized. The participants focused their conversations around a way of thinking that resisted a critical analysis of the consequences of racism for both people of color and for whites. White society's continued fetish about controlling the racial discourse around a "we/them-win/lose"

mentality, resulted in these young white females accepting an ideology embedded in fear and distortion.

Gerry asked to listen to the tape of session four prior to returning to session five. She was overwhelmed by the discussion in session four and needed some time to relisten and think through the conversations. During session five, she summed up her reaction to the "we/them" dualism to the group.

> *If you listen to the tapes, it's really shocking how it is such a "we-they" thing. Every comment is either "we" or "they," "we" or "they," "we" or "they." And you don't notice it until you really sit down and listen to it and you're not talking or contributing anything to it and you just listen and it's like, "Well, 'they' this" and "we," "they" and "we" and you're like, it's just so divisive and that's just the prime example. There's just a big division and it's "us" and "them" and I don't know how you can change that. (S5)*

Lack of clarity in defining racism and zero-sum thinking contributed to the group's construction of white talk for they are both strategies for insulating the speakers from tackling the underpinnings of whiteness. The group construction of white talk reified the distance that was created between the participants and people of color. Distancing themselves from Blacks, in particular, was not a difficult thing for these participants to do. As was noted earlier, they have had limited interaction with Blacks, little education about the realities of Black life in this country, and false teachings about what it means to be Black in the United States. As Elizabeth mentioned to the group when I asked them to think about their own whiteness, "It's hard though. It's hard to think about yourselves without comparing it to something other. Do you know what I mean?" Her comment resonates with one by Wellman (1993) which was mentioned in chapter one, "The fundamental feature of [white people's] identity is that they do not know who they are without black people. Without the black Other, the American [white] Self has no identity" (p. 244).

BUT I KNOW A PERSON OF COLOR WHO "MADE IT"

Feagin and Vera (1995) argue that "Among the most important of the myths to which whites cling is that the United States is a land of equal opportunity for all racial and ethnic groups" (p. 142). Reinforcing this myth was a characteristic of white talk. The participants shifted locations repeatedly when it came to supporting the white American

ideals of hard work and individual effort. They vacillated between acknowledging their advantaged positions as white females and suggesting that people of color have similar advantages if only "they" would both work hard and develop more inclusive strategies for assimilating themselves into American culture. What is missing in this model is the fact that America keeps Blacks—and many others—"so far behind the starting line [that] most of the outcomes will be racially foreordained" (Hacker, 1995, p. 34).

The participants admitted that, as whites, they benefited in and from a society founded on the principles of egalitarianism and individual freedom. Nonetheless, some of the participants felt that people of color needed to take some responsibility for the fact that they oftentimes excluded themselves from the mainstream, thus, marginalizing themselves from a host of opportunities open to all Americans. Rather than seriously considering the reconstruction of a system that favors whites, the participants privilege the foundations of that system. Some of the participants supported the notion that people of color should not only work hard to achieve the American Dream—just like their white counterparts—but also that people of color need to work hard to *include* themselves in the culture of the mainstream. The participants reinforced these notions by questioning the individual and collective actions of people of color and by sharing "exception to the rule" stories (Christine). These were stories about individual people of color who have "made it." They were stories that defended a myth that operates in our society that if only Blacks would do what we, as whites do, they, too, would achieve the American Dream. These "exception" stories served to soften the blow of white racism. The stories that were produced reverberated with the notion that racism was rooted in the psychological dispositions and actions of both whites and Blacks—a notion that made it extremely difficult to connect the multiple levels of racism operating in our society. Instead, racism became lodged within specific contexts and specific kinds of people. Although the participants are young white females who are "acknowledging or trying to get a better understanding of our race, of how we can acknowledge the other race" (Elizabeth), they oftentimes got entangled in talk that constructed barriers to fully grasping the racial hierarchy that exists in the United States. This white talk unproblematically re-created and reconstructed myths about Blacks and whites that exist within our society.

My analysis suggests that the participants value the ideals of individualism, equal opportunity, and hard work. Although the participants recognized that those ideals can be lived out more easily if one is white, they also believed that similar principles should apply to people

of color. The participants had competing priorities: on the one hand, they were concerned about what people of color lack in terms of societal resources. On the other hand, they refused to make a radical break from a system that protects the resources available to them, as white people, due to their skin color. They attempted to consolidate their self-interest *and* their concern for people of color under the canopy of inclusion, failing to recognize the fallacy of such a system when that system is grounded in racial hierarchy.

