

IS THAT RACIST?: ONE WHITE FAMILY INTERROGATING WHITENESS
AND CONSTRUCTING ANTIRACIST CURRICULUM

A DISSERTATION IN
Curriculum and Instruction
and
Educational Leadership Policy and Foundations

Presented to the Faculty of the University
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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2019

IS THAT RACIST? ONE WHITE FAMILY INTERROGATING WHITENESS
AND CONSTRUCTING ANTIRACIST CURRICULUM

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2019

ABSTRACT

Despite attempts by white teachers and families to avoid talk about race (Apfelbaum, Paulker, Ambady, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Bartoli, Michael, Bentley-Edwards, Stevenson, Shor, & McClain, 2016; Boutte, López-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011; Lesane-Brown, Brown, Tanner-Smith, & Bruce, 2010; Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012; Vittrup & Holden, 2010), children learn race and racism at a young age (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Miller, 2015; Park, 2011; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). While there is a limited body of literature on racial socialization in schools (Park, 2011; Priest, Walton, White, Kowal, Baker, & Paradies, 2016; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001) and white racial socialization in the home (Bartoli et al., 2016; Miller, 2015; Vittrup & Holden, 2011), this study examines the ways white children come to understand race in the context of an emergent antiracist home curriculum. Using a critical sociocultural orientation, this study employs parent child autoethnography and poetic inquiry to demonstrate how two white children used race words, metaphor, analogy, and political action to construct understandings of race.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a dissertation entitled “Is That Racist? One White Family Interrogating Whiteness and Constructing Antiracist Curriculum” presented by Rhianna K. Thomas, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that it is worthy of acceptance.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank my dissertation committee for their continuous mentorship, feedback, support, and critical eye. Each of you encouraged me to engage in artistic inquiry for social justice, and I have worked very hard to be responsible with the great privilege you have provided me. I will be forever changed by the mentorship of my cochairs Drs. Kindel Nash and Ekaterina Strekalova-Hughes, true motherscholars. In am incredibly blessed to have deep and rewarding friendships and professional relationships at UMKC's School of Education. The book clubs, lunches, and writing groups fed my mind and my soul and ultimately contributed to all of my scholarly and creative work.

Of course this dissertation belongs to my family. I owe so much to my husband, my partner in life, whose wisdom, compassion, and endless support kept me afloat. To my wonderful children whose creativity and bravery provide hope, thank you, and know I have worked hard to make this work something you will be proud of for years to come. To my own mother, thank you for all the sacrifices mothers make, for checking in, and always being there when I need you.

Thank you to my friends who kept me grounded throughout this journey. To the Collins family, you will never know how the moments of play, laughter, and good food supported this work. To my dearest friend Karen Fernandez, thank you for always listening and asking just the right questions. I plan on walking and talking with you for the rest of my life! A final thank you to Reverend Rose Schwab who took the time on several occasions to discuss this work. Your wisdom, joy, and reading recommendations have deepened this work and ensured that it is right by my soul.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

When I was a child,
people praised my
blonde hair
and blue eyes.

Popular songs
and music videos
fetishized girls with
blonde hair
blue eyes
white skin.

I knew
this
was what made me
special.

My second year
teaching first grade,
Amiya and John
who were Brown
told Sara
who was Black
that she couldn't play
because her skin was too
dark.

I
their teacher
said
everyone can play.

And sent them along.

My mentor said
it was bully behavior
a put-down
so John and Amiya
said
*we let everyone play
and sorry.*

And we sent them along.

When my son was
transitioning
from preschool
in a white suburb
to kindergarten
two doors down
from our home

he said,
*Will there be Brown
kids there?*

I said, *Yes.*

He said,
I don't want to go.

I talked to
his preschool
teacher.

She said, *He's just
nervous about going to a
new school.*

Don't worry.

Statement of the Problem

The poetic vignettes above describe how racism has permeated my lived experiences, both as a child and as teacher and parent of young children. When I was a child, I received overt positive messages about my (white) skin coloring. As a new teacher in a first grade classroom, I was surprised and paralyzed when two multiracial children excluded a Black child because her skin was “too dark.” Upon consulting my mentor, we used the sterilized language of the bully prevention program to avoid discussing race. This is perhaps in part because in my undergraduate teacher preparation program, I did not learn to address issues of racism or white supremacy that come up in early childhood and elementary classrooms. As a parent, I was startled to find that despite the fact that no one had formally introduced my five-year-old son to the concepts of race or racism; he had developed an apparent fear of children of Color.

It is common in white families (Bartoli, Michael, Bentley-Edwards, Stevenson, Shor, & McClain, 2016; Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012; Vittrup & Holden, 2011) and in systems controlled by white people including many early childhood and elementary classrooms (Berman, Daniel, Butler, MacNevin, Royer, 2017; Matias & Liou, 2015) to avoid and evade conversations about race. Dominant ideologies hold that “recognizing race is a precondition to racism” (Pahlke et al., 2012, p. 1165) and “discussions about racism are too advanced and complex for young, innocent children to understand” (Boutte, López-Robertson, Powers-Costello, 2011, p. 335). However, the poetic vignettes above demonstrate that I learned tenets of white supremacy at a young age, that I was ill-equipped to address white supremacy as a new teacher, and that my own son put into action white supremacist notions at the age of five.

Young children are not immune to the larger systems of oppression in which they live. Internalized privilege and internalized oppression develop at a young age (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Miller, 2015; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001), and children have been shown to accept racial stereotypes as early as four years of age (Pauker, Xu, Williams, & Biddle, 2016). Studies have shown that children from multiple racial and ethnic groups as young as three years old demonstrate assumptions of white superiority (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001) as well as an association of positive qualities with white dolls (Clark & Clark, 1947); Katz, 2003) and white characters in various texts (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009; Powell-Hopson & Hopson, 1988). While white children construct understandings of race and racism, their parents and teachers tend to ignore, silence, and shame their race talk (Bartoli et al., 2016; Boutte et al., 2011; Pahlke et al., 2012, Vittrup & Holden, 2011).

Despite the evidence that young white children become aware of race and show signs of white supremacy at a young age, the mechanisms by which children learn these social constructs and norms are not well-researched. Studies on racial socialization have typically examined adolescent populations rather than young children and focused on youth of Color rather than white youth (Priest, Walton, White, Kowal, Baker, & Paradies, 2014). This is especially problematic when we consider that systems of white supremacy are upheld by norms of silence around race (Bartoli et al., 2016; Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013) and a lack of examination of *white* as a racial category (Gillborn, 2005; Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, & Galindo, 2014; Rogers & Mosely, 2006). Considering the early onset of notions of white supremacy, it is logical to conclude, like Miller (2015), that, “The most powerful way to transform a society is to transform the understandings of young children” (p. 37).

Research Purpose and Question

Given my personal and professional ties to the early onset of racial prejudice, I have engaged in a nearly four-year parent-child autoethnography in which I used poetic inquiry as methodology. The purpose of this study was to examine my own white middle class family's interactions around race with a focus on the ways in which my two children construct and express understandings of race in the context of the home and community. Specifically, I have examined the ways my husband and I respond to our children through "home curriculum" (Clandinin et al., 2006; He, Schultz, Schubert, 2015) in which we considered "pedagogical ways of teaching [our] children about race while also learning from them" (Matias, 2016, p. 8).

To contribute to the body of work that addresses the early racial socialization of white children, I have chosen an autoethnographic design that asks the following question: How do my children construct and express understandings of race in response to the home curriculum?

Significance of the Study

Early socialization takes place within home, school, and community contexts, making it important to examine the ways in which messages are transmitted in these settings. The family is the first and primary socializing agent in a child's life and thus has a profound effect on a child's own racial identity as well as beliefs about those outside of their¹ cultural group (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup & Holden, 2010). Due to their membership in the dominant racial group, there is a need for studies that examine the

¹ *Their, theirs, them, and themselves* are used as gender-neutral pronouns.

ways in which white children are socialized to view race and discrimination (Bartoli et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2006) and ways in which white families might disrupt the development of prejudice (Miller, 2014; Vittrup & Holden, 2010). Quantitative studies provide evidence of broad trends in white racial socialization such as color evasiveness (Apfelbaum et al., 2008; Lesane-Brown, Brown, Tanner-Smith, & Bruce, 2010, Vittrup & Holden, 2010) but such studies are limited by the way race is defined (or mis-defined) by survey instruments, thus limiting study results to narrow definitions of race. Further, quantitative studies typically measure a child's conception of race in the moment or a single socialization incident captured in a lab setting rather than investigating how socialization practices are carried out on a day-to-day basis. Qualitative studies of racial socialization provide more detail such as the ways in which children's literature can be used to counter dominant ideologies (Boutte et al., 2011) and the flexible ways some children define race (Kromidas, 2014; Pollock, 2004), but the majority of qualitative studies take place in schools or labs (Pahlke et al., 2012) limiting knowledge of how racial socialization is carried out in home and community settings. As a way to examine my own experience as a white parent attempting to enact antiracist curricula, I combine autoethnography, parent child ethnography, and poetic inquiry methodologies. Blending methodologies facilitates examination of the ways my children construct and express understandings about race as mediated by emergent antiracist curricula. Parent child autoethnography and poetic inquiry methodologies are well-suited to explore the deep nature of racial socialization in my family in an evocative and intimate manner. The goal of ethnographic studies is to "describe and understand the cultural place and its influence in the everyday lives of its members" including "the varying cultural tools children use to develop in cultural places" (Weisner, 1996, p. 307). Autoethnography, the study of

oneself in the context of the larger culture, is the “methodology of choice for exploring issues of culture, power, and communication in society” (Boylorn, Orbe, & Ellis, 2013, p. 17). Parent child ethnographies “provide insights into the life experiences of their child-participants and the complexity to which daily activities are constructed through a cultural framework” (Kabuto & Martens, 2014, p. 2). Poetic Inquiry augments autoethnographic study by providing a methodological framework that allows for the representation of participant voices juxtaposed with words and images from bodies of research as well as the larger culture in an evocative manner. This study combines autoethnography, parent child ethnography, and poetic inquiry in order to “put culture [and] society into motion” (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 5) so that “cultural place [is] incorporated into understanding [child] development” (Weisner, 1996, p. 306) in a manner that “promote[s] self-reflection in readers” (Leavy, 2015, p. 2). Due to its focus on antiracist curriculum in the home, this study has the potential to elucidate possibilities for interrogating whiteness and antiracist white racial socialization for white teachers and families.

Definition of Terms

Antiracist

Antiracist is a stance toward exposing, interrogating, and countering whiteness, and demystifying how it operates at the micro and macro levels (Escayg, Berman, & Royer, 2017; Husband, 2010). For white people, to be antiracist means to examine one’s own positionality and “actively use their advantages responsibly to create an alternative racial arrangement that is less oppressive” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 98).

Binaries

Often, societies socialize people into binaries that position social groups as opposites. These groups are formed around concepts such as race, gender, and class which “are socially constructed, rather than [based on] biological or natural differences” (Stone, 2017, p. 11) These groupings are deeply embedded in the society and often understood to be based in fact rather than social constructions. Sensoy and Diangelo (2017) point out in the context of this socialization, “One cannot learn what a social group *is* without also learning what the group *is not*” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 44). Socialization into binaries is especially harmful because people are forced to conform to strict groupings and to understand another group of people as being entirely different from themselves and as essentialized or monolithic.

Black

The race label Black came into common use in the United States in the 1960’s as part of a movement by African American leaders “to break from the past and to shed the remnants of slavery and serfdom” (Smith, 1992, p. 499) while promoting understanding of Black people as beautiful, i.e. *Black is beautiful* and strong, i.e. *Black Power* (Smith, 1992). In the context of the U.S., the race label Black is most often associated with African Americans who have a long cultural history in the country, but is also used by and for recent African, Caribbean, and Latinx immigrants (Hernandez & Murray-Johnson, 2015). The race label Black is also used increasingly in countries outside of the U.S. by people of Color who associate with politically conscious American hip-hop and the ideals of the North American civil-rights movement (Roth-Gordon, 2016). While intimately associated with dark skin color, the designation Black is determined by more than ethnicity or phenotype; depending on context, it might also include language patterns, religion, and personal style (Alim, 2016b;

Kromidas, 2014). Black racial identity is understood to intersect with other aspects of identity such as religion, language, and gender resulting in varying degrees of tangible and intangible social benefit depending on context (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Levine-Raskey, 2011).

Brown

Race in the context of the United States is often associated with skin color and referred to using race labels such as Black and white (Fine et al., 1998; Harpalani, 2015). Because the context of the United States is marked by white supremacy, lighter skin comes with advantages even for those who are considered non-white in the form of colorism (Norwood, 2015), or “preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color” (Walker, 1983, p. 290). Within this context where racial designations are grounded in a binary system, some people of Color who do not identify as Black have been designated as, and claim the race label Brown. In the United States, the racial designation Brown often includes South Asian, Latinx, Northern African, African American, and biracial people depending on context (Harpalani, 2015, Roth-Gordon, 2016). While acknowledging these complexities here, throughout this dissertation I use the term Brown following the lead of my children who, used this color word to describe people and friends of Color with brown skin (moving away from the race label Black).

Color Evasiveness

With respect for Bonilla-Silva's (2002, 2017) work defining colorblindness and exposing the ways in which it serves to maintain white supremacy under the guise of gentility, I will be using the term color evasiveness throughout this proposal to describe the ways in which people "actively evade discussions on race" (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017, p. 154). I choose to use this term because, "Color-evasiveness, as an expansive racial ideology, resists positioning people with disabilities as problematic as it does not partake in dis/ability as a metaphor for undesired" (Annamma et al., 2017, p. 153).

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy is the ability to read the word and the world (Friere, 1985), or in other words see the power dynamics at play in everyday texts and discourses. Janks (2010, 2012) adds that critical literacy also includes the ability to critique, deconstruct, and transform those texts and discourses understood to be problematic.

Culture

Culture refers to a broad definition of culture as "man's medium" (Hollins, 2015, p. 16), inherent in all aspects of individual affect, behavior, and ways of knowing (Hollins, 2015). I understand culture to be ever-changing, and influenced by "history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or region" (Nieto, 1992, p. 306).

Cultural Tools

Cultural tools are the tools that reinforce and adapt culture, "such as books, orthographies, computers, languages, and hammers [which] are essentially social, historical objects [that transform] with the ideas of both their designers and their later users" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 291). Vygostky (1978) posited language is an especially important cultural tool that

“arises initially as a means of communication between the child and the people in his environment” which is converted to internal speech and “come[s] to organize the child’s thought, that is, become an internal mental function” (pp. 89–90).

Discourse

I define discourse as patterns of culturally-mediated language which have the “ability to produce us as particular kinds of human subjects” (Janks, 2012). The vocabulary and syntax used in society changes parallel to socio-cultural movements, and can be used to both maintain and challenge the status quo.

Discursive Toolkit

Discursive toolkits are the discourses people use to build their understandings of themselves and those they interact with as racialized beings. They use these tools to label and to construct an understanding of the ways race and racism operate in their lived experiences.

Home Curriculum

In recognition that the home is an important context and commonplace of curriculum (Clandinin et al., 2006; He et al., 2015) and as such, parents must consider “pedagogical ways of teaching their children about race while also learning from them” (Matias, 2016, p. 8), I define the home curriculum as teaching and learning that takes place outside of school and is guided by family and community members.

Latinx

Latinx is a gender neutral term used to describe people of Latin American ancestry. It is a cultural and ethnic rather than racial identity label as Latinx people may identify as different races. “The term Latino was adapted by the U.S. government to label individuals who identify as mestizo or mulato (mixed White, with Black and Native) people of Central or

South America” (Salinas & Lazano, 2017, p. 2). The use of x rather than o or a at the end of the word came into use in 2014 to resist the gender binary (Salinas & Lazano, 2017).

Othering

Othering (Spivak, 1985) is the intellectual and social positioning of those who are perceived to be different from one’s self and the dominant social norm as essentially and profoundly different. This distancing is often upheld in North American discourse around intersecting matters of race, religion, gender, social class, and language to compose “interlocking systems of oppression” (Jensen, 2011, p. 65).

People of Color

I use the phrase People of Color to describe the socially constructed racial category that describes people who have experienced racial oppression. This term originated at the 1977 National Women’s Conference as a term to signal solidarity between women who had been minoritized under systems of white supremacy (Ross, 2011). See definition for white below for explanation of choice to capitalize.

Race

When using the term *race* I am referring to a social construction used to establish and maintain power differentials. While race is commonly thought of as defined by skin color or hair texture in the context of the United States, I recognize that there are “multiple racial projects, each articulating itself in specific ways for different groups” (Leonardo, 2013, p. 156).

Racial Socialization

Racial socialization is the process by which people learn, often from a young age, the racial discourses (Pahlke et al., 2012), attitudes (Castelli, Zogmaister, & Tomelleri, 2009), and historical and political realities (Lesane-Brown et al., 2010) associated with their own race.

Racism

Racism is typically understood in the American legal system and broader society as individual acts of discrimination based on racial prejudice. This definition of racism was codified in the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1991 amendments to that act which made discrimination on the basis of race in the workplace illegal and defined race-based discrimination as intentional or unintentional, resulting in disparate treatment or disparate impact to people according to their race (Cerullo, 2013). Despite the designation of race-based discrimination as illegal, critical race theorists point out American society as we know it is inextricably tied to the history of race-based slavery and colonization justified with ideologies of white supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 2013). This social order continues to be reinforced daily as ideologies of white supremacy are inscribed in everyday texts and discourses which both express and reinforce white supremacy (Janks, 2010). In other words, racism is “the normal order of things in U.S. society” (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 37), racism is part of the psyche of every person living in this context, and racist texts and interactions are conventional. However, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) posit that while all people may hold prejudices, only white people should be considered racist due to “the historical accumulation and ongoing use of institutional power and authority that supports discriminatory behaviors in systemic and far-reaching ways” (p. 124).

Text

I use the term text to refer to any media visual, written, performed that was constructed by people. I understand all texts to be purposefully created within a sociocultural context to position those who encounter it in a certain way (Janks, 2010).

white

People who are labeled as the social category ‘white’ are people of European descent typically marked by light colored skin. I use the uncapitalized term *white* to describe the socially-constructed racial category that represents “a normalised way of being, a normalisation that occurs through the on-going oppression of persons of colour globally, nationally and locally” (Miller, 2015, p. 138). The white race is associated with *ravenous materialism, acquisition of power over others, and spiritual impoverishment* (Sleeter, 1996). The racial identity white is also intersectional (Crenshaw, 2009); white identity affords more power at the cultural level when the individual is also Christian (Ferber, 2012); presents a normative gender presentation (Carbado et al., 2013), and is middle class (Ferber, 2012). Further, I choose to capitalize the words Black, Brown, and Color when they are being used as racial categories while I leave the word white in lowercase type. This is “an attempt to re-equalize racial labels and terminologies in educational research ... give credence to the racialized experience of people of color as a proper noun... [and] challenge white supremacy in language” (Matias et al., 2014, footnote).

white supremacy

hooks (1994) recognizes white supremacy as a more accurate term than racism to describe the “exploitation of black people and other people of color in this society” (p. 112). Thus, I choose to use the term white supremacy when discussing “the taken-for-granted

routine privileging of white interests that goes unremarked in the political mainstream” (Gillborn, 2005, p. 485).

whiteness

I use the term whiteness to describe white as “an absent racial category” (Rogers & Mosely, 2006, p. 466) and social construction which functions to define white identity as normal and best (Gillborn, 2005; Nash & Miller, 2015; Rogers & Mosely, 2006) in often unrecognized and unexamined ways.

white fragility

Due to insulation from racial stress, whites suffer from a lack of racial stamina that DiAngelo (2011) terms white fragility. This fragility results in deep discomfort, deflections, tears, and avoidances around talking about race or being perceived as racist (DiAngelo, 2011). White people must learn to build stamina in the face of such feelings of discomfort.

Theoretical Framework

Throughout my life as a white person growing up in central Missouri, my career as an early childhood educator, and my experiences as a parent, I have found that issues of race and racism permeate school, home, and community settings. Despite their tendency to appear at every crossing, issues of race and racism are rarely discussed in school, community, and even private settings that I have been a part of. I grew up in a white working class neighborhood where I sometimes encountered outright disdain for People of Color. The school curriculum I experienced during my elementary school years included stories of the Civil Rights Movement, which I found moving but understood to be disconnected from the current conditions in our community. Now I understand these stories to be myths designed to promote patriotism rather than the “more beautiful and terrible history” of the United States

(Theoharris, 2018). For the past 16 years I have lived in a multiracial first tier suburban neighborhood, but have only recently become friends with families of Color in my community. I taught for four years at an elementary school that served racially diverse families but had only one teacher of Color on staff. I have found that even though I study race and feel very strongly about antiracist education, I often feel uneasy talking about race, and that when I do bring it up, white adults tend to become upset. Finally, when transitioning from teaching in a private preschool setting that was upper middle-class and nearly all white, to kindergarten in the public school in our mixed-income, multiracial neighborhood, my children demonstrated that they too were seeking to understand race and how it affects daily discourse.