I use the term inclusion rather than assimilation to emphasize the power and hierarchy that still exists within the construction of a myth that invites *all* people to participate in the American Dream. Assimilation denotes a sense of absorption, of acclimatization. Whites "invite" Blacks to acclimate themselves into white culture. Once acclimated, Blacks will realize the significance of white values, attitudes, and beliefs, there will be equal opportunities for all, and we can all live happily ever after. On the other hand, inclusion denotes a sense of power. "We" will include "them" in our culture, our ways of life but only on our terms. "We" demand that "they" work hard at including themselves in white society, and yet, we are the gatekeepers, the ones who decide the boundaries of that inclusion. Whites talk assimilation, when what we really mean is dominance and control. Inclusion says that Black Americans can be part of white society—in some measure— but they will remain subordinate and living on the margins. Inclusion is about circumscription, about whites determining the limits to which Blacks will be incorporated into the white culture.

Like many colleges and universities, the university that the participants attend has an organization for African American, Asian American, Hispanic, and Native American students. This organization is supported by the administration and has a visible presence on campus. The aim of the organization (which from now on will be referred to by the pseudonym UNITY) is to provide a variety of academic, financial, and social resources to the students of color at this campus. An example of how some of the participants had difficulty understanding the need for such an organization is illustrated in the following exchange which took place during session seven when the participants were discussing the different experiences students of color and white students have at this predominantly white institution. This exchange further illustrates the power of myth. Here, some of the participants reconstructed the myth that it is the people of color who are distancing themselves from white society. They portrayed students of color as being the ones who were separating themselves from the very university that was trying to support them.

ELLEN: *But I don't have the same experience at [this university] as any of the other people in this room do.*

ALICE: *But not because of your color, Ellen. For other reasons.*

ELLEN: *But do they, but do they have a different experience because of their color?*

ALICE: *Do you think that Black people on this campus have a different experience . . . than the white people on this campus?[*

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: *"Incredibly." "Yes." "Uh huh." "Mhm."*

ALICE: *Due to skin color? Do you think that you both experience it the same way?*

ELLEN: *(sigh) No. . . . Is that because of the organizations of the school?*

ALICE: *Meaning?*

ELLEN: *People, meaning every day in the mail, my roommate gets something from UNITY. And is invited to something new that UNITY has put on. And it's something that they are involved in purely because of their race. Purely because of their skin color. So that they feel connected to these other people in UNITY purely based on skin color.*

ALICE: *Why do you think they need to do that?*

ELLEN: *I don't know ---*

FAITH: *I walk into The Club, which is usually mostly, and I'm not, I'm stating a fact, and most times I go in there is mostly Black people or you know, people of color, whatever, go in there. And I feel like, I think it kind of increases the separation between people of color and white people. How can it not if you have your own group and I know it's important for them to feel united and for people of color to feel united and to feel you know like there's support and everything else - but I think it might also increase, I mean I I just hear white people talking on campus who are like you know, "Oh, why do they you have to have a group?" You know people who don't know why they have it think that they have it so that they don't have to hang out with white people. That's just a general thing that I've picked up that whites think.*

. . . .

ELLEN: *Why does [this university] as an organization feel that the minorities on this campus need an official organization in order to feel united but they don't feel that the majority, the whites, don't need their own official organization to feel united?*

(ct)

JULIE: *Because we don't need it. I mean everyone around us is white. Everywhere we go we have people to I mean we have people of our own race to relate to - whereas maybe there's one Black person in a class you know of all white people so why should, I mean I I think we have a hard time understanding why they have to have it because we don't, because we're the majority, you know? But when you don't have people around you that are you know common to you, it's completely different. I don't know.*

MICHELLE: *But I don't even think it's on that level. I don't think it's a relational level. It's a form of empowerment and I mean they have their, like, we have been granted so much power and we all in this room have been granted so much power being white - like in every facet of our life on a personal level, institutional level, cultural level anywhere you want to look at it we have all been granted some kind of privilege or power. I don't know if everyone's ready to admit that . . . all five or six sessions that we've been here no one has been, like it seems like everyone is like avoidant like scared to admit that they have privilege and scared to see it. (S7)*

This exchange resonates with some of the ways I interacted with fellow doctoral students—both white and of color—around issues of how whites and students of color experience life at this university. As I described in chapter three, I was taken to task by my colleagues of color for not being sensitive to the very thing that the participants are being insensitive to: the power of whites to include—or not—people of color in the daily exchanges that occur on a college campus. At the time it was pointed out to me, I was unaware of how I was using my privilege to exclude people of color from fully participating in the doctoral student meetings. I mistakenly thought that the group was a space for all students to feel/be "empowered." Yet, my actions were saying, "You can be empowered in this group but only if you do it the 'white' way."

My questioning Ellen about the differential experiences of Blacks and whites on campus opened the door to understanding how myths of inclusion are operative in discussions among white people and how what we might *think* is empowerment is really just white people controlling the extent to which people of color are allowed "in." Julie and Michelle interrupted the white talk and the mythmaking that was produced and tried to develop a different perspective about the presence of UNITY on campus. They attempted to refocus the discussion onto the responsibility of white people, not the actions—or inactions—of the students of color. Rather than debate the concept of inclusion, they tried to situate the discussion around white privilege and how that was

related to the ways the participants reconstructed myths about people of color. (To see the continuation of the above dialogue concerning white privilege, see Appendix D.)

The taken-for-granted myth of inclusion was difficult to contest. The participants have been advantaged by a system that "feels" very normal to them and therefore, "should feel" normal to every other American. The discourse they created though, managed to disrupt their sense of normalcy and raised questions for them about what it means to be "included" in white society. What was "normal" to them became problematic. They were "suddenly made to feel 'white' which [was] a new experience for most of them" (Wellman, 1993, p. 246).

Exceptions to the Rule

If you are a white person who is actively seeking to work against racism, then you are bound to run into another white person who will be all too willing to tell you an "exception to the rule" story. That's another strategy for reconstructing the myth of "equal opportunity for all" and one that was prevalent in many of our group discussions. These "exception to the rule" stories helped the participants—who continue to benefit from racial privilege—to feel secure in their social and racial locations. The stories are testimonies to the "pull up your bootstraps" mentality that permeates white American culture. This skewed framework for thinking about American success continues to ignore and deny the multiple barriers that are consciously or unconsciously built to advantage white people in this country. These exceptions function to alleviate the multiple consequences of white racism.

> The assumption, moreover, is that American society actually operates according to principles of fairness and merit, that the "deserving" are rewarded for their efforts, and that the "undeserving" are left out. Thus, these formulations allow students to see themselves as the rightful recipients of rewards based on individual achievement, *and* to defend a process that advantages them as a group, *without* ever having to justify their location in the organization of racial advantage. (Wellman, 1993, p. 233)

Like Wellman's students, the participants of this project constructed inconsistent formulations about individuality and merit, the work ethic, and equal opportunity. Rather than question the underpinnings of entrenched white American ideals, some of the participants defended the existence of the universality of these ideals across racial

groups, and questioned the commitment that people of color have to equality and hard work. In order to solidify the necessity and value of these ideals, the participants shared "exception to the rule stories," protecting their own images of self, and illuminating a positive representation of the Other. Representing a "positive Other" was used by the participants to demonstrate their proactive stance against racist stereotyping. The participants' stories also generated some moments of critical dialogue providing us with opportunities to more deeply engage in—and challenge—the prevailing discourse.

During session four, Gerry shared her confusion about "white status." She questioned the idea that the Other—in this case, her Chinese roommate—does not have the same opportunities for success that she, as a white person has living in this country.

GERRY: *I'm really confused. Are we talking about just white-Black relations or are we talking about all minority? Because I have a roommate who's Chinese and she has everything that any of I mean the rest of us have. She's been taught the same way that all of us have that she can do anything. Like I don't know.*

ELLEN: *There's Black girls that are in my high school that are taught the same the same thing I was.*

GERRY: *So is it socioeconomic? She doesn't feel like the world like my roommate doesn't feel like the world's against her or that like me, as a white person, has a that I have a higher status than she does. Like we talk about it too. And that's why I I mean I don't know if it's a white-Black thing or if it's a white-all minority thing or what. (S4)*

The conversation continued with some of the participants agreeing with Gerry and commenting on this roommate, who a few of them knew personally.

GERRY: *She's never had it be like oh, she's Chinese. Like it's never been that. Her boyfriend for three years was white. Um, and like she's seen white guys at this school. It's like that's never been an issue as far as like her relationships with males go and like we've never seen it. She's obviously felt blatant things towards her um, but honestly like we have never blatantly seen it done to her and she'll tell us if it is 'cause she comes home and rants and raves about it if it [racist behavior] does happens. (S4)*

Michelle commented that the roommate was probably "immune to it" by now "because she's just she's lived with them for so long."

Gerry responded with a comment that was challenged by Kerry who questioned the validity of using one example to represent an entire race or particular experiences that happen to members of a racial group.