I seek to understand my own and my children's constructions of race through the lens of critical sociocultural learning theory, the same lens that I have used in my work as an early childhood educator. In order to understand the complex power dynamics at play in constructs of race, critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000) and critical whiteness studies (Gillborn, 2005; Matias et al., 2014; McIntyre, 1997) have helped me understand the social phenomena that I have experienced in home, school, and community settings throughout my life. Since I seek not only to examine how my children and I construct understandings of race but also antiracist pedagogies (Berman et al., 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008) that counter white supremacist ideologies, I situate my study in an antiracist curriculum framework drawing from critical race parenting (CRP) (Depouw & Matias, 2016; Matias, 2016; Matias & Allen, 2013; Nishi, 2018) and critical literacy curricula (Janks, 2010; Vasquez, 2014). Based on my professional knowledge, knowledge of the literature, and experiences teaching young children, I believe

that people learn best when subject matter and ways of knowing are rooted in their own interests and experiences, therefore I also ground my work in emergent curriculum (see Figure 1.1).

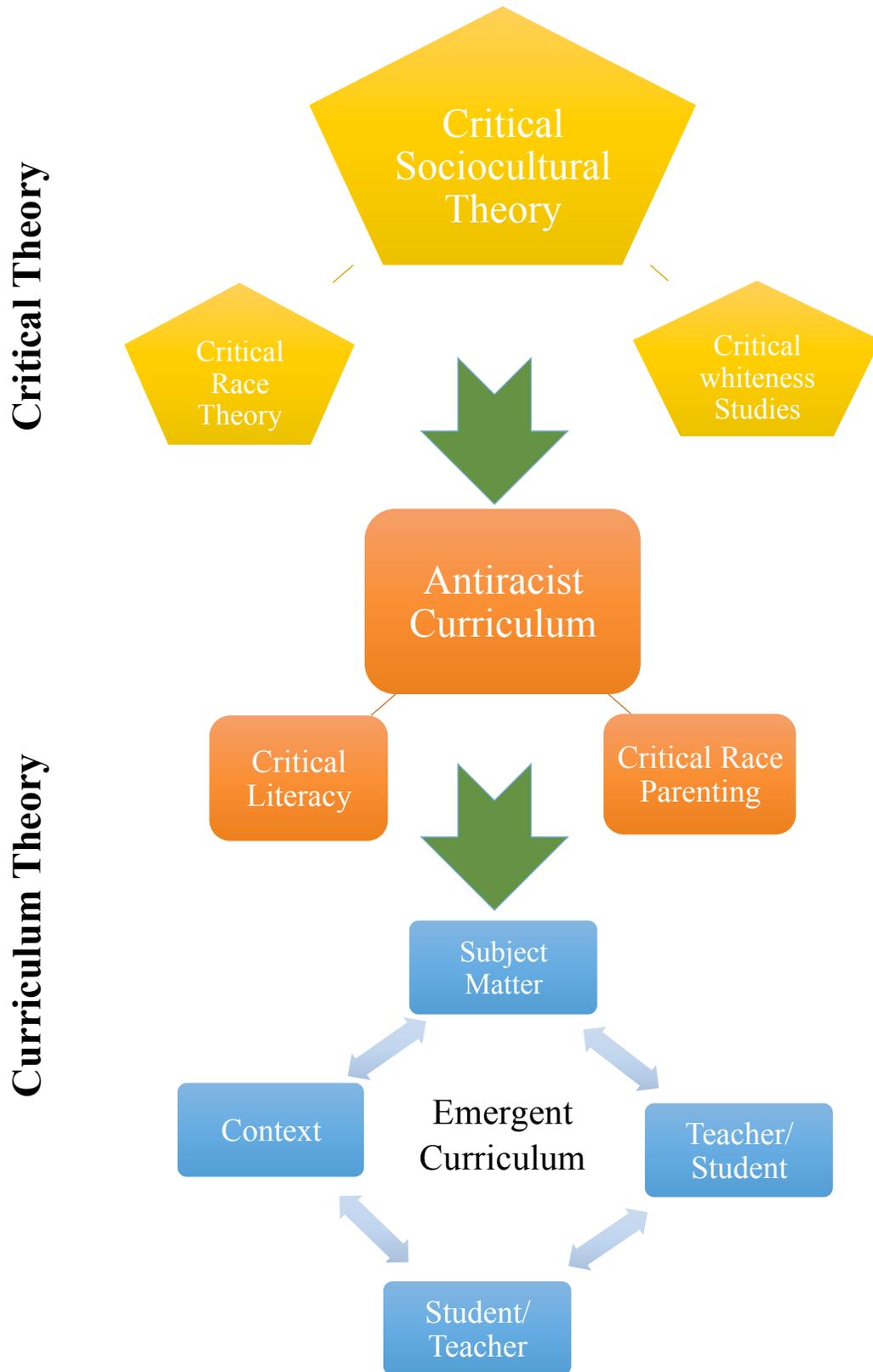


Figure 1.1. Theoretical Framework

Critical Sociocultural Theory

Critical sociocultural theory stems from sociocultural theory, which situates all learning socially, culturally, and historically. Interactions with others and with culturally-produced tools take place within culturally and historically mediated settings. This learning includes the attainment of knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking that lead to further cognitive development and prepare learners for life within specific cultural contexts (Moll, 2014; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1981). Vygotsky (1981) asserted that first learning appears on the social plane, between people, and then on the cognitive plane, within the individual. “This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts and the development of volition” (p. 163). In other words, learners’ cultures dictate what they pay attention to, how they encode information, and how that information is retrieved (Hollins, 2015). Gregory, Long, and Volk (2004) put it simply, “culture and cognition create each other” (p. 8).

Vygotsky (1978) described the setting by which learning occurs as a zone of proximal development whereby humans are able to perform tasks with the support of cultural tools or more advanced others that they cannot perform independently. During the assisted performance of these tasks, the learner gains knowledge and skill that are grounded in real life and can be applied in cultural contexts. While sociocultural theory forefronts social learning, it also recognizes the agency of individuals who “actively participate with others ... [and] serve as both guides and collaborators” (Gregory et al., 2004, p. 8). The agency of individuals and groups is what leads to the adaptation of culture, for sociocultural theory is based on the tenet that culture is ever-changing in response to the current physical and social environment.

No thought, act, or accomplishment is achieved independently or devoid of culture. Even if it does not take place in a social setting, all human work is accomplished using culturally and historically developed tools. These cultural tools include tools of the mind and tools of the hand. Ethnographer and sociocultural theorist Barbara Rogoff (2003) describes the changing nature of cultural tools “such as books, orthographies, computers, languages, and hammers [which] are essentially social, historical objects [that transform] with the ideas of both their designers and their later users” (pp. 275–276).

Critical sociocultural theory extends sociocultural theory into the political realm examining the ways in which social and political systems reinforce and maintain power differentials (Gregory et al., 2004; Nieto, 2009). Lewis and Moje (2003) explain,

The social and cultural in sociocultural theory has traditionally revolved around people interacting with one another in micro-level interactions, and less around the *systems* of meaning and power that people build, reproduce and contest in and through their interactions with one another. (p. 1991)

Thus, “education of any kind is inherently political and embedded within power structures that dictate privilege as well as bias and oppression” (Long, Volk, Baines, & Tisdale, 2013, p. 422). This is apparent in physical spaces, policies, curriculum, and day-to-day interactions within systems of education and communities. In terms of curriculum, “institutional environments are never neutral; they are always based on particular views of human development, of what is worth knowing, and of what it means to be educated” (Nieto, 2009, p. 16). Education systems are understood to be systems that typically work to maintain the status quo through segregation and academic tracking, disproportionate discipline policies, and mis-education around history. This is evident in data on academic achievement (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015), disproportionate discipline (U.S. Department of

Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014), over-referral to special education (Losen, Hodson, Ee, & Martinez, 2014), and under-referral to gifted and talented programs of students of Color (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). The education system and often other community organizations are complicit in “den(ying) whites access to sociological and critical understandings of racism” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 79).

While critical sociocultural theory is a helpful framework to analyze sanctioned curriculum in educational settings, it can also be used to help us illuminate the home curriculum that contributes to children’s understandings of their own racial identities and conceptions of race outside the self. Critical sociocultural theorists position children not as passive or naïve, but active agents who “are helping to build, or rebuild, a racialized society with their own hands with materials learned from the racial order of the adult world surrounding them” (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001, p. 22). Language has been found to be a powerful cultural tool used by children and adults in their co-construction of beliefs about race.

Language as a cultural tool. Vygotsky (1978) considered language to be the most important cultural tool because it serves “first and foremost as a means of social contact with other people” (p. 28) and also as a means to think about abstract concepts. As Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) indicate “As children learn to use a home language, they develop their abilities to deal with the external world and in the process learn to think— mostly in terms of the concepts and metaphors carried in that language” (p. 22). In a society where racial oppression is maintained through language (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; McIntyre, 1997, Miller, 2015; Nash & Miller, 2015), children encounter and interpret the discourses around race used by adults and peers then use that language to act on and within their cultural

context all the while developing their own racial identity (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Nash & Miller 2015; Miller, 2015). They co-construct ideas about raced others by “draw[ing] in the racist discourse from their worlds, alter[ing] it to make sense out of their own racial experiences, and recycl[ing] those messages in interactions with others” (Nash & Miller, 2015, p. 191).

Defining race. Sociocultural theorists recognize race as a social construction defined by more than appearance, an identity marker that is always changing in order to maintain power differentials (Alim, 2016a; Leonardo, 2013). Children become aware of the slippery and complex definition of race as they operate within different settings (Kromidas, 2014; Pollock, 2004; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Hence, children do not conceive of race as merely differences in physical characteristics. Depending on their socialization, they may associate language, literacies, and ways of thinking with their racial identity (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008; Pollock, 2004; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Critical sociocultural theorists assert that culture is not static and as such is tied up in both micro and macro structures of oppression ever-present in our society (Gregory et al., 2004; Moje & Lewis, 2007; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). As “human development is a process in which people transform through their ongoing participation in cultural activities, which in turn contribute to changes in their cultural communities across generations” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 42) many children who have experience in racially diverse settings see racial identity as something that can be negotiated and redefined (Kromidas, 2014. Pauker et al., 2016; Pollock, 2004). Through the lens of critical sociocultural theory, I was able to examine the multiple ways that race was defined by myself and the broader context and how my children constructed their own definitions of race based on their experiences and tools for thinking.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the United States in the 1970's in response to the stalling of progress after the Civil Rights Movement. Tenets of the movement were inspired by critical legal studies, which “examines the way law encodes cultural norms” (Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995) and “feminism’s insights into the relationship between power and the construction of social roles” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 5). CRT operates on five assertions: a) race is a social construction, b) identity is intersectional, c) racism is a normal part of everyday life in US society, d) interest convergence and e) storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Each assertion is further defined below.

Race is a social construction. Along with most social scientists, critical race theorists reject the notion of race as a biological or genetic reality and instead recognize race as a social construction that serves to maintain power differentials and unequal resources. Race and racism were necessary for American economic success in ventures such as slavery, land acquisition, and labor exploitation (Haney-Lopez, 2010; Leonardo, 2013; Spring, 2016). Rules about who belongs in a certain racial category are arbitrary and fluid and have been legally established in order to maintain social hierarchies and sow social divisions that support the past and present American economy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Haney-Lopez, 2010; Spring, 2016).

Identity is intersectional. Recognizing that racial groups are orchestrated under false pretense, critical race scholars assert that racial groups are not homogenous; instead, individuals possess complex identities. Aspects of identity such as race, gender, sexuality, national origin, religion, and socioeconomic status intersect and play out differently according to social context (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Put another way, one aspect of

identity may put one at an advantage in one setting and disadvantage in another. The concept of intersectionality resists marginalization and identity politics in favor of unity and “highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245).

Racism is a normal part of everyday life in US society. Critical race theory holds that “Racism is not a series of isolated acts, but is endemic in American life, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 52). Structural determinism, a tenet of CRT, is the idea that the structures, systems, and discourses in the U.S. support racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Structural determinism and systemic racism are apparent in the legal, education, and economic systems. Thus, critical race theory holds that, “Race is central to the inner workings of schools and society, woven into the common sense that drives decisions as formal as policy making and as quotidian as where kids sit together in the cafeteria” (Leonardo, 2013, p. 20).

Interest convergence. Further, policy-making is only done in a way that benefits minoritized people when it also benefits the dominant group. Interest convergence is the assertion that social change is only made when the interests of the dominant group align with those of minoritized groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Critical race scholars cite numerous examples from historic decisions that appear to be altruistic but in fact serve the needs of the majority. Derrick Bell, a founding father of CRT wrote, “Most racial remedies, when measured by their actual potential, will prove of more symbolic than substantive value to blacks” (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 37).

Storytelling. Among the core tenets of CRT, is storytelling, a tenet of hope. CRT holds that storytelling by people of color influences beliefs, “opening a window onto ignored

or alternative realities” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 46). Counter narratives or counterstories provide alternatives to dominant scripts often thought of as truths (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Storytelling is a cultural practice and provides for “the psychic preservation of marginalized groups” (p. 57). In the legal system, lawyers must think strategically about how to use story to present a convincing argument (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), thus counter-narratives are essential tools for change

CRT, as applied to American education systems, asks: “What role do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination?” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000, p. 42). CRT scholars Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) offer one answer: U.S. society “entangles democracy and capitalism” (p. 52) resulting in a system based on property rights that lead to segregation and unequal funding of education. When tenets of CRT are applied to children’s constructions of race, one might conclude children learn about race through their interactions in a racially stratified society, but their identities are not essentialized as the culture might dictate. Instead, children understand their race to be only one, albeit often salient, aspect of their identities. In this study, story was used as an integral part of the antiracist curriculum and as a medium to share the experiences of one (my) white family seeking to disrupt whiteness in the white home, an alternative to color evasiveness in the white home.

Critical whiteness Studies

Critical whiteness studies (CWS) is a movement to de-normalize and examine whiteness as “an absent racial category” (Rogers & Mosely, 2006, p. 466) and social construction that continuously reinforces “the power of white identifications and interests” (Gillborn, 2005, p. 488). As Matias et al. (2014) assert, “CWS adds [to CRT] that the

normative script of white supremacy is an exertion of whiteness that refuses to acknowledge how whiteness is historically, economically, and legally produced” (p. 291).

CWS emerged in the 1980’s with a proliferation of documentaries and reports examining what it means to be white including McIntosh’s (1989) influential essay on white privilege (Leonardo, 2013). In seeking to define whiteness, CWS scholars recognize that whiteness is a shape-shifter (Nash & Miller, 2015). Socially and legally enforced rules for who is considered white are not only vague, but ever-changing to serve the interests of the dominant group (Carbado et al., 2013; Leonardo, 2013; Miller, 2015; Spring, 2016). Examination of what it means to be white originated with Black scholars including W.E.B. DuBois and James Baldwin (Leonardo, 2013; Miller, 2015). Rightly, some worry that CWS may lead to white appropriation of that scholarship (Leonardo, 2013).

One branch of study under CWS is the study of discourses of whiteness (McIntyre, 1997; Miller, 2015; Nash, 2013; Nash & Miller, 2015; Rogers & Mosley 2006) which examines the ways in which “racism is perpetuated in subtle, symbolic, and discursive ways – through talk and everyday text” (Rogers & Mosley, 2006, p. 467). Discourses of whiteness are characterized by what is said and what isn’t said. Thus, whiteness is supported by color evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2017), a tendency of whites to avoid talking about race with the premise that not seeing race is a virtue and that seeing race is an aspect of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Working to examine the ways in which whiteness operates within white teacher education settings, McIntyre (1997) coined the phrase *white talk*, and defined it as “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” (p. 45).

CWS helps us understand the ways in which white children develop racial identity, maintaining that children pick up on social norms and discourses of white superiority and use them to “construct their understandings of whiteness” (Miller, 2015, p. 145). From the people and larger social world around them, white children learn that while race is the most important aspect of identity (Pauker et al., 2016; Roberts & Gelman, 2016), that they should not speak about race (Apfelbaum et al., 2008; Pahlke et al., 2012), and that People of Color are to be feared or pitied (Miller, 2015). In this study, CWS provides a lens by which to examine how whiteness operates in home and community settings including the discourses I engage in, so that we can begin to dismantle whiteness through the antiracist curriculum.

Curriculum as Learner, Teacher, Subject Matter, and Context

With this study, I seek not only to understand how my children conceive of race and their own racial identity, but how they came to understand it in such a way. In addition, I enact emergent antiracist curriculum to actively counter those white supremacist ideologies that become clear to me, my husband, or my children. In essence, I am setting out to examine the existing and teacher-constructed racial curricula of my children’s lives and how they interpret them. In order to do this, I adopt a broad definition of curriculum that includes four inter-related *commonplaces*: subject matter, learner, teacher, and context (Clandinin et al., 2006; He et al., 2015).

Curriculum is often conceived of as subject matter alone, and this subject matter is typically treated as though it is universally relevant and fixed, “impervious to changing circumstance” (Schwab & Harper, 1970, p. 3). Critical theorists assert this kind of subject matter fails to take the needs of the learner into account and serves to maintain hegemony. A conception of curriculum that includes learners, teachers, and context supports subject matter

guided by *practical problems* (Dewey, 1938; Schwab & Harper, 1970) which “arise from states of affairs . . . which hurt us, or which deprive us of more than they confer. They are constituted of conditions which we *wish* were otherwise and we think they *can be made* to be otherwise” (Schwab & Harper, 1970, p. 3). Schwab clarifies the need to take into account the person and the place when determining the subject matter of curriculum, “the conditions of group behavior and the character of a culture or society determine in some large part the personalities which their members develop, the way their minds work” (p. 24). This view of curriculum supports investigation of the personal, which is informed by immediate place all of which are influenced by the wider cultural, historical, and political milieu.

While each of the four commonplaces of curriculum are recognized as interacting with each other in profound ways, it is also useful to look at each commonplace individually. For instance, in a position of power, it is the teacher who often guides the subject matter and dictates how time will be allotted. Even if the teacher does not position themself as expert, the teacher will likely be the person who controls access to information and resources; the person who will shape the subject matter by following or not following the curiosity of a learner, the person who determines the cultural framing of the curriculum. In short, “What the teacher knows and does matters; it also matters who the teacher is” (Schlein, & Schwarz, 2015, p. 155). While the teacher, as an adult, is in a position of power, when enacting a critical curriculum, the teacher is also influenced by and learns alongside students; “both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (Freire, 1970, p. 72).

As alluded to in my explanation of teacher as curriculum, context, defined broadly, is an essential and inter-related part of the curriculum. Context includes the physical buildings, grounds, neighborhoods, cities, states, and country where education happens. Context also

includes the social, cultural, political, and historical aspects that inform the current conditions of those contexts. The Curriculum of context is dynamic at both the micro-level, influencing local subject matter and interactions between learners and teachers, and at the macro-level, where global and national trends affect dominant discourses in media as well as the nature of materials and the degree to which we have access to them (He et al., 2015; Janks, 2010; Leonardo, 2009). In this study, I utilize the four commonplaces of curriculum to examine the multiple ways my children are socialized around race as well as the sources of antiracist curriculum.

Emergent Curriculum

Due to the context-specific character of race (Alim, 2016b), the ever-changing nature of racial discourse (Bonilla Silva, 2017), and the intersectionality of individual racial identities (Carbado et al., 2013) the racial socialization curriculum must be individualized and emergent, dependent upon the experiences of the learner. This means that the curriculum cannot be a pre-determined, one-size-fits-all program; instead the curriculum must be guided by the questions and the perceived interests and needs of the individual in context. In arguing for a learner-centered emergent curriculum, Schubert and Schultz (2015) assert, “[I]f students and their actively evolving situational interests are not involved, [the curriculum] might not meet their needs at all” (p. 236). Honoring children’s curiosities about human difference is essential to developing curriculum that takes place in “nonspectacular, everyday ways” (Williams & Norton, 2008, p. 116). In contrast, prescribed curricula disregard student interests and questions, and silence children’s questions around human identity teaching children to “deflect, ignore, or dismiss their role, racialization, and privilege in race dynamics” (Matias et al., 2014, p. 291), precisely the norms that perpetuate white supremacy.

The field of early childhood education has a long tradition of emergent, child-driven curriculum in which children are positioned as self-motivated explorers of their environments (Jones, 2012). Loris Malaguzzi, one of the founders of the Reggio Emilia approach, explains,

It is not that we ostracize teaching, but we tell it, ‘Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before.’ (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 2012, p. 57)

Emergent curriculum has manifested in many ways in the field of early childhood. The two manifestations I find most useful are the curricular approaches developed in Reggio Emilia, Italy (Edwards et al., 2012) and the American project approach (Katz & Chard, 1989; Helm & Katz, 2000). Both approaches begin with careful observation of and interactions with students resulting in the selection of a topic to be investigated and questions to be answered. The defining characteristic of emergent curriculum embodied in both the Reggio Emilia and Project approaches is that the curriculum is not pre-determined, it evolves from the relationships between the children and the teacher. In other words, “It is based in the deep trust in the richness of children’s desire to learn with pleasure and also the ability children have to acquire initiatives and inventions that come from their shared relationships” (Gandini, 2011, p. 7). Grounded in teacher content knowledge, and guided by child exploration, the subject matter and manner in which it is learned has endless possibilities. The goals of emergent curriculum include attainment of content knowledge, but focus on the development of intellectual dispositions “to make sense of experience, to be curious, and to be empirical” (Helm & Katz, 2000, p. 5). Throughout this study, I became more adept at facilitating emergent antiracist curriculum, moving from a multicultural approach that primarily consisted of critical readings of teacher-selected children’s literature toward a more

nimble approach that allowed me to respond to topics that emerged in the day-to-day life of my family.