GERRY: *Yeah. No. I totally understand what you're saying. I just I have such a hard time like grasping that because I don't know. Maybe it's just me. When I look at her, she's just she's had everything that the white people like that the white people have had. I mean her parents are both professionals. They came from China. They're not they were not born in America. Her parents both came from China. They're both professionals. Like she's been given everything, every opportunity. She's at [a university]. So, that's why I don't understand the status thing, I guess. I don't know. I'm just very confused.*

ASHLEY: *Maybe she's a lucky[*

KERRY: *Because you also, you're looking at her as an example of all Chinese people. You're taking her out and saying, "Well, she's not really being, you know, she's not really seeing prejudice because she's made it. She had everything I did. But is that true of all Chinese people? (S4)*

Being a Chinese student at the university appeared to evoke a different set of assumptions for the participants than the ones they seemed to have if the student (or students) they were discussing was Black. It was assumed by the group that this Chinese girl and her family would arrive in this country well-equipped with exemplary educational backgrounds, good values, and respected traditions that exemplify a "model minority." Nonetheless, this story—which illustrates one of the few times that a member of a racial group, ethnic group, or both other than Black was used to demonstrate a participant's point of view—reveals, once again, the propensity for the participants to elevate "a" story so as to solidify "equal opportunity for all."

Faith shared her own story in session six. We were discussing institutional racism as it is maintained and sustained within the educational system and how they, as white teachers, could and would deal with it. Ellen commented that "We're all optimistic teachers who plan on not having racism in our classroom." The rest of the participants agreed and so I asked them, "How . . . as a white teacher in this society can you not have racism in your classroom?"

FAITH: *Like I work with this girl at my work up here [in the city] and she went to school in um, Hartford. And or New Haven? And she's Black. And she is completely urban, 50 kids in her class went to college. Her Mom's on*

like welfare whatever. I'm like, "Are you kidding? Like was it ever a thought that you weren't going to college?" I'm like, "This is perfect." She totally loves talking about this [race, racism] and she's like, "I never experienced racism in my classrooms." I'm like, "How could you not?" She had all white teachers. And I'm like, "Do you think that you can identify to a white teacher the way that you can identify to a Black teacher?" She's like, "It's my teacher." She's like, "Fine. They're white. They're Black." She's like, "What matters to me is how they treat me. I always felt encouraged by like to do things and sometimes I would feel discouraged but" she's like, "I knew what I wanted. I have my goals and there was no way I wasn't going to college." And here she is at a really good school, you know what I mean? And doing it and doing really well. . . . You know what I mean? I don't know. I lost my train of thought." (S6)

The participants never did answer my question directly. Rather, embedded in Faith's story were multiple strategies for how she felt racism could be addressed as a white teacher. They were difficult strategies to argue against. How can one oppose high expectations of students? How can one not be in favor of the principle of merit? Thus, her "exception story" fits nicely with the humanistic and American-sounding philosophy of education. She presents an example of a "completely urban" Black girl who has "made it." Not only is this girl Black, but she was on welfare and had to go to school with 50 kids in her class. The more roadblocks to success, the more powerful the story becomes as a way to glorify white American ideals, and show the world that yes, Blacks can make it too if they work hard, "have [their] goals" and know what they want.

The temptation to accept "exception stories" unproblematically and therefore, privilege the myth of equal opportunity is characteristic of many white people in our society. In conversations that Bellah and his colleagues (1985) had with 200 mostly middle-class white Americans in the early 1980s, they "have found an emphasis on hard work and self-support can go hand in hand with an isolating preoccupation with the self" (p. 56). This preoccupation with the (white) self distances white people from understanding the exact nature of a meritocratic system that privileges the individual who is a member of the dominant group in very particular ways. Individualizing racism and looking for "needles in the haystack" as ways to disprove the effects of racism, lead to misrepresentations of people of color and the systemic nature of racism. As Roman (1993) suggests, if these misrepresentations are "left unchallenged, they may silence, or worse yet, eclipse any memory of the historical, economic, and cultural conditions under which they were produced" (p. 214).

It's Overwhelming—You Feel Really Helpless

The participants met the complexities of racism with a variety of affective responses as well. Expressions of powerlessness, defensiveness, and fear were the most prominent feelings displayed during our project. I refer to these expressions as "privileged affect"—affective expressions experienced by white people that are related to positions of privilege. When met with many of the realities of racism, the participants appropriated a set of affective strategies that minimized the consequences of racism for people of color and maximized the "feeling realm" of the participants. Privileging their own feelings increased the likelihood that the participants would continue to construct white talk and fail to consider plans of action for changing the face of racism.

The question of who was going to "do something" about the problem of racism was a recurring theme throughout the sessions and is evident in many of the examples provided in the text. It was much easier for the participants to describe personal experiences related to issues of racism and their constructions of whiteness than it was for them to think about realistic and effective strategies for taking individual action, collective action, or both against racist practices, behaviors, and institutions. Feeling powerless over such overwhelming experiences resulted in subtle and not so subtle forms of abdicating responsibility for determining strategies to work against racism.

Since the participants felt most at ease and "most powerful" in their future classrooms, I decided to ask them how far they would take their commitment to "doing something" in the institutions in which they worked. We had talked a few times during the project about standardized tests and the continuing debates in education about their validity and reliability in representing both white students and students of color. The conversation below addresses that issue.

ALICE: *Well, let me give you a teacher scenario since you all relate very well to teaching as a place where you think you can have some influence. And this goes back to last week's collage about the standardized tests and someone's remark that they are biased. So, if those tests are biased and if they favor white children and you're in your classroom and you've decided that you are going to influence these 20 kids and not be racist[*

? *You have to give the test.*

ALICE: *. . . Your school district . . . says, "We're doing these tests." What are you going to do?*

LYNN: *Well, it's funny because I had to teach a class today, give an exam. . . . And next to [the students' names], they had their standardized tests scores and most of them were like 58, 59, just 60. Um, none of them really got over 70 except for one child who got 98 and he was a white kid who had transferred from another school. Um, the teacher didn't understand why they were so low because she knew these kids were so smart and what I've always learned about standardized tests and when I give these to my students, is I have to understand that these tests are not absolute. I have to use them and judge them and see them for what they really are. Like I can't use those as a basis for anything and in other words when I get my test scores back, with all these Black kids doing poor and these white kids doing um, fine, I can't say those Black kids are stupid or are not as smart and I cannot pay much attention to those. I would pay more attention to what they're doin' in my class rather than their standardized tests scores. Unfortunately, as a teacher, you're gonna have to give the test. There's not much you can do right now except make known that they are biased so that when people read the scores, they realize what may be a contributing factor to the low scores. I mean I I can't not give it. I'd probably be fired as a teacher if I did not give them.*

MICHELLE: *But what if the whole school system didn't give the test?*

? *They can't fire everyone.*

LYNN: *Right. So if I was a teacher I would pose a complaint and then, I'd have to give the test but in the aftermath, I would uh, go to my principal, go to the people making the test 'cause there are steps now to make these tests supposedly more unbiased but until that's done, all I can do with my kids, is not really put much weight in those standardized tests.*

ALICE: *I asked you the question because again, that's very laudable that teachers do that and say, "Well, I don't pay a lot of attention to the scores." But the scores follow these children until they get to where you were a couple of years ago, which is graduating from high school and you're trying to get into a college and now you have complied this group of test scores and every teacher that's had these kids has said, "I don't pay attention to those because I think differently." Now you point to, until those are changed, this is what I'm going do as a white person who is in a position of responsibility, who has avenues from which to do things. Well, who, what I'm asking is who's going to do that? While teachers are educating the children in their room, who is going to make those changes?*

ELLEN: *How can you make changes?*

LYNN: *Get involved in I guess, pose complaints, go to wherever the committees are that deal with standardized tests and say, "Look. You gotta be making these changes."*

KATHLEEN: *You know, when we talk about trying to change the standardized tests or whatever. That's gonna take a lot of time. And are we willing to, is it more important to try to do that and give up the time we could be preparing to teach in the classroom? Or we could be making a difference in the classroom.*

As was evident in the discussion, few of the participants were willing to jump on the bandwagon of critiquing and taking action against institutions that oppress students and create failure (Sleeter, 1992). Many times, it felt as if we were sitting around talking about what we are going to do *when*, which is very different than applying what we talk about *now* in our everyday lives. The sense of powerlessness over what to do about what many of the participants referred to as the "awesome" nature of the problem prevented them from being able to feel a sense of agency in their personal and professional lives. It was a tension that I wrote about often in my journal.

> Is "hearing" enough? So these girls "hear" something different and they experience themselves differently as white females. Maybe. One of them was telling us the other night that all she does now is think about race and [asks herself] "is *that* racially motivated?" and "is *this* racially motivated?" and it is driving her crazy - this preoccupation with racism. But that's a mind game. And I don't think we can *think* ourselves out of this problem. I don't think raising consciousness is enough, though I believe it to be crucial to the dialectical relationship between reflection and action. But the reflection pieces of it can be seductive. It can very easily turn into "intellectual" talk. And that lets us off the hook too easily. . . . I know that I can discuss, argue, and study all I want [but] it's also in the action. It's in the doing. It's in the actions I choose to engage in that will make or break my response to racism. And here I sit thinking that this experience could end in lots of discussions and study and arguing (I *wish* they would argue) and still, we could talk ourselves deeper into denial. (Oct. 15, 1994)

At the end of the penultimate group session, Michelle asked the group if they would be interested in "doing something" on campus about the issues that had been discussed throughout the project. Again, the

feeling of powerlessness was palatable in the conversation and appeared to immobilize the participants from engaging in any kind of group action.