Antiracist Curriculum

Critical curricular frameworks operate from the premise that, “If men are unable to perceive critically the themes of their time, and thus to intervene actively in reality, they are carried along in the wake of change” (Freire, 1970, p. 6) and “learning at it’s most powerful [can] liberate” (hooks, 1994, p. 4). Antiracist curriculum and pedagogy in particular, is a praxis that does not ignore history, politics, or power. Even when antiracist curriculum is implemented with young children, larger sociopolitical systems that serve to maintain white supremacy are addressed (Boutte et al., 2011; Escayg et al., 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008). The antiracist pedagogical approach “move[s] beyond superficial coverage” (Boutte et al., 2011, p. 338) of heroes and holidays toward a curriculum that is ongoing, integrated, and relevant to the children and the local context. This approach stands in contrast to multicultural and antibias curricula which may “mask processes of racialization by understanding racism as an attitudinal issue that can be overcome through teaching tolerance and celebrating diverse cultures” (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008, p. 260) and instead seeks to “empower[] individuals to resist the oppressive forces in their lives and thus alter the dominant power structures acting on them and on society” (Jay, 2003, p. 7). Further, antiracist pedagogy puts racism at the center of the discussion, a necessary position in consideration of the power of color evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2017) and white talk (McIntyre, 1997) which are employed by many to take any opportunity to avoid talking about race directly. Antiracist pedagogy seeks to expose and counter whiteness, demystifying how it operates at the micro and macro levels (Escayg et al., 2017; Husband, 2010).

While antiracist curriculum is for all children, the goal of antiracist education for white people is to examine their own positionality and “actively use their advantages responsibly to create an alternative racial arrangement that is less oppressive” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 98). Antiracist curriculum theorists recognize that children are socialized into whiteness at a young age and take seriously children’s “instances of racist talk or discriminatory behavior” (Feagin & Van Ausdale, 2001, p. 208) using them as entry points to curriculum. In addition to emergent curriculum, antiracist pedagogies also include adult-lead conversations about oppression. Miller (2015) asserts, “[T]eachers should not shy away from issues of race and racism, fearing that their children will not understand such complex issues; rather, they should introduce and confront them head-on” (p. 39). Escayg, Berman, and Royer (2017) describe the aim of antiracist pedagogy this way, “[I]t is essential to equip all young children, regardless of social positioning, with the moral imperative to reveal, disrupt, and actively challenge racism” (p. 17).

The goals of antiracist pedagogies for children include the attainment of content knowledge and skills. Content knowledge includes:

- clear and accurate definition of race (Matias, 2016; Michael & Bartoli, 2016, Nishi, 2018)
- understanding of systemic racism (Escayg et al., 2017; Matias, 2016; Michael & Bartoli, 2016; Miller, 2015; Nishi, 2018), i.e. making “it clear that racial-ethnic prejudice and discrimination are part of a larger society that needs reform and not just something that individuals do” (Feagin & Van Ausdale, 2001, p. 208,)
- knowledge of racial history (Michael & Bartoli, 2016), i.e. “the history of how human beings came to be raced and the legacy of racism” (Miller, 2015, p. 34)

- understanding of stereotypes and their counter-narratives (Escayg et al., 2017; Michael & Bartoli, 2016)

The skills promoted in antiracist pedagogy include:

- learning to identify racism in their everyday encounters and in texts (Escayg et al., 2017; Feagin & Van Ausdale, 2001; Matias, 2016; Michael & Bartoli, 2016; Nishi, 2018)
- knowing how to intervene (Michael & Bartoli, 2016), i.e. “assert their humanity as beings-in-struggle and beings-for-others” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 97)
- recognizing one’s racist and antiracist identities (Michael & Bartoli, 2016)

This set of content knowledge and skills made up the objectives and goals of the home antiracist curriculum. This framework influenced my choice of curricular materials such as children’s literature, video media, and community events as well as the conversations I took up with my family and the discourses used in those conversations. The specific content examined within the curriculum changed over time depending on the topics that emerged, but the goals of the antiracist curriculum remained constant, guiding the work.

Critical Race Parenting

Critical Race Parenting (CRP), also known as Parent Crit, is an emerging theoretical framework that applies critical theory to parenting. In recognition that separations between one’s identity and work in scholarship, parenting, and education are artificial (DePouw & Matias, 2016; Matias, 2016; Nishi, 2018), CRP is a means to “hold ourselves accountable to do the work of reconciling [critical race] theory and practice in parenting” (DePouw, 2018, p. 56). Grounded in a *humanizing love* (Matias & Allen, 2013) and a long history of parenting and supplemental education practices enacted by People of Color (DePouw &

Matias, 2016; Matias, 2016), critical race parenting “is defined as an educational praxis that can engage both parent and child in a mutual process of teaching and learning about race, especially ones that debunk dominant messages about race” (Matias, 2016, p. 3).

In terms of pedagogy, “the utility of Parent Crit lies in its ability to serve as a conceptual bridge between CRT and parenting without insisting on standardization of praxis” (DePouw, 2018, p. 58). This resistance to a set of designated subject matter and materials is in recognition that “institutional racism and White supremacy are flexible and subject to change—therefore, universal answers or solutions are impossible” (DePouw & Matias, 2016, p. 255). However, Nishi (2018) outlines several approaches to applying ParentCrit that add to the pedagogical implications of antiracist curriculum:

- critically guide racial socialization recognizing the impact of intersectionality, i.e. “Not only are children learning to racialize their world, they’re also organizing it by gender, class, ability, and beyond” (p. 20)
- make violence real by “arm[ing] our children with critical media literacy” (p. 21) in the face of violence as entertainment
- demonstrate resistance, “our children must see our commitment to social justice and be included in that commitment” (p. 21).

While CRP draws upon the parenting practices of People of Color who have a long history of countering white supremacist school curricula, it is a useful framework for white families as well. The task for white parents engaging in CRP is to “simultaneously check and dismantle their whiteness and raise their children to combat whiteness in the world and in themselves as they develop” (Nishi, 2018, p. 7). Depouw (2018) adds, “When engaging in critical race parenting, it is important for White parents to acknowledge their complex relationships to

Whiteness as a personal and social identity because this is the context for their critical race parenting” (p. 56). An antiracist home curriculum and critical race parenting approach supports *cognitive decolonization*, a recognition and interruption of the ways “we make meaning of material conditions and our actions, study them and communicate those findings is inextricably bound up with the ongoing project of coloniality” (Patel, 2016, p. 14). This decolonization of the mind aims to empower learners “to really see, hear, and understand where [racial] consciousness comes from” (Lee & Lutz, 2005, p. 4). Taking a critical literacy stance toward texts can further support such a decolonization of the mind.

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy scholars are concerned with teaching learners to identify and respond to power dynamics represented in texts, recognizing “It is impossible to read texts without reading the context of the text, without establishing the relationship between the discourse and the reality which shapes the discourse” (Freire, 1985, pp. 18–19). In critical literacy curriculum, the term “texts” is defined broadly and includes print media, visual representations, and audio and video productions” (Janks, 2000). Vasquez (2017) explains the culturally-situated origins of each of these kinds of texts, stating “the world is seen as a socially constructed text that can be read,” and “all texts are created from a particular perspective with the intention of conveying particular messages” (Vasquez, 2017, p. 3).

The critical literacy perspective, rooted in critical sociocultural theory, acknowledges that “children are only able to speak using the discourses that have been made available to them or for which they have had access” (Vasquez, 2017, p. 177). Thus, one aim of critical literacy is to support the development of multiple literacies including proficiency in both analyzing and constructing multiple types of texts. Further, a critical literacy framework

recognizes the changing nature of what it means to be literate (Freebody & Freiberg, 2011). Thus, the subject matter of critical literacy must be “responsive to the changing socio-historical and political context, the changing communication landscape” (Janks, 2012, p. 159) in order to “offer young people ways of thinking about their life worlds and discursive resources for taking local action” (Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001, p. 453). Indeed, “it is the action piece, doing something with what we discover through critical analysis of text, that helps us to participate differently in the world” (Vasquez, 2017, p. 13). Often times this action includes the creation of a new text, such as a letter to a person in power or a video used to sway public opinion. Action might also take the form of transformation or reconstruction of an existing text (Janks, 2010), such as recreating an advertisement to eliminate the bias that was identified in the original text. However, Janks (2000, 2012) reminds us that upon creating new texts, we must also critically examine the texts we ourselves create for evidence of our own bias, including which types of oppression we address and which we do not.

Throughout this study, I utilize critical sociocultural theory informed by CRT and CWS to make sense of the racialized world my family inhabits and the discourses we encounter and employ. The home curriculum I facilitated as curriculum planner was informed by an antiracist curriculum framework which forefronts race and the ways it is used to maintain power differentials in our historically situated socio-political context. Critical Literacy as a pedagogical framework provided tools by which to deconstruct white supremacist texts in our world. This home curriculum planning and enactment was part of my everyday life as a parent utilizing Parent Crit for the healthy racial socialization of my children. While these frameworks and theories influenced my curriculum planning and

enactment, the curriculum was emergent and reflective of the learners (my children) as unique individuals as well as the particular context we were living in.

This Dissertation

This dissertation has six chapters. Following this first chapter, which has highlighted the significance of this study and the theoretical framework grounding it, chapter two will outline literature relevant to the study. This will include a detailed review of studies on racial socialization. Chapter three details the blended methodologies employed in my study: parent-child autoethnography and poetic inquiry, and takes readers through the process of data collection and three phases of analysis. At the same time, chapter three showcases forms of poetic inquiry such as poetic transcription and poetic juxtaposition used as both method and form (Milner, 2010) during the study and in this document. Chapter four presents poetry developed throughout the study to provide greater context to the findings chapter, and a broader picture of the home curriculum. The next chapter, chapter five, details the major findings associated with the study, providing evidence and supporting literature to substantiate those claims. The final and sixth chapter elucidates implications for teachers, families, and community members seeking to enact antiracist curriculum, as well as implications for further research in racial socialization and the field of poetic inquiry .

An Invitation

I opened this chapter with three poems, providing a glimpse into my own racial socialization as a child, the white discourse norms I employed as a new teacher, and the ways in which my son took up the implicit racism he learned in the context of a segregated society, his school, and our home—all operating on ideology of white supremacy. These poems are an entrée into the unique methods of this study: parent-child autoethnography and poetic

inquiry. There are several studies on the ways white families socialize their children into color evasiveness (Bartoli et al., 2016, Pahlke et al., 2012, Vittrup & Holden, 2011) and antiracist/critical pedagogies in schools (Boutte et al., 2011; Husband, 2010; Kuby, 2013; Souto-Manning, 2009). However, there is little research that examines antiracist curriculum in the home, and I know of no studies that use poetic inquiry methodologies to tease out the way whiteness operates in young children's lives. Now, I invite readers into my home and family, into an extended view of my children's construction of ideas about race and racism. To do so, I will share the story behind the title of this dissertation: "Is that racist?: Interrogating whiteness and constructing antiracist curriculum in one white family (you will read more about this in chapters 4 & 5).

During the final year of the study, although still demonstrating that they were taking in the whiteness that surrounds them, my children felt that they can talk openly about race and racism. Reflecting the popular discourse, one frequent phrase my son began using was, "Is that racist?" I constructed the following poetic memo excerpt based on our back-and-forth discussions and deconstructions of the meanings of this term *racist*. Even though I know at times we failed, as you will see throughout this dissertation, this excerpt, and indeed this dissertation, shows the way we worked to normalize race talk in our home space, even as we tried to interrogate whiteness and help our children develop an antiracist white stance:

*That's racist...I know what racist is,
insists my son
again.*

You know what racist is?

*Yeah. It means when you think someone is Black,
and you say that they should do jobs.*

*Kind of like that.
I've been meaning to talk to you about this
because I've been thinking about it,
and we haven't talked about it.
But like, race is something like made up.
Like it's not even real.
Like people made it up.
Like it's not a science thing.
Like it's um, hm....*

Then why [do you have] a book called Let's Talk about Race?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Building from the theoretical framework highlighted in chapter 1, in this chapter I review the bodies of literature that inform my study of the ways in which my children construct and express understandings of race in response to the home curriculum. My study examines antiracist curriculum in the home and school, therefore it is informed by literature on racial discourses and white racial socialization in home and school settings as well as antiracist curricula. I organize this chapter into the following sections: Studies with a Cognitive Developmentalist Framework, Learning to be white: white Racial Socialization in the Home, Racial Discourse at School, and School Curriculum Designed to Counter Racism. I do this for two reasons. First, it helps elucidate what the research says about how young children construct ideas about race and racism and how these ideas are influenced by their socialization. This is important because my study might contribute to that literature. Second, it shares the affordances and limitations of methodologies utilized in the various studies I highlight, in order to build a rationale for the need for long-term parent-child autoethnographies that use poetic inquiry, such as mine, and other such studies that incorporate participant-observation. New methodological approaches are key to understanding a construct as complex as race.

Studies with a Cognitive Developmentalist Framework

Most of the studies that have been conducted on children's construction and conceptions of race are quantitative studies. The current literature on children's conceptions of race is rooted in cognitive developmentalist framework. In this section I make note of quantitative studies designed to investigate how children understand race. Piagetian cognitive

developmental theory has long dominated thinking and theorizing about how young children learn (Park, 2011; Rogoff, 2003; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Piaget and his followers' contributions are significant in that they contributed to understanding the way children learn physical properties of objects by shifting from a focus on the ways in which children are controlled by the environment to the ways in which children learn about the world by agentively acting on the environment (Donaldson, 1994; Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Piaget, 1977). In addition, cognitive developmentalists understand children's thinking and actions to be dictated by sequential stages of cognitive growth with abstract thought only becoming possible in the latest stages of development, sparking a movement toward *developmentally appropriate practice* in early childhood education settings (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Despite significant contributions to the field, the cognitive developmentalist perspective has limitations especially when studying children's perceptions of a social construct rather than a physical property. Here I will describe the ways in which definitions of race and quantitative methodologies used to understand children's conceptions of race in the cognitive developmentalist body of literature.

Definitions within this Research Framework

In reviewing the quantitative literature on children's perceptions of race, I found that the majority of the literature grounded in Piagetian developmental theory (Hirschfield, 1995; Kinzler & Dautel, 2012; Pauker, Ambady, & Apfelbaum, 2010; Roberts & Gelman, 2016) seeks to answer if and at what age "young children treat race as stable" (Roberts & Gelman, 2016, p. 888) or in Piagetian terms, that race is conserved across the life span. Due to the nature of the theoretical framework, which seeks to outline age-based cognitive stages of development, the studies compare children's understandings of race against adult's

understanding of race as if adult understandings were the inevitable developmental endpoint. Robert and Gelman (2016) explain these studies “question the extent to which children believe that race is stable over development—a belief that adults hold as intuitive” (Roberts & Gelman, 2016, p. 887).

While these cognitive developmentalist studies often briefly acknowledge race to be a “human social category” (Kinzler & Dautel, 2012, p. 131), they do not further define race. While many of the studies cited here state that race is a social construction, each goes on to imply race is defined solely by skin color and fails to acknowledge that race is often socially defined by language (Alim, 2016a), personal style (Kromidas, 2014; Pollock, 2004), cultural values and interests (Leonardo, 2009), and religion (Adams & Joshi, 2016; Alim, 2016b). Further, comparing children’s conceptions of race to adult conceptions of race fails to take into account “racializations . . . mutate and take hold on new ground” (Lee & Lutz, 2005, p. 4) and are therefore likely to be different from one generation to the next. For example, across a span of decades and contexts in America, Irish, Italian, and Jewish Americans have sometimes been considered white and sometimes not (Spring, 2016).

The definitions of race are further illuminated when the materials of these studies are scrutinized. Each of these studies employs photographs, or in the case of Hirschfield (1995) “color wash line drawings” (p. 220) of individuals who are assumed to be either white or Black. Due to the nature of two-dimensional depictions of people, the only way race could be determined by child participants utilizing these materials is through appearance. Cues about a person’s language, personal style, religion, and many other aspects of culture that are sometimes associated with race are not typically available indicators to the child participants when photographs or drawings are used to depict race. In essence, the researchers are seeking

to compare the ways in which children in certain age categories and adults understand race, but they are severely limiting the ways in which children can perceive race because the study materials reflect adult definitions of race that focus on skin color alone. A telling example of the precarious nature of defining race and the preponderance of materials that reflect adult-defined conceptions of race is the Roberts and Gelman (2016) study in which photographs from the NimStim Set of Facial Expressions which feature *multiracial* faces, were pretested with 127 adults “to ensure that all images were judged to depict Black or White, or happy or angry people” (p. 889). This example demonstrates an assumption that definitions of race are stable and do not change from generation to generation or in regard to context. In other words, the researchers assume that if the majority of adults perceive someone to be of a certain race after viewing a photograph of that person, then that racial determination is correct and therefore children will or should perceive that person’s race in the same way as adults.

Methodologies within this Framework

Studies of children’s developmental conceptions of race in terms of *race essentialism*, the notion that race is fixed and unchanging in the individual typically employ game-like experiments conducted in lab settings one child at a time. These studies are often conducted by showing a participant a photograph of a child and then two photographs of adults then asking which adult the child would grow up to be or, vice versa, showing a photograph of an adult and two photographs of children then asking which the adult was as a child (Hirschfield, 1995; Kinzler & Dautel, 2012; Pauker et al., 2010; Pauker et al., 2016; Roberts & Gelman, 2016). These studies often pit “race” against other variables they expect children to understand as changing or unchanging such as body build (Hirschfield, 1995), emotion as

represented by facial expression (Roberts & Gelman, 2016), occupation as represented by clothing (Hirschfield, 1995), and language (Kinzler & Dautel, 2012). When language was included in the Kinzler and Dautel (2012) study, it was presented as a three second audio clip of a “neutral phrase (e.g., ‘There are three meals: breakfast, lunch, and dinner)’” (p. 132).

In testing situations, children often answer questions in the way they believe the adult wants them answered, making an inference, as they would in any typical conversation or performance for an adult. Thus, the nonsensical questions that occur in testing situations do not elicit responses that demonstrate the full scope of the child’s thinking (Donaldson, 1994; Rogoff, 2003). For example, when asked “When this child grows up, which grown-up will it be?” (Roberts & Gelman, 2016, p. 889), a child is likely to perceive that they have two choices and one is the correct choice. Further, the child has no opportunity to explain his reasoning. Complicating the matter, in the Roberts & Gelman (2016) study, children “first participated in two practice trials depicting cartoon characters with differently shaped schematic bodies (i.e., square person, circle person)” (p. 889). It is possible that during these practice trials, children learned that they were expected to essentialize people according to physical features.

Through the use of two-dimensional images and by pitting social aspects such as language, occupation as depicted by clothing, and race against each other in the research design, the researchers are reducing race to skin color rather than a dynamic social construction. I posit that even though researchers might acknowledge race is a social construction in the introductions to their studies, the cognitive developmentalist theoretical framework does not support such a definition. Researchers working from a cognitive developmentalist perspective seek to learn if children extend the essentialist reasoning they

use to categorize objects by property, i.e. sorting buttons by color; to “reasoning about human social categories such as race, ethnicity, and gender” (Kinzler & Dautel, 2012, p. 131). In the process of seeking these answers, they often impose an a priori definition of race as skin color that heavily influences their findings. More worrisome, the cognitive developmentalist framework also opens up the possibility to theorize “beliefs about social categories can initially form independently of cultural experience” (Kinzler & Dautel, 2012, p. 137). This idea is not only nonsensical, but dangerous. Kromidas (2014) explains, “by isolating children’s attitudes about race in laboratories . . . it lends credence to [the] illusion: that prejudice is a natural response to people that look different” (Kromidas, 2014, p. 424). These studies typically find that children’s race essentialism grows as they get older, and the researchers attribute this to cognitive development rather than socialization.

In addition to concerns with the social influences of experimental procedures on children’s behavior, there are also concerns with the reliability of such procedures. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) remind us, “racial and ethnic ideas and behaviors may not be revealed in single instances but will more likely be episodic in a particular child’s life, just as they are in the lives of adults” (p. 41). In contrast, cognitive developmentalist methodologies operate on the assumption that a child’s response in a one-time testing situation is representative of that child’s thinking across the entire developmental period. This is evidenced by the professed goal to “determin[e] *when* children begin to use racial stereotypes [which is considered to be] essential for understanding their developmental trajectory” (Pauker et al., 2010, p. 1799). In other words, studies of this nature assume that the procedures will reveal children’s racial stereotypes and that the observed behaviors of the

child are representative of the child's thinking across settings and the designated developmental age range.

Social-cognitive experimentation. Notably, Pauker et al.'s (2010, 2016) work, while employing similar methodology to the studies described above takes on a socio-cognitivist perspective recognizing race essentialism as a *social-cognitive* component of *racial cognition*, meaning thinking about race is influenced by the social environment rather than mere cognitive development. Here the researchers' focus is on the association between race essentialism and racial stereotyping that is likely due to the essentialist "belief that racial-group membership is fixed and reflects an underlying essence shared by like individuals" (Pauker et al., 2016, p. 1410). The researchers state the implications of the work include knowing at what age interventions would be most appropriate to prevent racial stereotyping.