MICHELLE: *Do you think that we could like focus in on some certain aspect and as a group address some sort of aspect of racism? Or[*

FAITH: *As a group here?*

MICHELLE: *Yeah. Don't you think we could focus our energies on something and make a difference somewhere? I mean not in the whole entire level but focus in[*

FAITH: *But by focusing in, do you mean discussing or do you mean doing[*

MICHELLE: *Doing something[*

(ct)

LYNN: *Then mention something.*

(lots of ct)

ELLEN: *None of us know where to focus.*

(lots of ct)

? *That's why we came here.*

(ct)

MICHELLE: . . . *Obviously we all know we can't tackle this entire thing. I mean it's overwhelming. We learned that. But there's got to be somewhere that we can focus in on. Something that we can focus in on that we would be able to do as 13 white individuals working together as a group to do some to fight racism, to actively fight it and not just talk about it.*

FAITH: *Like what?*

The end result of these types of conversations is that the participants shift responsibility and free themselves from the complexities of a global and societal situation they feel powerless about changing. "[T]he situation . . . like I mean I I think obviously by the way none of us know what to do or know what to say we feel helpless too. Like it's an overwhelming thing and you feel really helpless in it" (Michelle).

I'M AFRAID I'LL SAY THE WRONG THING

Many of my white colleagues in the school of education have invited me to come to their classes and talk to their undergraduate and

graduate students about "whiteness" this past year. They specifically want me to use the group collage activity mentioned in chapter three, and described in more detail in chapter five, as a way to generate small and large group discussions about whiteness, race, and racism with their students. Having been an elementary and junior high school teacher for many years, I am familiar with, and have benefited from, a wide variety of teaching experiences: team teaching, coteaching, teaching with colleagues across age groups, and participating in shared mentoring of student teachers. Therefore, I am all too willing to engage in more collaborative teaching experiences in the university—an educational setting that is usually resistant to methods of teaching that go beyond the traditional professor-student paradigm. Yet, I am not convinced that the invitation to teach in these classrooms is about collaboration as much as it is about assuaging an underlying fear that my white colleagues have about their own whiteness *and* about "saying the wrong thing" to their students. Whiteness is not a topic that is usually covered in college classrooms. One of the concerns then becomes not knowing enough about whiteness to conduct an effective and educative class. In addition, talking about whiteness with white students is not easy. It generates uncomfortable silences, forms of resistance, degrees of hostility, and a host of other responses that many of us would prefer to avoid. From my own experiences teaching about whiteness in a university with predominantly white students, I can attest to the fact that there are many "How do I deal with what was just said?" kind of moments and many times when the question arises: "Did I handle that student's remark appropriately? Did I say the 'right' thing?" My colleagues might disagree with the above hypothesis, but it has been my experience, especially since conducting this research, that as white people and teachers, no matter how intelligent, well-read, progressive, liberal, or outspoken we might be, we do not feel comfortable talking about whiteness—our own or anyone else's.

My colleagues' hesitancy to "teach" about whiteness is similar to what the participants experience as they enter unfamiliar school settings where they are faced with what many consider insurmountable problems, only one of which they see as racism. Not only do they fear their own performance as teachers, they fear students of color in a very real sense. What if they say the wrong thing? What if they don't understand "them?" What if the students of color sense their fear?

In addition, the participants feel that they might "say the wrong thing" in a class, in conversations with people of color, in papers they write, and in everyday situations that occur in which race is a factor. They have a generalized fear of people of color—*and* about what to say

about people of color—that is fed by white America's representation of the Other—especially African Americans as Other. This fear resulted in a variety of responses that were expressed during our project: anger, frustration, confusion, defensiveness, guilt, and feelings of victimization.

At our third session, Faith asked if she could share her "whiteness experience" that had occurred during the previous week.