Along with picture matching to determine race essentialism, the socio-cognitivist studies (Pauker et al., 2010, 2016) include tasks to determine trends around racial stereotyping across age groups. Children were read episodes describing *race-neutral* behaviors, for example "liking animals, playing outdoors" (2016, p. 1413), as well as episodes describing behaviors that typify positive and negative stereotypes for the racial groups Black, Asian, and white. Examples of positive stereotypes include for whites, "being wealthy, acting as a leader" (2016, p. 1413), for Blacks, "playing basketball well, being rhythmic" (2016, p. 1413) and for Asians "playing violin skillfully, exceeding in math" (2016, p. 1413). Examples of negative stereotypes include for whites, "bragging, excluding others" (2016, p. 1413), for Blacks, "acting aggressively, underperforming academically" (2016, p. 1413), and for Asians "acting submissively, retaining foreign customs" (2016, p. 1413). For each episode that was read, the child was presented with two photographs of

boys. When the episode that was read involved a stereotype, “a photo of a child from the racial group targeted by the stereotype was presented alongside a randomly selected photo from one of the other two racial groups” (2016, p. 1413). When a non-stereotypical episode was read, two photos of children of the same race were presented. Both studies found out-group stereotyping to increase with age. Interestingly, the second study (Pauker et al., 2016) was conducted across two settings: Massachusetts, where the majority of people are white and monolingual, and Hawai’i, a context with high levels of racial, language, and ethnic diversity. Findings across both settings indicate an association between race essentialism and racial stereotyping. When looking at rates of stereotyping of specific racial/ethnic groups, Black people were stereotyped more than others in Massachusetts, but not in Hawai’i where no group was found to be stereotyped more than another. Further, “race essentialism reliably increased with age in Massachusetts . . . but did not increase significantly with age in Hawai’i” (p. 1416). The 2016 study also included interviews in which children were asked, “If this child really wanted to be Black and change his/her skin color could he/she do that?” (p. 1414) and a corresponding follow up question, “How would he/she change?” or “Why can’t he/she change?” (p. 1414). Children in Hawai’i demonstrated *context specific reasoning* about how a person’s race might change, i.e. suntan or adoption of a new culture or language.

While providing some helpful insights, studies grounded in cognitive developmental and socio-cognitivist theory have serious limitations. Due to their experimental design in which children perform a task in a lab setting, these studies examine children’s understandings of race in a single moment and make assumptions that those understandings are stable over a developmental period, as evidenced in hypotheses such as, “racial minority 5- to 6-year-olds may reason that race is more stable than emotion” (Roberts & Gelman,

2016, p. 890). The studies do not explore *how* children come to understand race in different contexts or what they *do* with their race knowledge in real social contexts. Further, the nature of these experimental designs put children in a position in which they likely feel that there is a right or wrong answer and may seek to please the adult in the room (Donaldson, 1994; Rogoff, 2003).

Studies built on a cognitive developmentalist framework fail to take the sociocultural context into account. These studies typically seek to examine at which age children think about race in predetermined ways, treating race as construct with a stable definition grounded in physical appearance that children will understand in ways similar to adults as their cognition develops. They examine a child's current reasoning rather than the ways in which the child developed such reasoning. The methodologies for such studies also limit the ways in which the child can express understanding with questions such as, "Will this child grow up to be this grown-up or this grown-up?" (Roberts & Gelman, 2016, p. 890). While studies grounded in socio-cognitivism recognize the importance of the social context, they are still limited by the presupposition that the definition of race will remain stable in the larger social sphere and children's understandings of race are stable throughout a developmental period and thus able to be understood through one-time testing measures.

Learning to be white: white Racial Socialization in the Home

A sociocultural approach to understanding the way children construct and express understandings of race requires an understanding of how children are racially socialized in the home. Research indicates white children are typically socialized about race differently than children of color. Nationally representative survey data of 18,827 families with kindergarteners gathered as part of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten

Class of 1998-1999 showed that white families were much less likely to have explicit conversations with their young children about racial/ethnic heritage than families of Color. Of the 10,857 white families surveyed, 57% reported never or almost never discussing ethnic/racial heritage with their children. In contrast, of the 2,694 Black families surveyed, only 30% reported never or almost never discussing ethnic/racial heritage. Of the 3,284 Hispanic families surveyed, 30% reported never or almost never discussing ethnic/racial heritage. Of the 307 American Indian families surveyed, only 15% reported never or almost never discussing ethnic/racial heritage (Lesane-Brown et al.,2010).

The small body of literature on white racial socialization in the home indicates that even though white parents do not have explicit conversations about race, they learn what it means to be white through color evasiveness, the harmful practice of “actively avoiding talking about race” (Annamma et al., 2016, p. 155) and implicit messages of white supremacy in interactions and written and visual texts. Below I describe three studies that illuminate how color evasiveness is carried out within white families, and one parent child ethnography that describes discourses of whiteness and Blackness that serve to maintain white supremacy.

Color Evasiveness in the white Home

Vittrup and Holden (2011) set out to investigate the effectiveness of antiracist television programming and family discussion around that programming, and inadvertently illustrated the power of color-evasiveness in the white family. The researchers carried out an experimental study with 93 white middle-class families with children ages five to seven years. Participants were divided into four groups: three intervention and one control. The intervention groups were assigned the following interventions: video only, video and

discussion, and discussion only. The video intervention consisted of five 10-15 minute videos to be shown over about a one-week period. Parents who were asked to have race-related discussions with their children were “given an additional handout containing instructions on what topics to discuss” (p. 200) for example, “pointing out how children of different racial groups can be great friends and have a lot in common” (p. 200).

Results were measured using the Pro-Black/Anti-Black Attitude Questionnaire and the Black White Evaluative Trait Scale with parents and children before and after the intervention. The Pro-Black/Anti-Black Attitude Questionnaire was given to parents and “consisted of 10 Likert scale items, half of which were worded to be consistent with humanitarian–egalitarian values. . . and the other half consistent with the belief that the problems experienced by Black people are due to their own shortcomings” (Vittrup & Holden, 2011, p. 198). Children’s attitudes were measured through interview using the Black/White Evaluative Trait Scale (BETS) “consists of 12 items, including positive (e.g., nice, honest), negative (e.g., unkind, dishonest), and neutral (curious, trusting) traits about each racial group” (p. 199). In the interviews, “Children were asked how many people within each racial group possessed these traits. Examples of questions include, “*How many Black people are nice?*” (p. 199). Children were asked to respond according to a five point Likert-type scale “of 0 (*Hardly Any*) to 4 (*Almost All*)” (p. 199). The authors claim,

The BETS is likely to produce a more valid measure of children’s racial biases compared to previous [quantitative] measures . . . because it measures separate positive and negative evaluations of both the in- group and the out-group . . . and it includes the option for children to choose multiple targets or no targets for each of the adjectives” (p 199).

The authors concede these measures indicate *explicit* rather than *implicit bias*, indicating an understanding that responses to the measures are socially mediated. However, the authors

imply that the measures are accurate representations of participants' *explicit racial attitudes* as if those expressed attitudes are stable across settings. In other words, the authors assume that the explicit racial attitudes of the parents as measured by the Pro-Black/Anti-Black Attitude Questionnaire in the research setting are indicative of the explicit attitudes of the parents in home settings in which a great deal of family socialization takes place. They apply similar logic to the measurement of the children's explicit racial attitudes as measured by the BETS. This assumption allows the researchers to conclude, "despite parental claims of egalitarian viewpoints, their children seemingly did not automatically adopt these same attitudes" (p. 207).

Children were also asked before and after the intervention to predict their parents' attitudes towards Black and white people using a 14-item questionnaire that was developed for the study using adjectives from the BETS. The questionnaire included questions such as, "*Does your Mom/Dad think Black people are dishonest?*" (p. 200) and allowed children the following response options: "'Yes,' 'No,' or 'I don't know'" (p. 200). After quantitative analysis, the researchers concluded, "children who watched videos and/or had discussions with their parents showed more positive out-group attitudes . . . [but] the two methods combined did not prove to be superior to either method alone" (p. 208). In addition, the authors concluded, "children's racial attitudes were not shown to be significantly correlated with their parents' reported racial attitudes, children's *perceptions* of their parents' racial attitudes were significantly associated with their own reported attitudes" (p. 209). Vittrup and Holden concede that their findings are somewhat inconsistent and statistically weak and attribute these results to a lack of reliability in parents implementing the agreed upon discussions about race. Due to my skepticism around the validity of the quantitative measures

used in this study, I am more interested in Vittrup and Holden's discussion of the reluctance of white parents to discuss race with their children.

From recruitment to carrying out interventions, parental avoidance of talking about race permeated the study. After initial recruitment, three families withdrew because they were "too busy" and two families withdrew after being asked to have race-related conversations with their children. For the remaining families asked to have conversations with their children about race-related topics, an overwhelming majority of white parents demonstrated discomfort or unwillingness to talk to their children about race. Two families assigned to discussion groups reported having no conversations about race with their children at all; another twelve families reported only briefly mentioning the topics. Vittrup and Holden (2011) report, "even when instructed to do so, only 10% of parents reported having in-depth race-related discussions with their children" (p. 208). The authors conclude, "Such reluctance may be due to discomfort with the topic and not knowing how to approach it, and further research should explore parental thoughts about the issue" (p. 209).

Pahlke, Bigler, and Suizzo (2012) set out to examine color evasive practices of white families directly by observing readings of race-related children's literature. The researchers conducted a study with eighty-four dyads made up of college-educated middle-class *European American* mothers and their four and five-year-old children. The researchers videotaped the dyads reading two children's books, and they administered a battery of standardized assessment measures including a survey.

Participants came to the lab setting, were given two books, and asked to read them as they normally would at home. The mothers were not told that this was a study about "children's attitudes about racial groups" (p. 1167) until after the readings. The first book,

David's Drawings by Cathryn Falwell (2001) features life-like characters and is set in a classroom. The main character is described as African American while his classmates are “from a broad range of racial and ethnic backgrounds” (p. 1167). The book is about a boy who creates a picture with the help of his classmates. Pahlke et al. state, “The book never explicitly mentions race or ethnicity, but the diversity of the characters is quite distinctive” (p. 1167). The second book, *What If the Zebras Lost Their Stripes?* by John Reitano (1998), is designed to raise questions about race and racism and “presents a series of questions related to what would happen if some zebras became all black and others all white” (p. 1167).

After the readings, the mothers were told that the study was in regard to children’s attitudes about racial groups and asked if they would like to continue. All mothers agreed to continue participation. After parental consent, the children were asked to complete a picture-sorting task in which they were given photographs of 16 individuals and asked to sort them into two groups and name the groups. The authors used the labels each child used for European American and African American throughout the rest of the child assessment measures for that individual child. Those assessment measures included: The Black-White Evaluative Trait Scale, five items from the Ethnic Social Comfort Scale, and a *guessing game* in which the child was asked to estimate his or her mother’s ratings on the Ethnic Social Comfort Scale.

In an adjoining room from which they could see but not hear their children, mothers completed the Black-White Evaluative Scale, the Ethnic Social Comfort Scale, and a modified version of the Parental Racial–Ethnic Socialization Behaviors measure. Mothers were surveyed about their children’s inter-racial contact and asked to estimate their child’s

ratings on the Ethic Social Comfort Scale. Mothers were then asked to complete the Parental Racial-Ethnic Social Behaviors measure in regard to their plans for future discussions.

Findings indicate the mothers avoided discussion of race with their children even when reading picture books with multiracial characters or a racialized theme. During the readings of *David's Drawings*, only six comments with any relation to race were made amongst the eighty-four mother-child dyads. This means the vast majority of dyads (93.9%) did not comment at all. Of these six comments, two children talked about characters' race or skin tone directly. No mother talked about race or skin tone. One mother whose child asked, "Is David dark?" replied, "I don't know" (p. 1170). During readings of *What If the Zebras Lost Their Stripes?*, neither race nor ethnicity was ever mentioned explicitly and was implied in only 12 comments. For example, one mother read aloud, "Or would [the zebras'] colors make them start to only see the black or white and not what lives within their hearts?" then explained, "So sometimes when people look different... You know, sometimes they think they look strange, that kind of stuff. That's silly, right? Because they're all people" (p. 7). While nearly 76% of dyads made at least one positive comment about intergroup contact such as, "Well, just because they're zebras doesn't mean they can't be friends. Even if they're different colors," (p. 1171) 47.6% made at least one comment rejecting inter-group contact. Most of the children who made a comment rejecting intergroup contact did so by simply answering *no* to one of the questions in the book such as *Would different colors be the end of living life as loving friends?* Child replies of no might demonstrate misinterpretation of the question, however maternal responses to these negative reactions were intriguing. Most mothers did not respond at all. Those who did respond did not counter their children's

rejection or negative statements, but simply asked a follow up question then turned to the next page.

Results of the standardized assessments demonstrate some concerns with validity. According to the Black-White Evaluative Scale, mothers showed a slight preference for African Americans while children showed a pro European American bias. Using the Ethnic Social Comfort Scale the majority of mothers reported feeling happy with the idea of interacting with African Americans in the role of neighbor, friend, doctor, teacher, and babysitter, while statistically speaking, children felt uncertain about interacting with African Americans in those roles. However, children's response to this measure varied widely. Further, children significantly underestimated their mothers' ratings on the Ethnic Social Comfort Scale. Acknowledging concerns with validity, statistical measures indicate color evasive socialization is associated with children's racial bias, mothers under-predict their children's racial bias, and children's racial attitudes were related to their mothers' cross-race friendships.

Survey results indicated mothers do not currently have many conversations about race with their four and five-year-olds. However, they reported plans to discuss race-related issues in the future. They planned to focus these discussions on "messages about egalitarianism and discrimination against other groups ...[rather] than messages about preparation for bias and the history of other racial groups" (p. 1172).

Bartoli et al. (2016) conducted a case study on white racial socialization with 13 white families with one or more children aged 12 to 18 years. A white researcher conducted one hour interviews with each parental unit and one teenager per family before conducting a one hour family interview with follow up questions based on the initial interviews. While no

parent reported talking directly with their child specifically about what it means to be white every teen identified as white “and almost uniformly qualified that descriptive term as being meaningless” (p. 129) making statements such as, ““I guess I am Caucasian, but I don’t really think about it. It doesn’t really play a part in my life at all.”” (p. 129). The researchers found that most of the white families lived in predominately white neighborhoods and justified this through talk of *safe neighborhoods* and *good schools*. This talk was accompanied by discourse about a person’s values mattering more than their race, including the value of hard work. “Parents expressed no awareness that some values, such as a belief in meritocracy, were racialized” (p. 130). Further, parents and teenagers demonstrated an association between city neighborhoods, People of Color, poverty, and danger. Parents instilled the values of helping and respecting others and defined racism as “overt and individual, rather than systemic, pervasive, or historical” (p. 130). The teenagers exhibited a belief that racism had steadily decreased in the United States since slavery and cited the Civil Rights Movement and the election of Barack Obama.

Parents demonstrated an understanding of the importance of not being *racist*, with one parent asking a child directly during the family interview if she was racist and showing relief when the teenager said that she wasn’t. However, parents did not typically bring up issues of racism to discuss or teach their children how to respond if they encountered racism. For their part, teenage children sometimes talked with their parents about incidents they understood to be racist in the news or at school. Teens also reported feeling unsure about how to respond when they observed an overtly racist incident, with some explaining they had not seen models of how to do this.

Parents in two of the thirteen families who participated in the study reported ongoing authentic relationships with People of Color. Parents in these families had learned of the ways racism affects their trusted friends, and in contrast to families with no close inter-racial friendships, often brought up issues of race and racism with their children. These parents shared stories with their teens of negotiating interracial contexts and offered counter stories to racial stereotypes.

Taken together, these three laboratory studies indicate white parents actively avoid talking about race as the primary method of racial socialization of their white children. White parents avoided talking about race when they had agreed to do so as part of a research study, when they were reading race-related books with their children, and in daily conversations with their teenagers. White parents talked around race, focusing instead on egalitarian values. White parents and children avoided using labels to identify race, and seemed to consider their own race as meaningless. While these studies employed variations in their theoretical frameworks, each focused on the social nature of learning race.

Discourses of whiteness in the Home and Community

Unlike the quantitative and mixed methods studies described above, Miller (2014, 2015) conducted an in-depth qualitative study of the racial socialization of her own children that occurred in her home and community utilizing a critical sociocultural framework. Data sources consisted of audio and video recordings, ethnographic field notes, photographs of artifacts, and researcher's journal. Miller's nine-month parent child ethnography "examines the nuanced ways we use language to shape our ideological orientations and worldview" (p. 140). Perhaps due to her position as a white parent seeking to disrupt color evasiveness as well as the in-depth study of a variety of discourses, Miller's work moves beyond color

evasiveness to examine the implicit messages about race her children encountered in their day-to-day lives. Miller positions her children as co-constructors of meaning and their own identity development, therefore her study also outlines the ways in which her children interpret and employ the messages about race they encounter.

Miller identifies three discourses her children encountered on a daily basis: discourses of whiteness, discourses of omission, and discourses of blackness. In turn, she found that her children engaged in discourses of re-appropriation and discourses of negative emotion.

Discourses of whiteness served to normalize whiteness and characterize it as good, socializing children into the ideology of white supremacy. Discourses of whiteness were categorized as over-representation of white people in visual texts, music, media messages of white people as the drivers of American capitalist society, white people as foremost in the educational process, and white people as the generic human. *Discourses of omission* of People of Color manifested in texts in the home environment, school curricula, community, and church settings. Her children demonstrated their mediation and adoption of discourses of whiteness and omission by carrying out discourses of re-appropriation. The children demonstrated re-appropriation by interpreting characters in books as white by drawing them as such, and by *whiting out*, or representing People of Color as colorless in depictions of actual experienced events. A third discourse of whiteness, discourse of citizenship in which white people were depicted as being tough on black crime, was a common element of political discourse, and served to convey whites as protectors and Black people as dangerous.

Discourses of blackness were characterized as token symbolism and discourses of pity. Miller (2015) indicates “Discourses of blackness worked in conjunction with discourses of whiteness to construct narratives of white supremacy” (p. 146). In school curriculum

“token persons of colour [] were viewed as helping out the efforts of white people or working towards a national cause of adopted ideals” (p. 147). Pity for People of Color was conveyed through church and school charity events. Miller’s children responded to discourses of Blackness in their daily lives with discourses of negative emotion such as discomfort, fear, and pity. All three of her children expressed feelings of discomfort and sometimes fear while in the company of People of Color. Her five-year-old son expressed pity for People of Color by saying to his mother, “Did you know that our church is doing a really good thing? They are giving money to poor people” (p. 149). When Miller asked who these poor people were, she found that her son “categorised people of colour across countries, continents and people – El Salvador, Africa, South America and Native American Indians – as poor, distancing them geographically from himself” (p. 149). Miller concludes, “When positive emotions associated with being white are juxtaposed with the negative emotions associated with white views of blackness, the duality between whiteness and blackness can be more completely understood in the development of a white identity” (p. 147).

Miller’s (2014, 2015) work illustrates the ways in which children in the United States are often surrounded by messages that place white people as normal and best; the helpers, safe-keepers and moral authority of the world. When Miller’s study is juxtaposed with the literature on color evasiveness in white families, one can see how avoiding discussions about race perpetuates systems of racial oppression by leaving them unexamined and treating race as unimportant. Such approaches to racial socialization lead to complacency and acceptance of the status quo. This is especially problematic in the current American sociopolitical climate in which racism is “overtly tolerated and normalized” (Montoya & Sarcedo, 2018, p. 71), a context in which Montoya and Sarcedo (2018) assert we cannot choose to “lie to our

children about the reality of the world and the oppression that exists” (p. 79). In the following section, I examine the literature on racial socialization in school settings in which no explicit antiracist curriculum is being enacted.

Racial Discourse at School

In this section, I describe four studies that were conducted in school settings. These studies were designed to examine the ways students understand race and employ racial understandings in their daily interactions in school settings. While school curricula and teaching practices are not the focus of these studies they are sometimes described as part of the larger social milieu. For example, Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) note the center in which their study was conducted employs a “popular antibias curriculum” (p. 39) intended by school faculty “to foster in the children acceptance and value of differences” (p. 98). However, none of the curricula in these four studies are described as antiracist or critical. Indeed, Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) point out that when a preschool teacher who is experienced in and committed to teaching the prescribed antibias curriculum is “confronted with overt racism, she is not sure how to respond” (p. 170). The first three studies investigate peer interactions in school settings while the fourth compares racial socialization across educational settings. These four studies are diverse in setting, age range, and methodology, but share common themes which will be discussed in the conclusion of this section.

Two Studies of Racial Discourse in Preschool

Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) conducted an eleven-month ethnography at a white majority, multi-ethnic and multiracial preschool in the United States. Van Ausdale typically spent ten hours per day five days per week in the field positioning herself as a non-sanctioning adult playmate. The researchers set out “to discover how children themselves

perpetuated racial and ethnic patterns, away from the prying eyes and controlling activities of adults.” (p. 2).

Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) utilize a critical sociocultural framework, operating on the understanding that, “As children collect experiences with others, the richness and complexity of those experiences will impel and reshape their cognitive processing and organization.” (p. 19). Further, the authors examine the ways in which children take up physical and linguistic cultural tools in their interpersonal relationships to gain social understanding. In other words, “They take the language and concepts of the larger society and experiment with them in their own interactions with other children and adult caregivers.” (p. 182).

Through unobtrusive observation, Van Ausdale witnessed children using racialized language to “develop their own individuality in relation to others, garner attention from other children and adults, and—at least in the case of the dominant-group children—develop a strong sense of power over others” (p. 23). Essentially, the researchers found that despite a preschool “curriculum that embraces respect for all cultures” (p. 170) and promotes celebration of all skin tones and ethnic backgrounds, children enacted both healthy and harmful racial discourse in their private play. Major findings from the study describe trends in the social environment of children that teachers seemed unaware of: skin color holds abstract meaning for children, children use racial discourses to exert social power, children and adults employ a rigid definition of race based on appearance, and children actively hide some racial discourses from adults.

Foundational to other findings, is the notion that children understood skin color to hold abstract meaning beyond a celebration of diverse skin tones as beautiful. The children in

this study seemed to tie their skin color to their identity, and were able to represent this symbolically using the cultural tools of skin tone art materials. For example, when asked to choose the color of paint that matches her skin, a four-year-old biracial girl chose light brown for one hand and dark brown for the other explaining, “I have two colors in my skin” (p. 58). The researchers understood this to signal the child’s “understanding of her biracial parentage and identity” (p. 58).

The authors also found, “Young children often use racial and ethnic ideas and concepts to control interaction with others, maintain their individual space, or establish dominance in interactions with other people” (p. 96). For example, a four-year-old white girl told a three-year-old Asian girl, “Only white Americans can pull this wagon” (p. 103) and a three-year-old white girl told a three-year-old Black boy, “Black people are not allowed on the swing right now, especially Black boys” (p. 106). Children also used racial and ethnic concepts to acquire adult attention, a limited commodity in the preschool. In particular children who possessed language knowledge associated with their racial and ethnic identity and “wanted attention or company and was not receiving it, beg[an] a performance in another language . . . [as] a way to accomplish this goal” (p. 119). This was the case when three and four-year-old brothers from two different Asian countries asked Van Ausdale if she knew “what a certain nonsense phrase means . . . then translat[ing] the meaning” (p. 120). This drew the attention of a teacher who asked “what language they speak at home” (p. 120) to which the four-year-old boy replied “Florida language” (p. 120). The authors understood interactions like these to be reiterations of power dynamics children observed in the larger society.

A third finding is that some children and some adults insisted on naming a person's race rather than accepting the race label that person gave himself or herself, demonstrating a rigid definition of race based on appearance and societal norms. For instance, a four-year-old white boy told a four-year-old biracial girl that she could not celebrate Kwanza because she is not Black and several adults rejected a young girl's (correct) assertion that she is from Africa and insisted on teaching her that she is African American not African.

An important finding made possible by the participant-observer relationship was that sometimes children actively hide racial discourse from adults. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) observed while on the playground, children "frequently used this private child's space to practice and discuss things that they knew adults would interfere with if they observed or overheard" (p. 167). They also note that discourse about race sometimes changed when teachers left an activity. For example, a teacher read a book featuring children with different skin tones and encouraged the children to compare their own skin color to the children in the book. Then the teacher left to take a phone call. "As soon as the children were in charge, the focus moved from an artificial comparison to children in a book to a real-life comparison of each other's skin" (pp. 150–151). This finding indicates children are aware of both the importance adults place on race and of the care teachers take to talk about race and ethnicity only in sanctioned discourses.

Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) conclude that even young children have access to images, language, interactions, and other media that convey racism. Further, young children draw meaning from these texts and act upon their understanding. Van Ausdale and Feagin explain, "Once most young children recognize the importance of racial and ethnic distinctions as meaningful concepts, they begin to reconstruct them into substantial

intellectual and interactional devices of their own making, equipment suitable for use in their social milieu” (p. 22). The social context within which children test their racial understandings has profound effects on the conclusions they will draw. This includes the peers and adults they interact with and the nature of those interactions.

Park (2011) conducted a qualitative study grounded in critical sociocultural theory at a preschool serving predominantly white children with highly educated parents. Like Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001), Park asserts children make sense of race using the tools made available to them and in the context of their social experiences. Participants in her study included prekindergarten children ages three to five years. Data collection consisted of playground observations of 20 children and one-on-one interviews of six children selected through maximum variation sampling. During the interviews, children “were shown a picture book that depicted an ethnically diverse group of children and asked several questions about which characters looked most like or different from themselves and which looked most like or different from other children in the class” (p. 403) and asked “to draw pictures of people” (p. 402). It is important to note the prompts around the picture book focus on appearance and are likely to elicit a certain response, but unlike some studies, the children were not given restricted response options. Interviews were facilitated using a dog puppet who claimed to not know about human diversity so that the “interview protocol would not be construed by the child as known-answer questions” (p. 400).

Using a critical sociocultural theoretical lens, Park found race and ethnicity marked by physical features to be important aspects of identity to the young children in her study. Through observation she learned that one child took great pride in his Navajo heritage stating, “I’m NOT American! I’m not! I’m Indian! And part White man!” (p. 403). As part of

this conversation, another child stated, “I’m White American” (p. 403). In addition to conclusions made through observation, Park describes children carefully choosing colors from the selection of “‘regular’ and ‘skin-colored’ markers” (p. 402), which she understands to be cultural tools, to draw pictures of themselves and their family members. While drawing, Lulu the dog puppet asked the children questions about their drawings. During this activity, one African American-Latina-European American girl, “pointed out that [the researcher’s] hand was ‘white’ while hers was ‘light brown’ and stressed throughout the interview that her hair was dark brown, not black like [the researcher’s]” (p. 403). Further when reading a multicultural book, the child compared herself to an African American character in the book stating adamantly, “‘No, I not, that not black. Her got black hair. Cause I not got black hair. I got just brown hair. No, that not brown. This is dark brown. I’s dark brown’” (p. 403).

In addition to placing importance on physical features and ethnic/racial identity, children demonstrated knowledge of deeper social systems of race. When asked by the dog puppet Lulu why some kids are brown and some are lighter yellow, a five-year-old white girl told the puppet that skin can get tan from the vegetables one eats or from the sun; people have darker skin because they come from different countries; and “it’s a different kind of person.” When asked by the puppet, “What kind of person are you?” the child responds, “I’m um, American person” (p. 410). Park stresses that rather than being confused or limited by her cognitive ability, the child was assembling theory parallel to theories about race and skin color in the dominant society that she had encountered in her day-to-day life namely:

- (a) pseudo-scientific theories that attempt to ground race in biological properties and/or cultural practices, (b) the circular reasoning that people have group traits because they are members of groups that possess those traits, (c) reasoning that people of color are ‘different’ and foreign in the sense that they come from ‘different’ places, (d) and reasoning that Whiteness is associated with Americanness. (p. 412)

Racial Discourse in the Elementary School

Kromidas' (2014) ethnography of four to eleven-year-olds in what she terms a *super-diverse* New York City school further illuminates the socializing power of the social milieu in terms of peer interactions. Kromidas carried out a 14-month ethnography grounded in posthumanist theory in a public school located in a working and middle class neighborhood. She found in this setting, children challenged dominant conceptions of race through “humor, risk and play” (p. 434). Kromidas utilizes a posthumanist perspective which “challenges the traditional way that humans have been conceived and the anthropocentrism of humanism” (p. 423) and focuses “on behavior not encompassed by the scales of rationality” (p. 435). This lens leads her to point out children have often been conceived of as not yet human, “instinctual beings . . . unfettered by social and cultural constraints . . . [and thus] imputed to be natural” (p. 423). Kromidas rejects claims of children as not human and race as natural, but also recognizes that race is tied to the physicality of the human body. She sets out “to take account of the actual properties of physical bodies, but refuse to consider these continuously varying properties as ‘unmediated descriptors’ of discrete human types” (p. 425) and “to rethink the human itself” (p. 427) by “emphasiz[ing] laughter, play and surrealism in everyday life” (p. 425).

She found that the children were profoundly aware of physical markers of race and asserts that they negotiated physical and social definitions of race in order to overcome “obstacles to their social relations and their conceptions of Self and Other” (p. 431). She describes a ten-year-old Bengali girl’s creation of a skin-tone test “based on the presence or absence of a line separating the palm from the back of the hand” (p. 431) and explains that

the test was “less about categorization than wonder at bodies [sic] fascinating differences” (p. 431). In another vignette, a ten-year-old African American boy commented on the author’s tan exclaiming, “You almost as black as me!” (p. 432). A third vignette involved two African American friends of unidentified age. One boy rapped and the other commented, “I don’t even listen to rap music.” His friend responded, “That’s ‘cause you a white boy!” A white boy nearby questioned, “How could he be a white boy! Look at the color!” The boy who rapped, quietly and then more forcefully told the white child to shut up (pp. 432–433). Kromidas expounds,

Kids regularly struggled to interpret just what was meant by an utterance – they took into consideration various factors beyond the statement itself, such as the speaker’s perceived motivation, social relations, character and stance towards race. These moments of unease and potential conflict were public and educative. (p. 432)

Kromidas describes three additional vignettes in which children physically marked by light skin claimed to be Puerto Rican, Muslim, Moroccan, African, and/or Black. Their claims were accepted, or not, depending on their interpreted stance on race as well as perceived “social relations, dress, speech style, verbal skills” (p. 434), and authenticity. Kromidas ultimately describes the children as agentive, both influenced by and influencing culture. She concludes,

It is clear that the kids were aware that bodies are sticky with meanings, but they were able to refuse those meanings, while not having to adopt a ‘we’re all the same’ rhetoric, or closing their eyes to differences in bodies. (p. 434)

Kromidas’ (2014) study is unique in that it provides examples of elementary-age students redefining race in the context of peer relationships. Her study addresses the fact that race is associated with skin color, but does not limit race to skin color. Kromidas provides an example of how children in diverse educational settings “shape identities related to the

conflict and tension that is always present in such communities” (Lewis & Moje, 2003, p. 1979).

Comparing Racial Discourse across Elementary Schools

While Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001), Park (2011), and Kromidas (2014) study children’s racial discourse in school settings, Priest, Walton, White, Kowal, Baker, and Paradies (2016) use qualitative methods to better understand variations in student socialization across school settings, examining student, teacher, and parent perspectives. Thus their study offers important insights into differences in the ways children are socialized around race from multiple sources and across contexts.

The Priest et al. (2016) study takes place in Melbourne, Australia across four primary schools with differing racial/ethnic and socio-economic demographics. Two of the schools were “comprised mainly Anglo-Celtic students from mid- to high-socioeconomic backgrounds” (p. 812). One of the schools was comprised of children from “low- to mid-socioeconomic backgrounds” (p. 812) and “the majority of students had first and second generation migrant and refugee backgrounds from East African countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea” (pp. 812-813). The fourth school was comprised of students from low to mid-socioeconomic background and “a significant proportion of students from first and second generation migrant or refugee backgrounds from countries in South and Southeast Asia and the Middle East” (p. 813).

Participants were eight to twelve-year old students, their parents, and their teachers across these four settings. Overall, participants included 67 students, 21 parents, 27 teachers, and 14 administrators as key school informants. Data sources included classroom observations and interviews of students, parents, teachers, and administrators. All interviews

were semi-structured, and focus group interviews included four scenarios representing race-based discrimination “to determine how students felt parents and teachers would respond and correspondingly, how parents and teachers felt they would respond to students in terms of key messages and behaviours” (p. 814). Focus interviews were conducted separately with students, parents, and teachers at each school site. Individual interviews were conducted with administrators due to the power dynamics associated with their job function. Four parents were also considered key informants and asked to participate in individual interview. Classroom observations were conducted by at least two researchers at each setting across a time span of five months for a total of 45 observation hours across all four schools.

The study’s findings echo the themes of studies set in the United States as outlined above: students across settings demonstrated awareness of race and racism; children experimented with race-related discourses collected from the broader society, and white adults exhibited color evasiveness. The study adds to the literature by elucidating nuances between settings with different demographic compositions and teachers with varying degrees of comfort talking about race. The classroom observations offer examples of how teachers avoid race conversations even when covering historical topics grounded in racism, as well as how some teachers take up topics of racism in everyday life.

Across the four primary schools, all students demonstrated an awareness of race and racism. However, students “from visible minority backgrounds [reported] experience[ing] racism themselves” (Priest et al., 2016, p. 816) with children from East African backgrounds reporting the most incidents of racism. Across all four settings, majority and minoritized children took up discourses of color-evasiveness especially the phrase, “that’s racist,” indicating a belief that talking about race at all was racist behavior. Even while color

evasiveness was a discourse norm, students participated in overtly racist discourses culled from the broader culture. For example, ethnic minority students asserted Chinese people are ““rude and they have long moustaches and look very . . . scary” (p. 818). Further, “students from visible minority backgrounds . . . described experiences of racism perpetrated by their classmates from both majority groups, and other minority groups, as well as by people in the wider community” (p. 816). These experiences include being told, ““You black people, go back to where you came from, go back to Africa”” (p. 816) and being called “The n-word” (p. 816).

What was considered racist discourse by the students appeared to vary depending on the demographics of the people in that setting. In the student focus group from a school where the majority of students were first or second generation African immigrants, students claimed Chinese people look *the same* as each other, *weird*, and *scary*, no student in the focus group countered this talk. However, when a student pulled her eyes to mimic epicanthic folds, another student said, “She’s being racist” (p. 818). In the same focus group, the students debated if a Black person calling another Black person ‘Black’ was racist. It seems logical that if this school had a substantial Asian-Australian population that this talk would be challenged more readily. Differences in social rules and racialized language across settings was also demonstrated in one child’s story of being raced differently depending on context. A student “who identified as both Eritrean and Saudi Arabian explained that people at her Arabic language school had teased her about her darker skin colour relative to her classmates with lighter skin colour” (pp. 816-817). She also demonstrated worry that darker-skinned peers at her primary school might identify her as white. This student’s story

challenged the notion of race essentialism in that her race was defined differently in terms of skin color and social standing depending on the setting.

Similar to the United States, Australia is a white-dominant colonized space and the teachers in the study are described as primarily “from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, operat[ing] from an undisrupted position of white privilege” (p. 822). Thus it is not surprising that teachers and white parents participating in the study exhibited color evasiveness. Parents reported worrying that talking about race might “draw[] unnecessary attention to perceived barriers between people” (p. 826) so they did not bring up topics around race and ethnicity. In classrooms, ““the majority white, high socio-economic status school, was the only site [of four] where students did not discuss racism in any depth either in focus groups or classroom discussions” (p. 819). At the two majority white schools, even when discussing Aboriginal people or the history of colonialism, talk about skin color and race was actively silenced. This was achieved by teachers changing the subject or simply restating the statement about race and then moving on.

The researchers conclude, “teacher confidence impacted the extent to which students were encouraged to engage in discussion about racism” (p. 822). Even after showing a video about Aboriginal child removal policy and the White Australia Policy, teachers evaded talk about race. For example, a student said, ‘A long time ago, people used to treat Indigenous people as slaves, treat them like dogs. [They] didn’t think the Indigenous people were equal to them’” (p. 824). The teacher responded, ‘Which Indigenous people?’ The student replied “all Indigenous people” (p. 824). Then the issues of inequality and slavery the student brought up were not explored further. Even after showing a video about *Aboriginal child removal policy* and the *White Australia Policy*, teachers evaded talk about race. The issues of

inequality and slavery the student brought up were not explored further by the teacher. The researchers note, “with the exception of [the majority African immigrant school], teachers at the other three schools focused primarily on culture rather than race or ethnicity, emphasising sameness while glossing over how certain differences are made to matter in society” (p. 822).

However, at the majority African immigrant school, the observed teachers were more skilled at race conversations and engaged with students in nuanced conversations around topics of race as they applied to the history curriculum and the students’ daily lives. For example, they talked about the social rules surrounding the N word in terms of intent and racial identity of the speaker and context as outlined in the excerpt below.

- Student 2: Some people say it as a joke.
Rebecca: Is that racism? If [a student] came up to me and said, ‘What’s up nxxxxx?’
Student 3: If a friend says it, it’s a greeting. You have to use the greeting to someone you know really well.
Rebecca: So you have to have a relationship? You have to have a relationship with someone and it’s about their intent. How do you know what their intent is? Voice? Facial expression?
Student 4: And the voice that you use. If someone was white and said to you. . .
Rebecca: What if [Student 2] said it?
Student 2: It would be racist if I said it but not if he said it to him. If you talk to your own skin colour [it’s okay]. (p. 825)

In this same conversation, the teacher also supported a discussion of what is considered racist discourse.

- Rebecca: Is it racist to tease someone’s accent?
Student 5: It is racist because that’s how you are, you can’t change that unless you go to another country early on.
Student 6: The others thought accent was racist, but I don’t. It depends, some people mimic accents they might not.
Rebecca: If you don’t intend it, is it racist?
Student 1: It depends on the way the person takes it.
Rebecca: If we’re trying to build relationships with diverse people, we need to know what racism is. (p. 825)

Parallel to the finding that most teachers employ color evasive discourses, Priest et al. (2016) found “Most parents, like many teachers, felt it was acceptable to talk about culture rather than race or ethnicity” (p. 826) and many parents demonstrated “talking about difference is construed as not only irrelevant or inconsequential, but also as something that draws unnecessary attention to perceived barriers between people” (p. 826). For example, one parent at a majority Anglo-Celtic school explained, “I wouldn’t want to bring to their attention that someone was different or that something needed discussing. It’s more that it just is. Unless they ask a question about it we just accept that that’s how it is so I wouldn’t be initiating, ‘Why do you think they’re doing that?’ or ‘Why do you think we do it this way and they do it that way?’” (p. 826). Another parent from the same school insisted, ““They don’t care. I don’t think the kids care. I don’t think they notice”” (p. 826). Also parallel to the discourse trends of teachers across the four settings, Priest et al. found some parents actively countered color evasive discourse. One Aboriginal parent helped her child navigate racial discourse and become more comfortable with racial terms. The parent explained,

At the moment she’s got a very black and white view about racism. So just trying to get her to think a bit more about what racism is and her understanding of racism because I know we might be talking about, might be something like even with the word black in it and she’ll go, ‘But that’s racist’ and I’ll have to explain what racism is. That it’s not actually when you’re talking about a black cat. (p. 827)

These four studies of children’s racial socialization in multiracial and multi-ethnic schools demonstrate that children from preschool to upper elementary not only notice physical differences, but assign them racial meaning gleaned from the larger society. While some parents and teachers actively counter harmful discourse norms, most engage in color evasiveness contributing to children’s racial socialization. Children use their understandings of race purposefully in social interactions influenced by the cultural context. Further, children

do not merely learn the rules and meanings of the cultural context, they also participate in changing cultural norms and understandings including those that pertain to race. These conclusions are impossible to draw using quantitative methodology. Each of the four studies employed observation which made it possible to draw conclusions about *how* children learn race, not just *if* children learn race. Unobtrusive participant observation in the Van Ausdale & Feagin (2001) and Kromidas (2014) studies made researchers privy to social interactions that most adults are unaware of and that children might actively hide from their teachers and parents. The semi-structured interviews employed in the Park (2011) and Priest et al. (2016) studies allowed children to express themselves through back-and-forth conversation, revealing new meanings and experiences in response to conversational partners.

School Curriculum Designed to Counter Racism

The studies described in previous sections make it clear that children learn and utilize racialized discourse at an early age. Further, the adults responsible for guiding them often deny that children are aware of the ways race operates in the social world and are typically unprepared to counter racist discourse. In this final section of the literature review, I share four studies of antiracist curricula enacted by study participants and published within the last ten years. Each study includes the voice(s) of a teacher researcher. These teacher researchers each ground their curricula in critical frameworks, and two of them utilize critical literacy as a lens by which to guide curricular decisions. Each utilizes children's literature and situates the curriculum in the children's lived experiences to different degrees. I begin with a study by Boutte, López-Robertson, & Powers-Costello (2011) that demonstrates the ways in which children understand racism through reading relevant bilingual literature and relating it to their own experiences. Then I describe a study by Souto-Manning (2009) in which children come

to understand the way race shapes their school lives and take action. I follow that by highlighting findings from an autoethnography by Kuby (2013) who examines her own position as a white teacher enacting a critical literacy curriculum. I conclude with a study by Husband (2010) who describes the difficulties he encountered when seeking to enact an Afrocentric history unit in his first grade classroom.