FAITH: *I was walking and it was raining and I was like walking through the rain back to my house and I saw this guy come towards me and he had a hood on and he was Black and I'm like, "Oh my God" and like I think immediately I was like, he's a man. I'm alone. It's raining. It's night. Rape on campus. You know what I mean?*

? *Right.*

FAITH: *But I was like if he were a white guy would I be, "Oh my God" or would I be like, "Yeah, what's up?" you know what I mean? (laughter). I don't know. I don't know how I was reacting. When I reacted that way I was like, "I just came back from two and half hours of discussing my total open-mindedness and my (laughter) liberal role and now here I am jumping on the other side of the street" and I couldn't believe it and I think, I don't [know] if that's ever gonna go away, you know what I mean? . . . And if I was talking to like say someone like my father, and I was trying to talk to him about it, he would be like, "Well, you know, Faith, statistics say that of all the rapes on campus, 98 percent of them are done by Black men" so you're just thinking, "Of course I'm gonna be scared because most of the people who do it are you know, Black." And you know, not that he's a racist but some people might think he is. (laughs) I don't know. But you know what I mean? So, I don't know. I'm just very confused. (S3)*

Faith's story was immediately followed by Marie's—a story that resonated with the same kind of fear we heard in Faith's narrative. Marie's fear was accompanied by a feeling of embarrassment about "looking racist." Marie picked up where Faith left off.

MARIE: *I I don't mean to interrupt[*

FAITH: *No.*

MARIE: *I had a similar experience today. (laughter) One of my friends was telling me a story about how she was held up last night at McDonald's and she was telling me this blah, blah, blah and they like, they came in*

and she noticed they were wearing like bandannas and they had hoods on and she's like, "Oh, they're from a gang" and then they pulled out guns and she was like, "No they're not." (laughter) . . . They put them all in the freezer and nothing happened. They took the money and they left and I had to ask her. I said and I don't know why I said, "Were they Black?" and she said, "Yes." and I said, "Why did I immediately think that?" and I was like and I and I try so hard. I really do. (laughter) I do. (laughter) It was like this burning question and it made me feel like really embarrassed and I even said it to her and I'm like, "I'm really embarrassed that I just asked you that question because now you are gonna think that I'm like" and I did and I assumed and I was right but I assumed. (S3)

Immediately following Marie's story, Michelle told a story about how uncomfortable it was for the white students in one of her classes to claim their racial and ethnic backgrounds. This led to a discussion about how to describe people of color and was it "OK" to use color as a descriptive term. Lynn joined in that conversation and stated, "I should not have to feel uncomfortable saying, 'That *Black* guy over there.'"

As noted in chapter three, I had made a firm decision to remain a "silent bystander" during session three. As I sat and listened to Faith's story—and the rapid succession of others that followed—I began to question that decision. In my journal entry the following day, I wrote: "I have to admit that there were some tempting moments there when I wanted to ask a question, make a comment, refocus the group, interrupt a talkative participant, but I kept thinking, 'Al, you promised yourself that you wouldn't say anything so be quiet'" (Sept. 30, 1994). So, instead of challenging Faith's father's assertion that 98 percent of the rapes on campus are committed by Black men, or commenting on the small number of Blacks on this campus, or expounding on the realities of rape in America, or discussing *why* some Blacks commit violent acts in the United States (i.e., poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunity), or explaining how justice is meted out among this country's racial groups (see, e.g., Wellman, 1993 and Hacker, 1995), I remained silent, and the participants continued to privilege their feelings. In doing so, *I* failed to correct misinformation and *they* resisted any attempt to undercut their negative and racist images of Black men. Their feelings became justified, their disparaging conceptions of Black men were reified, and I took solace in the fact that I had kept my promise to myself! It was only after listening to the tapes and being challenged by Brinton about my silence that I realized how badly I had handled those discussions. After a meeting with Brinton about the above stories, I wrote in my journal:

I don't know whether I should cry or kick the door in here. . . . One minute I am flying high over the immense accomplishment of not talking - even though I wanted to - and then, in a flash, I am devastated because I SHOULD HAVE said something. Well which one is it? Is it a process that I let go of or is it a process I interrupt? Didn't I already write about this? (Oct. 3, 1994)

In order to clarify my position, and provide a critical response to the above stories, I explained to the group the following week what I should have explained during the discussion itself. The participants listened to my interpretations (briefly summarized in the following paragraph) and although they didn't openly disagree with them, they didn't necessarily accept them as fact either.

What resonated in their stories from session three was a feeling of shared acceptance of a particular stereotype and a feeling that all the participants would have assumed the same things Faith and Marie had. Instead of looking at how whites construct images of the Other, how Blacks are prohibited from entering the "white world" on a variety of levels, how racism is implicated in the amount of crime in this country, the talk continued to center around how uncomfortable the participants *felt* dealing with racism.