Bilingual Literature Discussions for Antiracism

Boutte, López-Robertson, & Powers-Costello (2011) examine the use of weekly bilingual literature discussions/pláticas literarias to engage second grade students in “social issues that were significant to them and that they identified with” (p. 337). Of the 15 students in the class, “10 were bilingual (Spanish/English); one child was Native American; one child was Puerto Rican & Mexican; one child was Biracial (White and Mexican-American), and 12 were first generation Mexican–American. Almost all of the children received free and reduced lunch” (p. 336). The study took place in the natural setting of the classroom, specifically the established procedure of literature discussions/pláticas literarias. Books selected were both fiction and nonfiction and covered “social issues such as racism, illiteracy, poverty, immigration” (p. 337). The procedure was carried out as follows: bilingual reading of the book one week prior to the activity, sending the “books home with the children to be read and discussed with family members” (p. 337), classroom discussions during which children “engaged in conversation with one another in small groups...shar[ing] insights, questions, wonderings, and connections with each other” (p. 337), drawing and writing responses to the book, sharing responses with the group. After several literature discussions/pláticas literarias, the teacher-researcher asked the children to respond to the question, *What does racismo/racism mean to you?* Findings are represented through

photographed and captioned artifacts of five student responses. The responses included definitions of racism, “I think racism means hurting other people” (p. 338), historical depictions of racism such as scenes from the Civil Rights Movement, and personal experiences, such as “I think that racism is people want Mexicans to leave” (p. 338). The children use different color markers and crayons to illustrate people and one child labeled people *Black*, *Brown*, and *white* in his illustration. The authors conclude,

The second graders in these examples demonstrated an awareness and understandings of race and racism that were based on their lived experiences. By engaging children in dialogue, [López-Robertson] provided much needed opportunities for them to make sense of their everyday experiences with racism. (p. 337)

This study provides an example of antiracist curriculum that is tied to children’s lived experiences and school literacy objectives. The curriculum engages families by sending home literacy materials and encouraging home discussions around topics from the antiracist curriculum. The children’s responses to this curriculum indicate the second graders are capable of drawing connections between racism in the past and present. This work answers the call for multicultural materials such as skin tone markers and children’s literature “and critical discussions concerning race and racism” (Escayg et al., 2017, p. 16).

Critical Literacy for Localized Social Action

Souto-Manning (2009) describes a teacher research study conducted over two years in her first and second grade classrooms. The focus of the study, “why certain children went to certain classes while others could not opt to do so” (p. 55), emerged as important to Souto-Manning and her students in their day-to-day life in school. Data sources for the study include field notes, student artifacts, student and teacher interviews, audio recordings of whole and small group activities, and researcher journal. The audio recordings were collected

during teacher-lead discussions as well as by placing recording devices around the room to document student-lead conversations.

The study focus emerged in the context of a critical literacy classroom in which Souto-Manning conceptualized learners as “agentive subjects rather than passive recipients of knowledge” (p. 53), supported “critical dialogue . . . to transform and recreate relationships, [and] foster[ed] political and critical consciousness” (p. 53). In this classroom, it was common to read multicultural literature on social justice topics and share diverse perspectives among a community of learners. During a discussion of Ruby Bridges’ experiences of racism and segregation, a child commented,

It’s just like us...when you don’t know you goin’ special ed, to resource, and you thin’ you special. Then you know later that you really dumb. You all alone, ya’ know. We all here in yo’ class, but when we go to tha’ other class, it’s not everybody.
(p. 67)

A classmate responded by going to the board to tally students who attend remedial classes and those who attend gifted classes. The children decided to use pink and brown markers to designate race because, “we are not really white. So let’s choose pink” (p. 67). The class found that all children who received gifted services were white or Asian, all who received English language services were Asian or Latinx, and all receiving special education services were African American boys.

Souto-Manning “wanted to bring into this conversation the historical influences shaping the relationship between diversity and access” (p. 55) and did so through children’s literature. The class continued to read about and discuss racial segregation. The first and second graders constructed and demonstrated understanding of the complex sociopolitical nature of race through conversations that began with real world experiences and readings of

children's literature. "[T]he curriculum emerge[d] from social issues exposed in multicultural children's books and [] developed through dialogue" (p. 58). During a peer-to-peer interaction one child said, "It's all 'bout tryin' to make ev'ryone sames; but same's white; same's rich. I'm black and I live n the project" (p. 51). The children did not only talk about the problem; they took action, a tenet of critical literacy. They decided to talk to the principal about the segregation they had identified in their own classroom. The principal acknowledged the gravity of the problem and encouraged the children to continue talking about it.

The children and their teacher sought a solution by first seeking to understand what each group of children experienced when attending a pullout service. Through dialogue, they learned about each groups' experience of going to a pullout class. After learning that the children in special education received phonics-based instruction and the children in gifted education participated in inquiry-based instruction, the class decided they would all like to engage in inquiry-based instruction. They proposed that all teachers who typically take children out of their classroom come into the classroom instead. Souto-Manning received permission from the principal and students' families. Then she coordinated schedules with the pullout service teachers. The class completed second grade with no school-mandated segregation by sharing all services across students in the regular education classroom.

This study demonstrates what is possible when children learn race within a critical curricular framework. Similar to what is evidenced in other studies, children took up the cultural tools that were made available to them, (i.e., tally charts, colored markers, children's literature, open talk about race, and a social justice perspective). They took up these cultural tools in a certain way due to the multiple racial and ethnic perspectives that were given voice

within a community-of-learners classroom culture. Their teacher positioned them as agentive and supported their goal to make change. In this context, the children were able to understand race as an identity marker that is also used to position some as smart/able/deserving and others as dumb and deficient.

Whiteness Can Permeate the Critical Literacy Curriculum

Kuby (2013) conducted a six-week autoethnographic critical literacy inquiry set in a half-day summer school program in the Southern United States. Her class of 28 kindergarteners was made up of mostly white middle class students and included five African American children, one Asian child, and twins who identified as white and Asian. Kuby is a white middle class woman who utilizes autoethnography to better understand her own positionality and influence on the curriculum. Data sources for this study include video recordings, field notes, student and class artifacts, and researcher journal.

The study began with a critical incident that occurred on the school playground. According to Kuby(2013), when her students sat on the only shaded benches on the playground, “teachers would yell at my students, stating that the bench was for adults only” (p. 38). Kuby responded by talking with her students later in the classroom about how this incident reminded her of Rosa Parks being told to move to the back of the bus. They made a list of how they might respond if asked to move off of the bench again. Kuby shared information about Rosa Parks and segregation through a timeline and interactive reading of children’s literature. For the remainder of the summer, the class learned about segregation and Rosa Parks in particular. In the context of the critical literacy curriculum, they continued to discuss what to do about the recess bench problem

Throughout her analysis of the curriculum, Kuby examines the ways in which her own whiteness and personal experiences as a white person shape the curriculum and her moment-to-moment interactions. Kuby found that she had difficulty talking about race with the children. Notice in the following quote from a video recording of a read aloud, she avoids mentioning race when discussing segregation,

Well, that means people were in separate places. That means some people could not talk to other people (*used one hand to show division, separation*). Some people could only eat at some restaurants; other people had to eat at other restaurants (*using hand to show division*). I wonder why? (p. 60)

After a child brings up race, Kuby talks about “African American people” and “people who had whiter skin than them” (p. 61) and gestures toward herself. She explained that she initially avoided talking explicitly about race especially in relation to oppression because she was worried how white children would respond to being positioned as oppressor.

As an early childhood educator who values emergent curriculum and student construction of knowledge and a white person who has been socialized not to talk about race, Kuby struggled with answering student questions about race directly, preferring to restate students’ words and ask questions. For example, when a child asked why Black people had to sit in the back of the bus, Kuby replied, “Somebody made a law like that. That said that. Why do you think men would make that law?” (p. 66).

Kuby found that she and the children engaged in *nice talk* and supplied *easy answers* which served to downplay injustices in the past and present. An example of Kuby’s nice talk is “[Rose Parks] was asked to get up out of her seat and move” (p. 89). An example of children’s easy answers begins with a child claiming, “It doesn’t matter the color of their skin” (p. 91). Kuby replies, “It doesn’t matter? Oh, well, it seemed like it mattered... to the

people who made the law” (p. 91). Another child replied, “They were sorry. They were so sorry” (p. 91). Another child added, “Yeah, so they won’t do it again” (p. 91).

Kuby (2013) also described difficulty with race labels. She writes, “One of the most troubling aspects of language was trying to figure out what words to use to describe someone’s race” (p. 92). While she and the children used the terms Black, Brown, and African American to describe Black people, Kuby only used the term white to describe white people. In analyzing recordings and transcripts, Kuby found the ways she used the terms *we* and *they* troubling because “pronouns include some people and exclude others, and situate people within categories” (p. 94).

Within this curriculum, children learned some of the racialized history of the United States. They gained some experience with talking about race in a school setting. They also learned about race through mediated interactions with peers. Upon reading a book containing the following rhyme, “Roses are red, violets are blue, don’t let Sister Anne get black on you,” Kuby realized some children thought dark skin color could wipe off onto light skin. Kuby took the opportunity to talk about fear, misunderstanding, and racial teasing. She also asked an African American child to wipe a hand on a white child, an action she immediately regretted due to its inappropriateness and potential to Other a child. However, the children take up this action later in play. Kuby writes, “Experiences through role-play assisted them to understand that race is not about skin color, but socially constructed ideas related to fear and power” (p. 106).

Kuby concludes the book with an admission that she and her students did not approach the teacher who told students to get off the *teacher bench*. Once when Kuby sat on the bench with the offending teacher, some children sat with her, but no one talked to the

other teacher about solutions to the problem of sharing the shade amongst teachers and students. After acknowledging the power dynamics at play between children and teachers, Kuby wondered, “Would the children expect me to speak up for them after I brought my observations from several weeks ago back to them? Was it my responsibility as the adult to speak up for them?” (p. 53). At the end of the book, Kuby concedes, “Speaking up was a risk, at the time, I was not willing to take” (p. 106) and implies that this is due in some part to life experiences that taught her that schools are places where rules are not to be questioned and children were always to respect authority.

Kuby’s study provides a highly personal example of the ways in which whiteness might permeate antiracist curriculum especially when it is being carried out by a white person. Her analyses and discussions draw attention to the ways whiteness affects language choices and in turn curricular possibilities. Her work also draws attention to the bravery needed to be effective critical literacy role models in our work with children.

The Need for a Critical, Antiracist Perspective in Home and School History Curriculum

Husband (2010) conducted critical action research in his first grade classroom examining the learning opportunities and challenges of implementing the Afrocentric American history unit he designed. Husband designed a nine-lesson unit to fit within the time constraints of the mandated curriculum. He decided to cover the African American experience from the enslavement of Africans to the Civil rights movement within these nine lessons over the course of three months. Each lesson included an introduction of the topic, reading of a relevant children’s book, process drama, debriefing, and time to write and draw

about the experience. Sources of data for the project included video recordings of the lessons, researcher field notes and journal, and student artifacts.

Husband outlined four challenges to implementation: determining the scope of the curriculum, failing to consider student background knowledge, supporting student movement beyond dichotomized notions of racial justice, and tension with white parents.

Husband found “nine lessons seemed to be a quite confining amount of space to adequately and richly discuss the complexities of African American history” (p. 67). He rightly worried that he had essentialized and oversimplified the African American experience and reflected that just one of the lessons, such as the lesson on the Civil Rights Movement, could be expanded to span the entire nine-lesson unit. In addition, Husband was surprised at what the children already knew about the topics he had planned to present including their knowledge of the Underground Railroad. He wondered if their families had taught them African American history. A major implication of the study is the importance of providing time for children to contribute to conversations and flexibility to follow their interests. Husband also found his students had difficulty comprehending and articulating the historical and racialized roles he asked them to take on during the process drama portion of the lessons. Each process drama had children take on roles of oppressor and oppressed. He found that children often enjoyed the power of the oppressor role in a way that made it difficult for them to articulate the injustices the role embodied. Husband’s class of 28 students included four white children. Husband reported complaints from the families of two of those children. Each parent voiced concerns about the age-appropriateness of the curriculum and expressed being unsure about how to talk to their children about the concepts presented.

Husband's study points to the importance of an emergent curriculum grounded in students' experiences. Unlike Souto-Manning's (2009) curriculum, Husband's history curriculum was detached from the children's everyday experiences making it difficult for them to empathize with and deeply understand historical injustices. Further, the limited amount of time spent on each broad swath of history lead to an essentialized depiction of African Americans as simply oppressed rather than a nuanced understanding of African Americans as agentive, resilient, and diverse. Perhaps most worrisome is Husband's curriculum did not offer agency to the children. Since the curriculum was framed as history rather than critical literacy, students were not offered opportunities to reconstruct problematic stories or problem-solve around issues of racism in their lives. Essentially antiracist curriculum framed as history fails to recognize the ways in which systemic racism affects students in the present making it difficult for students to engage with the curriculum in empowering ways.

Taken together, these four studies demonstrate the difficulty and importance of implementing effective, emergent antiracist curriculum (see Table 2.1.). Antiracist curriculum should include clear and honest connections to history but should not be limited to the past. Effective curriculum is grounded in the lives of students, emergent rather than pre-planned. Critical literacy offers a promising framework due to its focus on building critical consciousness skills and its focus on action. Teachers enacting antiracist curricula with a critical literacy approach must be willing to take risks and take action. This requires teacher self-awareness and continuing education. The same can be said for parents and families enacting antiracist curriculum within a critical approach. Parents and families must also be willing to constantly question and critique themselves and their own actions, further

their own education, take risks, and take action. White families in particular must learn to build the stamina needed to counter their own fragility (DiAngelo, 2011) resulting from their insulation from racial stress.

An Urgent Need: Interrogating whiteness in Home Settings

In this chapter, I have provided both a detailed description of the literature on white racial socialization and antiracist curriculum and an overview of information on theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and major findings of studies elucidated in this chapter. Table 2.1 is included to provide an overview of the studies described in this chapter in terms of their theoretical framework, methodologies, and major findings. The literature is clear: white children are learning what it means to be white at home (Bartoli et al., 2016, Miller, 2015; Pahlke et al., 2012, Vittrup & Holden, 2011) and in school (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001, Priest et al., 2016). They are learning, overtly and subtly, that to be white, especially white and cisheteronormative, is to be superior (Bartoli et al., 2016, Pahlke et al., 2012, Vittrup & Holden, 2011). There are a few studies on the ways white families socialize their children into color evasiveness (Bartoli et al., 2016, Pahlke et al., 2012, Vittrup & Holden, 2011) and antiracist/critical pedagogies in schools (Boutte, 2011; Husband, 2010; Kuby, 2013, Souto-Manning, 2009). However, there is a dearth of research that examines antiracist curriculum in the white home. This parent-child autoethnography has the potential to fill an urgent need in this society, and in my home—to create curriculum to interrogate whiteness and normalize talk about race and racism, offering real alternatives to color evasiveness that might lead to antiracist, critically literate, white identities in this home and perhaps, beyond.

Table 2.1 Overview of Studies

Studying Children's Conception of Race from a Cognitive Developmentalist Perspective		
Study	Theoretical Lens	Methods
Hirschfield (1995) Kinzler & Dautel (2012) Robert & Gelman (2016)	Cognitive developmentalist	Picture matching
		Children's conception of race as stable increases with age.
Pauker et al. (2010, 2016)	Socio-cognitivist	Picture matching
		Conception of race as stable is associated with racial stereotyping; children's conceptions of race as stable vary with social context.
White Racial Socialization in the Home		
Study	Theoretical Lens	Methods
Vittrup and Holden (2011)	Social learning theory	Intervention and control groups; Pro-Black/Anti-Black Attitude Questionnaire; Black White Evaluative Trait Scale
		White parents avoided talking about race, raising questions about the reliability and validity of quantitative data.
Pahlke, Bigler, and Suizzo (2012)	Critical sociocultural	Observation of parent child interactions in a lab setting; Black-White Evaluative Trait Scale, Ethnic Social Comfort Scale
		White mothers avoided race talk even when reading picture books with multi-racial characters or a racialized theme. Results of the standardized assessments demonstrate some concerns with validity.

Bartoli et al. (2016) Critical sociocultural Case study of white families with at least one white teenage child; interview White families typically avoided talking about race with their teens citing egalitarianism. They defined racism as overt and individual. The few parents who reported close relationships with people of Color told their children stories to counter racial stereotypes.

Miller (2015) Critical Sociocultural 9 month parent child ethnography The children encountered discourses of whiteness, discourses of omission, and discourses of blackness on a daily basis. In turn, they engaged in discourses of re-appropriation and negative emotion.

Racial Discourse at School		
Study	Theoretical Lens	Methods Findings
Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001)	Critical SC	11 month ethnography with researcher acting as a non-sanctioning adult playmate in the preschool Preschool children took up racial information from the culture and use it to develop identity, garner attention, and experiment with positions of power.
Park (2011)	Critical Sociocultural	playground preschool observations and one-on-one interviews with a multicultural book, drawing, and puppet to facilitate discussion Preschool children demonstrated knowledge of social systems in regard to race including an understanding that race and ethnicity marked by physical features were important aspects of their own identity.
Kromidas (2014)	Post human	14-month ethnography in an elementary school setting Children were profoundly aware of physical markers of race and negotiated physical and social definitions of race in order to develop identity and navigate peer relationships.

Priest et al. (2016)	Antiracist education; critical race theory	classroom observations across four primary schools; interviews of students, parents, teachers, and administrators	Students across settings demonstrated awareness of race and racism. Children experimented with race-related discourses collected from the broader society. White parents and teachers exhibited color evasiveness. Teachers' personal and professional knowledge and skills correlated with their comfort in discussing race in the classroom.
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Curriculum Designed to Counter Racism

Study	Theoretical Lens	Methods	Findings
Boutte, López-Robertson, & Powers-Costello (2011)	Antiracist education	Participant observation in the elementary classroom, collection of child-created artifacts	The second graders understood racism through children's literature and their own experiences. They depicted racism in historical and current events and their own lives through writing.
Souto-Manning (2009)	Critical literacy	Teacher research over 2 years in a first and second grade classroom.	With their teacher's facilitation, the children investigated the racially segregated special education opportunities they received including historical foundations. Then they enacted a solution.
Kuby (2013)	Critical literacy, critical whiteness studies	six-week autoethnography in a kindergarten summer school	The white teacher and children engaged in <i>nice talk</i> and supplied <i>easy answers, which</i> served to downplay injustices in the past and present. Whiteness might permeate antiracist curriculum especially when it is carried out by a white person.

Husband (2010) Antiracist education Antiracist education

Nine week critical action research in first grade classroom

Four challenges to implementing an Afrocentric American history curriculum: determining the scope of the curriculum, failing to consider student background knowledge, supporting student movement beyond dichotomized notions of racial justice, and tension with white parents.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Chapter 2 examined literature about the ways children construct and express understandings of race. In this chapter I present a rationale for my methodological stance; a detailed overview of the study methodologies, parent-child autoethnography and poetic inquiry. In addition, I use poetic techniques to share important background information that will take readers into my home and community. This includes poetic descriptions of the participants; the multiple contexts in which data collection took place; data collection methods; data analysis; ethical considerations, positionality, and limitations.

Rationale: Methodological Stance

In order to examine both my own experience as a white parent attempting to enact antiracist curricula and my children's racial identity development within the larger culture, I combine autoethnography, parent child ethnography, and poetic inquiry methodologies. This blending of methodologies allows me to examine the ways my children construct and express understandings about race as mediated by antiracist curricula that I enact. I utilize parent child autoethnography and poetic inquiry because they are methodologies well-suited to explore the deep nature of racial socialization in an evocative and intimate manner. Ethnographic and artistic methodologies move the theoretical framework of critical sociocultural theory into action. The goal of ethnographic studies is to "describe and understand the cultural place and its influence in the everyday lives of its members" including "the varying cultural tools children use to develop in cultural places" (Weisner, 1996, p. 307). Autoethnography, the study of oneself in the context of the larger culture, is the "methodology of choice for exploring issues of culture, power, and communication in

society” (Boylorn et al., 2013, p. 17). Parent child ethnographies “provide insights into the life experiences of their child-participants and the complexity to which daily activities are constructed through a cultural framework” (Kabuto & Martens, 2014, p. 2). Poetic inquiry augments autoethnographic investigation by providing a methodological framework that allows for the representation of participant voices juxtaposed with words and images from bodies of research as well as the larger culture in an evocative manner (Prendergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009). As such, arts based inquiry such as poetic inquiry has the potential to “prompt[] conversation, reflection, cultivation of empathy, and, at times, increased self and social awareness” (Leavy, 2015, p. ix) in a way that traditional research presentation does not. I combine autoethnography, parent child ethnography, and poetic inquiry in order to “put culture [and] society into motion” (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 5) so that “cultural place [is] incorporated into understanding [child] development” (Weisner, 1996, p. 306) in a manner that “promote[s] self-reflection in readers” (Leavy, 2015, p. 2).

Parent Child Autoethnography

In this section I describe autoethnographic, parent-child ethnographic, and poetic inquiry methodologies. Then I explain how I combine these three methodologies to conduct engaged data collection and analysis in order to answer the research question,

- How do my children construct and express understandings of race in response to the home curriculum?

Throughout the review of methodology, I connect my methodological decisions to the theoretical framework as highlighted in chapter one.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a research method that uses ethnographic techniques to connect “the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political,” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). This work to clarify the relationships between one’s own life and the influences of the larger cultural milieu “allows for both personal and cultural critique” (Boylorn et al., 2013, p. 17) which is necessary to fulfill the demands of a critical sociocultural theoretical framework. Further, autoethnography answers the call from emerging Critical Race Parenting scholars to “hold ourselves accountable to do the work of reconciling theory and practice in parenting” (DePouw, 2018, p. 56). The power of ethnography comes from *sustained engagement* in a particular culture (Mertens, 2015), for autoethnography this means careful data collection and analysis of one’s own cultural experience over a prolonged period.

Potter (2006) argues that autoethnography is an especially appropriate methodology for understanding how whiteness operates. She explains, “[T]he discussion of the ‘strategic rhetoric’ of Whiteness still lacks everyday examples of its embodiment or definitive iterations of what might constitute this rhetoric in action” (pp. 1434–1435). Additionally, autoethnography provides a means by which to “[look] at co-cultures (members of the larger culture who differentiate themselves) and the ways in which their existence and experience/s challenge hegemonic norms” (Boylorn et al., 2013, p. 16) a goal parallel to critical whiteness studies which asks how white people might begin to *break with whiteness* (Sleeter, 1996) recognizing their position as simultaneously “part of the problem and part of the solution” (Michael, 2015, p. 4).

Autoethnography not only exposes the ways culture influences day-to-day interactions, it is designed to elicit an empathetic call to action. As Ellis and Bochner (2006)

indicate, “Autoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something” (p. 5). The participant-researcher attempts to share lived experience in an evocative manner; “[t]he goal is to write performance texts in a way that moves others to ethical action” (Denzin, 2013 p. 70). When autoethnography is conducted from a critical stance, it does not claim to be neutral; “it embraces political struggle and is not ashamed of its political advocacy” (Madison, 2012, p. 231).

Unlike quantitative studies, “Ethnography is concerned with the collection and analysis of empirical data drawn from ‘real world’ contexts rather than being produced under experimental conditions created by the researcher” (Mertens, 2015, p. 243).

Autoethnographers are intimately involved with the *real world context* and use theory “to make the familiar strange. . . bringing to the surface potential contradictions between [educational] practices and the objects or desired outcomes of the activity” (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010, p. 104). Recognizing “[a]utoethnography has been criticized for being nonanalytic, self-indulgent, irreverent, sentimental, and romantic” (Denzin, 2013, p. 12), I employ a critical theoretical framework including critical whiteness studies in order to “theorize about [my] own identity, the social position that it delineates, and the structural violence operationalized therein” (Potter, 2015, p. 1435). While taking my critical stance very seriously, I also set out “to encourage more creative and critical approaches to movements toward racial justice” (DePouw & Matias, 2016, p. 247).

Parent Child Ethnography

While autoethnography applies ethnographic methodology to the self, parent child ethnographies “provide insights into the life experiences of their child-participants and the complexity to which daily activities are constructed through a cultural framework” (Kabuto

& Martens, 2014, p. 2). Parent ethnographers have exclusive and intimate access to and knowledge of their children and the interactions and routines that are specific to their home cultures. Research within the family is designed to be non-invasive, with the parent-researcher acting as a natural participant-observer (Miller, 2015). When a parent acts as ethnographer, children's voices are more likely to be authentic because they take place in home rather than laboratory settings. The words and actions of children are also more likely to be interpreted accurately because parents have already intuitively carried out the "in-depth investigations of children's own semantic categories" (Spyrou, 2011, p. 159). Furthermore, Spyrou points out that "children's voices are fundamentally social and reflective of prevailing discourses" (p. 159) which may complicate analysis by outside researchers. Parents are typically aware of many of the media and contexts that influence their children's verbal expression, making interpretation of children's meanings more likely to be accurate.

In addition, parent child ethnography opens pathways to turn toward self-critique rather than critique of other teachers' or parents' enactment of whiteness. This stance is important because a major characteristic of whiteness is to deny the ways in which one upholds white supremacy in everyday life (Leonardo, 2002; McIntyre, 1997). The combination of autoethnography and parent child ethnography broadens the "multiple data collection methods and sources" (Long & Long, 2014, p. 134) required by parent child ethnography to include the personal experiences of the parent that influence curricular decision-making in the home. Data sources in parent child ethnography include observation, audio and video recording, unstructured child interview, and collection of child-made artifacts (Kabuto & Martens, 2014). Autoethnography adds intensive personal journaling and the collection of artifacts that have influenced one's own thinking to the list of data sources

(Denzin, 2013; Madison, 2012). This combined methodology, which I term *parent child autoethnography* is well positioned to “contribute to the currently limited body of literature about young White children’s construction of understandings of race” (Miller, 2014, p. 37).

Poetic Inquiry

Ellis and Bochner (2006) call for autoethnographic research “that ties sociology to literature, expresses fieldwork evocatively, and has an ethical agenda” (p. 17). Poetic inquiry answers that call, providing a means to present fieldwork alongside literature in an aesthetically pleasing and emotionally charged manner. Leavy (2015) points out, “Arts-based research practices are a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research” (p. 4). Poetic inquiry in particular is “the process of intuitively sorting out words, phrases, sentences, passages that synthesize meaning from the prose” (Prendergast et al., 2009, p. xxiii) into poetry that theorizes “experience in a direct and affective way” (p. xxii).

Poetic inquiry is present in each aspect of my methodology including data collection, analysis and presentation. Due to poetry’s power to communicate and elicit embodied knowing, poetic inquiry allows for the inclusion of emotion necessary in ethical social science research. My refusal to bracket emotion is integral in my attempt to move away from a Eurocentric worldview that reproduces individualism and a false “dualism between mind and body” (Saavedra & Salazar Pérez, 2017, p. 450) and move toward a worldview that values “disciplined thought of the heart-mind [that] leads to right relations” (King & Swartz, 2016, p. 3).

Methodologically, poetry permeates data collection. Poetry writing is present in the writing of field notes, data analysis, and representation of findings (Clandinin et al., 2006;

Prendergast et al., 2009). Writing poetic field notes is a way for me to quickly capture details and my own emotions. For example, I made the following poetic memo to document a conversation that occurred on January 16, 2016.

At kindergarten
she learned about Ruby Bridges
and giggled at the dinner table,
They threw things at her, and something really funny, tomatoes!
Daddy's eyes looked sad.
He said,
She must have been really scared.

I explained Ruby Bridges was the first Black girl
to go to that white school
and lots of white people
didn't want her to go there
that is why they threw things at her.
Guards had to walk her into the building.
My son was especially interested in this.
"She had her own guards?" he asked, impressed.
"The president sent guards to protect her," I explained
trying to express that throwing tomatoes was not funny
and not her only worry.

Poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997) which entails extracting verbatim phrases and salient quotes from transcripts and arranging them poetically on the page, is the purest form of poetic inquiry. Instead of placing dialogue in partitioned columns with margins set just so, poetic transcription in particular and poetic inquiry in general allows the researcher to "use poetic structure to represent and interpret complexity... use end stops, punctuation, white space, and short lines to slow down a transcript and focus visual and auditory attention" (Cahnman-Taylor, 2003, p. 31). An example of a verbatim transcription and an excerpt from the resulting poetic transcription from my study is included below.

July 8, 2016

(In the car after church, a conversation about conceptions of God began, and I turned on the recorder.)

My Son: God, part of his body is white and part of his body is brown. Are you copying me?

Myself: Yeah, I'm copying you because I think what you're saying is so interesting. (to my husband) I said that the other day and he goes, "You always say that." (to my son) Well, you say a lot of interesting things, [Son].

My Son: He made everything (difficult to hear) he tried to stop the wars, but he couldn't do that. That's what I think.

My Husband: What is the image you have of-

Myself: Hold on, hold on, I want to hear just a little bit more about [our son's].

My Husband: Oh, sorry.

My Son: Uh, so.. so you think God is- When you make a picture of God in your mind, [Son], what do you see?

My Son: Uh I see...

My Daughter: But the thing I don't-

My Son: Um, half of his body is white and half of his body is brown. He has, he has a white robe. He has a staff.

Myself: Hm.

My Son: I mean a thing that you walk on.

Myself: You mean like a walking stick?

My Son: Yeah, he just has a –

My Daughter: Is him up in the sky?

My Son: brown eyes.

My Daughter: That's what my thing was!

My Son: He has whitish brownish hair.

My Daughter: I said him help kids all the time.

My Son: That's what I think, okay.

Myself: Okay, [Daughter], Daddy wanted to hear what your picture of God is.

My Daughter: Okay. Well him's wearing this round hat, and him's hat was yellow and red and there, there's this hook what's brown, and he has white skin and blue eyes. And him's up in the sky. And him's helping kids.

Poetic Transcription: God is Half White and Half Brown

In the car after church,
my family began talking about God.

My son said,
I think that God,
part of his body is
white
and

part of his body is
brown.
He has a white robe.
He has a staff.
He made everything.
He tried to stop the wars, but he couldn't do that.
That's what I think.

That's what my thing was!
said my daughter.
I said him help kids all the time.
Him's wearing this round hat, and
him's hat was yellow and red and there,
there's this hook what's brown and
he has white skin
and blue eyes.
And him's up in the sky.
And him's helping kids.

Chapter four contains poetic memos and poetic transcriptions from the data set to construct a narrative that allows the reader to engage in “critical exploration and consideration of multiple interpretations and possibilities” (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008, p. 263) rather than relying solely on my interpretations. Constructing poetic findings through *poetic juxtaposition*, described in detail in the data analysis section of this chapter, brings this poetic inquiry process full circle. In this way, poetic inquiry allows for engaged data collection and analysis, artistic presentation that facilitates sensual knowing, representation of participant voices, and situating findings in theory as well as the current sociocultural context.

Engaged data collection and analysis. Arts-based research like poetic inquiry enriches the experience for both the researcher and the audience. The implementation of artistic methods in research helps the researcher collect data, analyze it, and present findings in a fully-engaged manner rather than a superficial bracketing of emotions, a lame attempt to remove “the empirical reality of our personal engagement with and attitude to those others”

(Jackson, 1989, p. 34). Indeed, parent child autoethnography as a methodology calls for analysis methods that engage the personal. Throughout stages of data collection and analysis over my four-year study, I found writing poetry required close readings of transcripts and the bringing together of multiple experiences and ideas that lead to deeper analysis of the data. For example the poem, *The Panoptics of Dollar General in Our City* found on page 130 of this chapter was created after reiterative readings of interview transcripts, poetic memos, and theoretical literature. Further, the poetic inquiry approach to writing field notes and memos allowed for documentation of and subsequent analysis of my own emotional reactions to creating and enacting curriculum and the way my children engaged with it. Allowing myself to bring together multiple texts including field notes, transcriptions, research and theoretical literature, as well as popular texts in the process of poetic inquiry allowed for “heightened idea generation” (Leavy, 2015, p. 244) and a more nuanced representation of my family’s experience grounded in the larger sociocultural context.

Artistic presentation. Along with deepening the experience of data collection and analysis for the researcher; artistic presentation through poetry also has the potential to broaden the audience and deepen audience understanding of the research. As Holman Jones (2003) says, “Art helps us to experience others’ perspectives in an intuitive way. It allow[s] us to ‘try on’ the subjectivity of another- to gauge how the ‘glove’ fits and doesn’t fit” (p. 113). The glove I would like white families to try on is adopting antiracist and critical literacy curriculum in the home, to counter color evasive norms, which, as shown in the literature review (chapter two), are widespread and contribute to the maintenance of white supremacy. I facilitate this perspective-taking through the composition of accessible poetry that makes “use of ordinary language and concrete, resonating images and decreas[es] the use

of academic jargon and theoretical abstraction” (Cahnman-Taylor, 2003, p. 32). I attempt to create “Poetic language [that] facilitates embodied knowing, or at least facilitates calling up our embodied faculties-gut reactions, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, emoting, intuiting” (Hurren, 2009, p. 229). For example, in the excerpt from a poetic memo from September 15, 2018 below, I describe a tragic event in the news and a resulting personal decision in a matter-of fact manner to elicit a gut reaction from the reader and provide a window into my own emotions..

I am wearing my Black Lives Matter shirt today.

I got it two months ago at the National Civil Rights Museum.

And this is the first time I’ve worn it.

Earlier this week,
Botham Shem Jean,
 a Black man,
was shot in his apartment
by a white off-duty officer.

The officer thought that he was in her apartment.

She was on the wrong floor of the building.

I read that his last words were,
 Why did you do that?

I worry that wearing the shirt might upset people
I worry I’ll appear anti-police.
I worry about how people might perceive
 a white woman wearing it.

But today,
Black Lives Matter
seems like the simplest
and most important message.

My goal is to “promote self-reflection in readers, create longer-lasting learning experiences for readers, and most important, get the work out to the public” (Leavy, 2015, p. 2).

Participant voices. Poetic inquiry takes special care with participants’ words. This careful attention to participant speech is a form of linguistic analysis that results in poetry, a literary genre known to create a “space we can go to, in order to think differently, and imagine...find ourselves ‘more truly and more strange’” (Zapruder, 2017, p. 16). In this way poetic inquiry facilitates examination of the day-to-day voices of participants with heightened sensitivity and from a new angle. In the example below, an excerpt from a July 27, 2017 poetic transcription, I use leveled spacing and white space to take special care with participant voices and invite careful readings of their words.

*Name one Disney movie that is racist,
challenges my son.*

Peter Pan.

*Not Peter Pan!
says my daughter
dismayed.*

Yeah, the way they show Native Americans in Peter Pan.

How?

*Do you remember what the Native People
look like in Peter Pan?
offers my husband.*

No.

They have red noses and they talk funny.

And I think they call them “the red man.”

*I’m not talking about the old Peter Pan,
I’m talking about the new Peter Pan.
They don’t have any Indians in it.*

They all look like us.

Like West (2009), my intent is to allow “readers to enter the stories by engaging with patterns of words that contain some of the emotion and intention of the original speech, signs or thoughts” (p. 337).

Situating findings in theory and sociocultural context. In addition to representing participant voice, Prendergast (2006) discusses the use of poetic inquiry to artistically represent the literature review. Prendergast used found poetry methodology to construct a poetic literature review explaining found poetry “serves to reflect on, play against, and perform with the central topic of [the] inquiry” (p. 369). I extend Prendergast’s work by creating found poetry with excerpts from literature on critical theories, racial socialization, and critical pedagogy, as well as popular texts including novels, speeches, songs, and advertisements. I include an example of this kind of poetic representation below. In this excerpt, I juxtapose found poetry from Kromidas (2014) and from Muriel Rukeyser’s poem *Ballad of Orange and Grape* as well as poetic transcription from the data set to illustrate a finding that my children used race labels to describe People of Color. Throughout poetic representations, I utilize footnotes to cite sources so that the flow and shape of the poetry is not disrupted.

“[T]he manner in which people use
biologically-based visual cues in processes
of racialization is not just a simple matter of
‘looking’
but rather a profound, difficult process
in which our senses have been regimented
to look at phenotypes and decide that
‘that is x’

[and ‘that is y’]
despite continuous variations
and contradictory signals,²
the usual two machines.³

*Annie is Black,
my daughter said.
We watched a movie of it.
She is Black.
Wait, she is brown.
Her whole body is.
Well, all of her skin is brown.
Not all of her body.
Fingers not brown,
White.
Kind of.
Jabari is the same color.
The Black, wait brown.
Brown.
Jabari is my best friend who has brown skin.*⁴

How are we to believe what we hear and we say and we do?

*I didn't know Jason was my cousin's brother,
my son said.
Is Jason's family Black?
No, his dad is Latino,
I tell him.
Do those people look Black?
Brown.
So that's why Jason looks Blackish?*⁵

I find this method of juxtaposing poetic transcription with excerpts from the literature review and popular everyday texts fulfills the purpose of autoethnography which is to situate

² (Kromidas, 2014, p. 425)

³ Bolded text is from Muriel Rukeyser's *Ballad of Orange and Grape*.

⁴ From a 9.30.2015 poetic transcription.

⁵ From a 7.24.2016 poetic field note.

personal experience in the cultural and theoretical, “privilege[ing] individual experiences and corporate realities in order to theorize about what we can learn relationally, personally, and culturally through personal narratives” (Boylorn et al., 2013, p. 16). In other words, I seek to fully utilize “poetry, with its unique ability to capture and present aspects of the past (in memory), present (in experience), and future (in hope/fear).” (Prendergast, 2006, pp. 369–370).

Participants

Participants in this study are my own two children, my husband, and myself. Each of us racially self-identify as white and culturally as Midwesterners of distant European heritage. We are members of a Unitarian Universalist religious congregation, which is important to mention because our religious identity and ways of knowing mediate our understanding of race in profound ways as described in chapters four and five. My husband and I consider ourselves middle-class. Due to the autoethnographic nature of this study, it will be difficult to maintain confidentiality for any of the participants. While confidentiality is not required due to the subjective nature of the study, I take seriously the question, “What does it mean *to the child[ren]* when researchers interpret [their] words and actions to the broader educational community” (Long & Long, 2014, p. 125). Thus among several other ethical considerations, I will not be using the names of my family members so that publications regarding this work do not surface if someone conducts a web search using my children’s names. Instead, I will refer to study participants as my son, my daughter, and my husband. All other names used are pseudonyms. In this section, I provide both a traditional and poetic description of the participants. The descriptions have been approved by the participants.

My Son

My son was aged seven to eleven years during the course of the study. He enjoys playing baseball and soccer, inventing contraptions, creating costumes, and beat-boxing. He has a silly sense of humor and recently entered the gifted program at his school due to his visual-spatial reasoning.

My Son in 15 Stanzas

1.
We listened to hip-hop while we cleaned the house.
He asked, *Is there a such thing as Black rap?*
He explained a white kid at school said there was Black rap
Later I learned this kid had gotten in trouble.⁶

2.
We sat down to eat
at a new Black-owned business
in Our City.
He said,
We are the only white people in here.
Then he ordered a burger and fries.

3.
When I tucked him in for bed,
he said,
*Did you know there is someone out there
making the same move as me?
They might have different blankets.
They might be a different color,
but they're making the same move as me
There are thousands of people out there,
more than that, billions.
Someone must be making the same move as me.*⁷

4.
He plays on the back porch all summer with the neighbors,
biracial twin boys one year younger than him.

⁶ From a 10.7.2015 Transcription.

⁷ From a 4.24.2017 Field Note

They use paint, permanent markers, cardboard,
the hot glue gun, and my good kitchen scissors
to create costumes and reenact scenes from
the television show *The Flash*.
In the show the hero is white
his girlfriend and adoptive father are Black
Cisco, my children's favorite character,
is a tech genius who always wears a cool T-shirt
and is Latino.⁸

5.
All afternoon at the quinceañera
He watched the boys play.
I said, *Go play with them!*
He said, *They don't speak my language.*
His father and I said they do,
They speak English and Spanish!
Slowly he approached them
watching
following them from one side of the community center
to the other.
They danced this dance for about thirty minutes.
Finally they were outside playing together
chasing each other
hiding behind trees
making their hands into guns.⁹

6.
He said it seemed like most rappers were People of Color.
I said, *Black people invented rap.*
Oh, that's why! he said.
He asked why and wondered if it was a form of protest.¹⁰

7.
He said,
Mom, at soccer practice,
there was a sound of a train,
and one of the kids on another team
thought it was war coming.
Oh, I said,

⁸ Based on a 7.7.2017 Memo

⁹ From a 7.08.2017 Poetic Field Note

¹⁰ From a 8.10.2017 Field Note

*Did he used to live in a place where there was war?
Yeah, I think so.
That must have been scary for him, I said.¹¹*

8.
He asked,
*Can we go to the Target by church?
I want to buy another Bey Blade.*
My husband and I said no.
I asked him to think about why
he wanted another Bey Blade
when he already had so many
and he was so good at making his own
out of Legos.¹²

9.
We listened to Janelle Monet's ArchAndroid
on the way to art camp.
He hit repeat to listen to *Oh Maker* again.
Later he looked it up on YouTube.
*So much hurt
On this earth
But you loved me
And I really dared to love you too*
I asked him why he liked it so much.
He said he thinks it's about the world.
This was the first time I observed him
interested in a song
for it's meaning rather than its sound.¹³

10.
Looking at a cover of a book his sister said,
*It's just that it's kinda not fair that there's
only basically white super heroes and no Black.*
He said, *There are some Black superheroes.*
I said,
*I noticed that except for Black Panther,
the white super heroes are the leaders
and the Black superheroes are like the sidekicks.*
He said,

¹¹ From a 9.2017 Field Note

¹² From a 6.11.2018 Field Note

¹³ Based on a 6.25.2018 Memo and Field Note

*Not Black Panther, not with Black Lightening.
But yeah.*

I said,
*I wonder if Star Fire has a race,
like is she white,
or Black,
or Latina,
or Asian.*

He said,
*She's actually from a different planet.
She doesn't really have a race?* I asked.
Nope, he said.¹⁴

11.

I played cards with my son at the kitchen table,
the hip-hop station playing on my phone.
He beat-boxed, I sang along.
Childish Gambino's
This is America came on,
we stopped playing cards to watch the video
dancing
shooting
running
cars.

He said,
*Childish Gambino really cares about that stuff.
What stuff,* I asked.
What's happening in the world, he said.¹⁵

12.

Brayden came over to play
video games and Bey Blades.
When I took him home
he and my son danced their secret handshake
mirroring each other in shape and form
saying goodbye.
They're like some kind of weird twins,
said Abena sitting on the couch.
And I knew she meant
they are Black and white copies of each other.¹⁶

¹⁴ From a 8.30.2018 Transcription.

¹⁵ From a 11.04.2018 Field Note.

¹⁶ From a 11.11.2018 Field Note.

13.

He asked if he could buy some classmates gifts for Christmas.

After doing some math,

he decided to make the gifts instead.

Lego sets culled from his big tub of Legos.