Privileging their own feelings over the conditions and feelings of people of color was a strategy for the participants to ignore their own whiteness. As has been shown, locating the discussion around the powerlessness, fear, and defensive posture of the participants stalled the conversations and led to highlighting the discomfort of the white self and dismissing the daily life experiences of people of color. Roman (1993) raises the important question of what educators should do "when white students recognize not only that racism exists at levels deeper than the expression of individual prejudices [and here I would add, individual feelings as well] but also feel ashamed to be implicated in its structural practice—ashamed to face those who have suffered racism" (p. 214). Her response to that question is an important one:

> Ashamed contradictory whites subjects are not absolved of their responsibility to build effective social alternatives to structural racism. If white students are to become empowered critical analysts of their own claims to know the privileged world in which their racial interests function, it strikes me now that such privileges and the injustices they reap for others must become the *objects* of analyses of structural racism, to the effect that subjects move from paralyzing shame and guilt to stances in which we/they take effective responsibility and action for disinvesting in racial privilege. (p. 207)

SUMMATION

The examples of white talk presented in this chapter demonstrate how the participants' uncritical talk resulted in the domestication of the multiple issues we raised concerning the meaning of whiteness, white racial identity, and white racism. Constructing difference from people of color was a continuous thread heard in the group's discourse. In addition, many of the participants reconstructed myths and stereotypes about people of color. Finally, the participants' instinctive emotional reactions to a variety of issues raised in our group sessions proved formidable barriers to interrupting the flow of white talk. Oftentimes, their affective responses resisted individual and collective critique. Feelings of powerlessness, fear, and defensiveness shielded many of the participants from challenging the polemic nature of race talk.

However, the participants' strong, affective responses were not only tools for resisting critique. Becoming aware of their feelings about racism and their own racial identities was an integral and very important aspect of how the participants made meaning of whiteness. Their willingness to share their feelings about themselves and people of color was crucial to being able to move the discussion beyond the feeling realm—even if the move was slight. In reflecting on the intensity of their feelings, some of the participants gained a much deeper sense of themselves as white women and were able to construct new forms of knowledge about racism, whiteness, and the lived experiences of people of color. For example, during our last session, I asked the participants what they were going to take with them as we ended our experience together. Below are a few of their responses:

JULIE: *Mine is um recognition of white unearned privilege because I think just recognizing it is a first step to having solved the problem.*

KATHLEEN: *This is a very wide problem on many different levels and that I no longer need to have, I shouldn't have, tunnel vision and I should have a wider perspective of everything in order to understand it.*

MARY: *I'm um taking three things. Well, I'm taking a lot but three things came to mind. A new understanding about myself. Um, a new perspective about everyone like the whole problem and um, a little bit of optimism.*

ASHLEY: *I wrote introspection. I think this group helped me to really stop and think and not just say things without backing it up. I have such empty statements sometimes and like this group has made me like really think about if I really believe that or not and stick to when I do. Stay with it.*

King (1991) suggests that whites need to identify, understand, and bring to conscious awareness our "uncritical and limited ways of thinking" (p. 140) about racism if we are to move toward a more critical consciousness-raising dialogue. In this PAR project we identified the problem of racism and whiteness. We brought to consciousness our "uncritical and limited ways of thinking." Subsequently, through critical self- and collective dialogue, many of us experienced a new awareness about the myriad issues that were raised in our group sessions. Such an engagement was excruciatingly painful at times. At the beginning of session five, we were discussing how disturbed and confused everyone felt following session four. Elizabeth summed up the group's feelings quite well when she said:

> *I remember like Mary, Marie, and I were leaving and we were just like, my whole body was like AHHH! There was so much going on and it was like I wish we could've just sat, I don't know. I almost felt like we were all in like this huge fight (unint.) and it wasn't. It was just a discussion but it was like (unint.) being almost like angry and I don't even know why. (S5)*

Discovering why, making meaning, and engaging in dialogue and critique are a continuing process. As Freire (1994) argues, "Changing language is part of the process of changing the world" (p. 67–68).

My analyses of the participants' discourse both documents the participants' paradoxical language and illustrates the enormous complexities involved when white people begin to examine racial issues. The conversations presented thus far make clear the need to examine the multiple dimensions of camaraderie, group homogeneity, social locations (including gender and social class), and the lived experiences of white people when we problematize whiteness. When we are creating spaces for groups of white people to attend to race relations, and to our own white racial identities, we need to be aware of how easily we can fabricate white talk—a kind of talk that doesn't just obliterate the lives of people of color. It also anesthetizes the white psyche, and serves to minimize white culpability for the existence of individual, institutional, and societal racism.