He built a figure with a jet pack for Eamon

 a sniper behind a barricade for Maya

 a pilot in an aircraft for Landon.

Then he took each set apart,

put the pieces in sealed bags,

and wrote detailed directions

and charts on how to reconstruct them.

He packed each in a box

and glued a photo of the constructed set on the top.

He said,

Hey mom, am I being like the guy from Walden Pond?

I'm making things instead of buying them!¹⁷

14.

He was anxious about

practicing with his new indoor soccer team.

The team and its coach appeared to me to be Latinx.

He had only been to one practice.

He said, *Mom, I'm the only white person on my team.*¹⁸

15.

The polar vortex had split

and blown across the Midwest,

a product of climate change.

There were twelve inches of snow

and the kids were out of school.

We made two waffle mixes

 vanilla birthday cake

 and

 double chocolate chip.

We poured vanilla batter into one side of the waffle iron

and chocolate batter into the other.

We opened the iron, to find a perfect round grid,

 half golden,

 half deep brown.

¹⁷ From a 12.19.2018 Field Note.

¹⁸ From a 1.2019 Memo.

My son picked up his waffle and said,
*It's like me and Brayden.*¹⁹

My Daughter

My daughter was age five to eight years during the course of the study. She enjoys playing baseball and soccer, caring for “lovies,” collecting small found objects and arranging them carefully, creating art, and learning new songs. She likes to “make her bed very pretty.” She is often quiet but very brave in social situations.

There are lots of ways to be a girl²⁰

1.
She is blue-eyed and wild-haired.
She pointed out that she has the lightest skin in our family.
Then said to herself,
I am pretty.

2.
She said,
Jabari is my best friend who has brown skin.
He likes the monkey bars.
He gives me his crackers from lunch.
Sometimes at recess she plays what he wants to play
and sometimes she chooses what to play.
I say that is a good way to be friends.²¹

3.
At the Magic House in St. Louis,
we entered the replica Oval Office.
She said,
I'll sit in the chair.
*There needs to be a girl president.*²²

¹⁹ From a 01.15.2019 Field Note.

²⁰ On July 14, 2017 my daughter watched a video of a soulful singer with a high-pitched voice. After the video she said, “I thought he was a girl.” I said, “Me too. There are lots of ways to be a boy and lots of ways to be a girl.”

²¹ From a 10.09.2015 Field Note.

²² From a 12.22.2016 Field Note.

4.
She says, *Speeches help people
and I do a lot of speeches.*
 on the playground when someone is unkind
 in the cafeteria when someone is scared
I asked her if she knew anyone else who gives speeches.
She said, *No other kids.*²³

5.
At the dinner table
she said,
*In my land,
there's Martin Luther King
and everything is right.
And it's a candy land.*²⁴

6.
She asked,
Did you know that your whole body is your heart?
I asked,
How is it your whole body?
Well, it's not your bones, like your skeleton. But it is the rest.
Why is it the rest?
*Because you need lots of love to keep going.*²⁵

7.
After watching The Nativity
she received a soft toy owl as a Christmas gift.
She named the owl Jesus.
For three years now she has cared for the owl.
She makes it clothes from felt and tape
tucks it in at night,
and celebrates its birthday in December.²⁶

8.
We listened to Inner City Blues
By Marvin Gaye in the car.

²³ From an 4.17.2017 Field Note.

²⁴ From a 7.25.2017 Field Note.

²⁵ From a 9.30.2017 Field Note.

²⁶ Based on a 12.09.2017 Memo.

Crime is increasing
Trigger happy policing
Panic is spreading
God knows where
We're heading
Make me wanna holler
The way they do my life...

When it was over,
She said it was her favorite song.
I asked her what she thought it meant.
She said,
*I think it's about changing the world.*²⁷

9.
She tiptoed out of her bedroom
and found me on the couch reading.
She said she wanted to
wake up early to see the sunrise.
We went to the front porch.
The clouds turned from silver to pink.
We sat together in our pajamas
our arms touching
watching the sky.²⁸

10.
When children taunted her at school
and told her to, *worship God*,
she asked me to help her write a speech.
I wrote a sentence on a piece of paper, and she added another.
She read it several times in a strong voice at the kitchen table,
I'm Unitarian Universalist,
and I believe that every person
gets to decide what they believe in.
And you do not get to decide what I believe in.
Then she put it in her backpack.²⁹

11.
Upon learning that
leprechauns,
Santa Claus,

²⁷ From a 12.10.2017 Field Note.

²⁸ From a 8.24.2018 Poetic Field Note.

²⁹ From a 9.28.2018 Transcription.

and the Easter Bunny
were not real,
she wept and exclaimed,
*I just wanted to believe
that there was a little bit of magic in this world!*³⁰

12.
She wears what she likes
 leggings
 skirts under dresses
 clothes her brother has outgrown.
She takes scissors to thrift store shirts
 cuts fringe,
 ties,
 arm holes.
She cut the sleeves off of old shirts
Then cut holes to put her thumbs through
She wore one to school.
That weekend she made sleeves for
 Jabari
 Haley
 Jerome
 Tali
 RJ
 Hayden
 Brayden
She worried that it was against the rules
to give them away at school,
So she devised a plan to give one to Jabari
discretely when she put her backpack away.³¹

My Husband

My husband has a degree in natural science and does environmental work as a contractor, working from home much of the time. He plays softball and helps coach our children's baseball teams. He maintains Native prairie flowers in our two acre yard. He

³⁰ From a 11.15.2018 Field Note.

³¹ Based on a 3.2019 Memo.

grew up in a small town about an hour south of Our City and did not develop relationships with People of Color until college.

His hands speak.

Take a look at these hands
The hand speaks
the hand of a government man³².

He studies Native plants
 liatris
 purple poppy mallow
 coneflower
And invasive species
 honeysuckle
 crabgrass
Together we dug up the entire front yard
and planted buffalo grass,
 but it didn't take.
Only the hardiest grasses took root
and come back each summer
 little blue stem
 river oats
 Indiangrass
Now the front yard is full of prairie flowers and tall sturdy grasses.
Goldfinches, monarchs, honeybees visit daily.
Anonymous neighbors complain to the city
about the height of our grass.
He orders a sign from the Missouri Department of Conservation
and hammers it into the ground.

All I want is to breathe
Won't you breathe with me?

We were married at 19 and 20 years old
in a wooded garden
at the arboretum where he worked.

Find a little space, so we move in-between

³² ³² (Byrne, Eno, Weymouth, Harrison, & Frantz, 1980) All left justified text are lyrics from "Born Under Punches" by the Talking Heads. I have been listening to Angelique Kidjo's cover of the Talking Heads album, Remain in Light.

Friends said we were too young.
Friends got new phones and big trucks and bigger houses.
Friends asked if we would move before the kids go to middle school.
We stayed in our mixed race neighborhood.
He kept driving his old pickup truck.

Keep one step ahead of yourself

He grew up in a small town
with few People of Color.
He told me about the time
two Black children came to church
and were accused when something turned up missing.
He said he knew it was stupid even then.
When he introduced me to his uncle,
the uncle said, "Well, at least she's not Black."
We knew we were meant to laugh
but didn't.

Don't you miss it, don't you miss it
Some of you people just about missed it.

He worked on an organic farm
picking tomatoes
turning over compost
with a shovel
digging potatoes
filling buckets with caterpillars found eating cabbage.
We stopped buying cheap produce.

Last time to make plans.
I'm a tumbler,
I'm a government man.

He was hired as an ecologist.
He conducted plant and animal surveys
Walked plots looking for signs of wetlands
ephemeral pools
cattails
erosion.

I'm not a drowning man,
and I'm not a burning building!
I'm no government man.

When the small company was bought by a corporation,
he grew tired of
 hierarchy
 fancy parties
 mid term reviews
and began work as an independent contractor.
He learned The Clean Water Act and The Gulf Oil Spill.
At Thanksgiving dinner my cousin asked,
 Why does the government get to say
 what I can and can't do
 with a creek in my backyard?

All I want is to breathe
Won't you breathe with me?
Find a little space so we move in-between
And keep one step ahead of yourself.

As a father he sometimes
has to fight his instinct
 to show affection through gift-giving
 to yell instead of talk.
He hugs our children,
kisses their cheeks,
puts a treat in their lunch boxes.
writes them notes about how proud he is of them
plays board games
 hide and seek
 soccer
 baseball.
Tells them he loves them.
Accepts them for who they are
 goofy
 gay
 gifted
 poetic
 social
 shy
 who knows?
Makes them practice an instrument
and read for twenty minutes each night.
Teaches them about democracy.
Teaches them to stand up for what's right.

Myself

I have degrees in elementary and early childhood education and am currently working toward my Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction and educational foundations. I worked as a teacher in toddler, preschool, and elementary classrooms for more than fifteen years. Currently, I work as an instructor of early childhood education. I have a minor in studio art and enjoy “stitching,” singing, and writing poetry. I grew up in a predominantly white mid-size Midwestern city that was the site of racial tension throughout my growing up. As a mother, I read with my children before bed, take them to art museums and galleries and other cultural events. I sometimes help in the baseball dugout, but this is not a comfortable role for me. Due to my position as autoethnographer exploring the ways children construct understandings of race and attempting to enact antiracist curriculum, I have included poetic descriptions of my school experiences here as well as once poem about my experience of becoming a teacher and one poem about my experience as the mother of a white son during the Black Lives Matter Movement. I share these experiences acknowledging my belief that “culture [is] a structure which creates biographies and selves” (Denzin, 2013, p. 45) and “all life histories have their origins in early childhood” (p. 46).

Preschool

*Melita Day Nursery was organized
in Sedalia, Missouri
on March 7, 1910
to provide affordable day care and meals
for working mothers' children.³³*

³³ Imhauser, R.C. (2007). *Images of America: Sedalia*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing. (p. 114)

In the 1980's the center was housed
in an old two-story house
so close to the big iron bridge
that lead to the wrong side of the tracks.

Our mother paid on a sliding scale
brought us to the front door
before going to work
managing the Taco Grande.

While there
my brother and I
climbed the big tree on the playground
with Britney and Dakota
learned to ride tricycles and jump rope
ran to the fence to see the garbage collectors
dipped our graham crackers in our juice
held the dustpan while our teachers swept the floor.

Every year
the school put on a Christmas program.
An enormous tree filled one room.
Santa came down the stairs
saying ho ho ho
with a sack of wrapped gifts
a doll for each girl
a truck for each boy.
The teachers opened pastel Styrofoam egg cartons
filled with jingle bells
each on a knotted loop of yarn
and handed one bell to each of us
to shake while we sat in rows
and sang Christmas carols.

One December my photo was in the paper
whispy white hair flying
mouth wide singing jingle bells
among all the other round white faces.

Elementary School

For most of my elementary years
it was my brother,
my mom,
and I

living on a prayer
nothing's gonna stop us

on East 7th Street
in a two bedroom house
with a swing
 on the front porch
and one floor furnace
 in the middle of the house
 that giant grate emitting heat
 singeing a grid pattern
 on our clothes
 before school
 on winter mornings
 when we laid them out to warm
 for too long

Mom left for work early
 in her pantyhose and Payless pumps
 every winter she stapled sheets of plastic
 over the windows to keep the warmth inside
at 7:50 am we walked
three blocks down
to the poor kids' elementary school
 two-story and brick
 with a fire escape snaking down two sides

somehow we knew we were second-class
and so were our classmates
except maybe Jordan Atwell
who always had new tennis shoes
and went to gymnastics

just like we knew without being told
that there was another
school across the railroad tracks
that was still worse than ours
the school for Black kids
in the part of town my grandma once called Nxxxxx Town.

Our school had two Black teachers
a few Black students
and one famous biracial family.

I studied my Black classmate
using my peripheral vision
developed theories about Black hair and skin.
Hers was always shiny and smelled sweet.
I found myself wanting to bite into her hand and the fleshy part of her arm
 Black skin must be naturally sweet
 like sweet-smelling chocolate
 I reasoned.

I got a *Crimp 'n Curl Cabbage Patch Kid* for my birthday.
The doll's yarn hair was waxy and thick.
You could wrap it around a plastic curling iron
and it would *magically hold its shape*.
 Black girls were lucky,
 I reasoned.
 Their hair would naturally hold its shape when
 tied,
 twisted,
 and held with a plastic barrette.

My fifth grade teacher
was a Black man.
The rumor was that the mother of
one white girl in my grade
had her transferred out of his class
before the year even started.

There was no talk in my house
of moving me to another class.
My teacher liked me
thought I was smart
shook my hand
when I filled in all of the circles correctly on the Scantron
noticed the other kids called me Rhino and Hippo
passed around papers for us to write something nice about each person in the class
and stapled them into a book we could take home.

Church

Some Sundays
the East Sedalia Baptist church bus

would pick us up
while my mom slept
 her face in her pillow
 exhausted from
 working two jobs
 and going to night school.

We would sit at the back pew
 and chew gum
 and fall asleep
 and laugh.

There must have been Sunday school,
but I don't remember it.

I do remember the pastor
 and *for God so loved the world*
 special Sunday baptisms
 with a pool of water and white robes.

I was so afraid that we might go to hell
I baptized my brother in the backyard
with the water hose.

High School

I went to the same high school as my grandmother.
It was old and stone
with a gravel parking lot
 and some trucks with Confederate flags
 stapled across the back window,
 though I did not know their significance at the time.

I started high school
amid the Tyson chicken boom in Missouri
when Mexican immigrants
came to work in the meat packing plant

and decent white people talked behind their hands
about how many of *those Mexicans*
lived in one rental house
then without acknowledging the irony went to WalMart
and bought chicken breast for 99 cents a pound.

One pretty new girl
with light brown skin
straight black hair
and liquid eyeliner
told us,
*This kid told me to go back to Mexico,
I've never been to Mexico.
I'm from New York.*

Becoming a White Teacher

Full of good intentions,
she is needed in a system
that fails repeatedly
in retaining good teachers.³⁴

*I want to work in a school where I am needed most,
I told the recruiter.
She nodded in agreement and checked the box.*

Her positionality has a history-
a gendered
and racialized one-

*I want to ensure no child
leaves my first grade classroom
without learning to read,
I told the scholarship committee.
And the audience applauded when the committee
repeated my words at the recognition ceremony.*

complicated by the fact that she is
frequently the teacher of students of color.

*Although no elementary education course mentioned race,
I was hired as a Title I reading teacher
in a school district coming to terms
with its new multiracial demographics.*

Her objective remains the same,
but, instead of White children of farmers,
this time it is to save children of color

³⁴ All left justified text in this poem is from Leonardo and Boas (2013, p. 318).

through education.

We learned Ruby Payne's *Framework for Understanding Poverty*.
Were we talking about poverty or race?
Whichever, we knew we were there to fix things.
We knew we had the answers.

She is part of a larger social structure
steeped in co-forming systems of race
and gender
that play out in significant ways
within the institution of public schooling.

So I gathered songs from *Sweet Honey in the Rock*.
I brought jump ropes into the room to practice rhyming.
I felt especially smug when I saw Black parents in the grocery store
or visited their homes.

Motherhood: Every day *my* son gets older

*Not watching the videos of Black people murdered
doesn't mean that Black people
aren't still being murdered.*³⁵

During the first protests of Micheal Brown's death
in August 2014,
I was in Boston attending a training.
When I mentioned I was from Missouri,
someone asked me about
the terrible things
happening in St. Louis.
Oh, I said, that's on the other side of the state.

*Who gets to revel in their present
with an eye still on their future,
and who gets discussed as though
nothing about them could be promising?*³⁶

³⁵ (Abdurraqib, 2017, p. 21-I capitalized Black.) During the summer of 2018 and the writing of this poem, I have been reading Abdurraqib's essays on music and culture contained in his book *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*. The title is from a note he found posted on Micheal Brown's head stone.

³⁶ (Abdurraqib, 2017, p. 20-I changed the period to a question mark.)

In October of 2016,
I attended a conference on multicultural education.
A woman said to me,
“Do you know what it’s like
to have to tell your child
how to be safe around the police,
to be afraid they’ll be shot by the police?”
I shook my head no.
I could not speak.

*Do whatever they tell you to do...
Keep your hands visible.
Don’t make any sudden moves.
Only speak when they speak to you.*³⁷

In my kitchen in July 2018,
My friend, Carl, a Black man,
told me
“You need to worry about your son
if they are going to stay friends as they get older.
I teach my son what to do if he is stopped by the police.
You need to do that if your son is going to be friends with Black boys.”

When her son was shot,
Micheal Brown’s mother said,
*You took my son away from me.
You know how hard it was for me
to get him to stay in school
and graduate?
You know how many Black men
stay in school and graduate?
Not many.*³⁸

On the drive to art class on July 2018
my son said,
“Mom, I just realized something.
Every day I’m getting older.
I was thinking about my birthday and realized that.”

³⁷ (Thomas, 2017, p. 20) My all white-girl book club read *The Hate U Give*, like every other book club in 2017.

³⁸ (Hannah-Jones, 2015) I listened to this podcast in 2015. It was about school segregation, but the portion of the podcast that really stuck with me is the quote I included here.

Yes, I said,
Every day you're one day older.

I'm walking a line
I'm visiting houses in motion...
Two different houses surround you, round you
*I'm walking a line*³⁹

Contexts

Race is a social construction with context-specific (Alim, 2016b) and changing definitions; and racial socialization occurs in home, community, and school settings (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Michael & Bartoli, 2016, Nash & Miller, 2015).

Therefore, in this study, I consider context an important aspect of curriculum. Throughout the study, I collected data in our home, at church, during school events, at the fields where my children played ball, and other settings we visited throughout our daily lives. I only audio recorded conversations between myself the members of my family after getting permission from them. I did not record conversations with friends or community members in social situations, but I collected artifacts and took field notes of interactions that occurred in more public settings such as the ball fields and church. In this section, I begin by describing the broad context and move to smaller contexts. I use traditional and poetic descriptions to portray: the United States of America, Kansas City, Our City, Our Church, Our Neighborhood, the Ball Fields, and the Elementary School.

³⁹ (Byrne, Eno, Weymouth, Harrison, & Frantz, 1980) In 2018, during the writing of this poem, I have been listening to Angelique Kidjo's cover of the Talking Heads album, *Remain in Light*. I like Talking Heads, and find the way that Kidjo, an African artist, interprets the songs compelling.

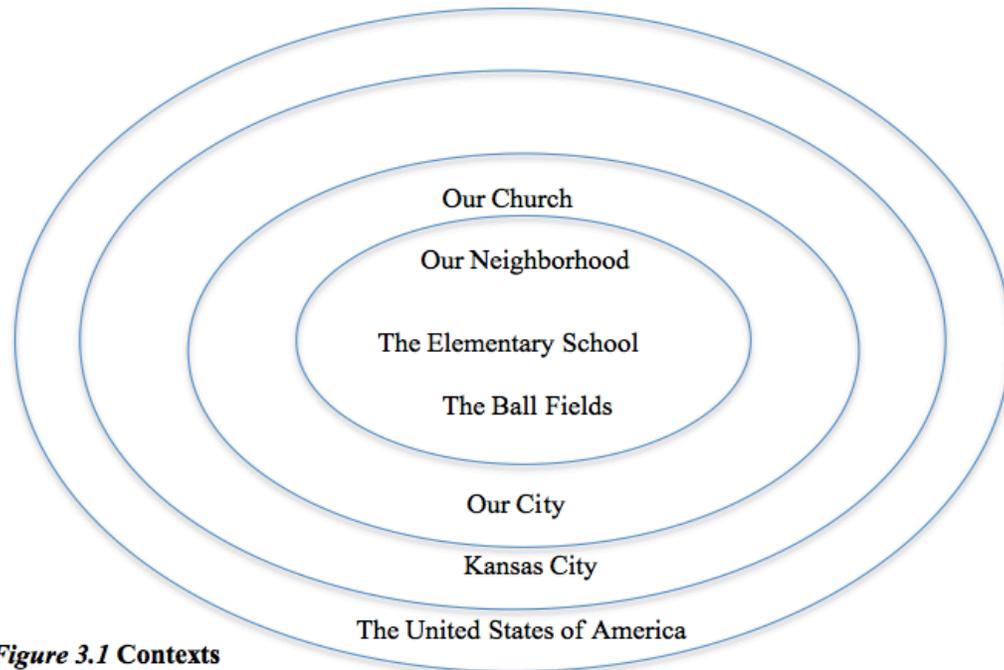


Figure 3.1 Contexts

The United States of America

The United States of America is a country deeply affected by its history of enslavement of dark-skinned Africans as an economic enterprise that was justified by notions of white supremacy. Although slavery was legally abolished in 1865, public schools continued to be legally segregated by race until 1954. Even after school segregation was deemed illegal, many schools were not desegregated until years later through the use of federal force. Despite the national Civil Rights Movement which resulted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ending segregation in public places and the Civil Rights Act of 1968 which made discrimination in public housing illegal, the U.S. is currently experiencing “continuing residential segregation and increasing school resegregation” (Tatum, 2007, p. 13). Today the vast majority of schools and communities are racially segregated due to real estate practices, income disparities, and white flight from neighborhoods of Color (Gotham, 2002).

This study takes place during a tumultuous political time period in the United States. Within the nearly four years of data collection, the United States experienced the transition from our country's first African American president to a president who "breaks convention[al] ... norms for presidential behavior and middle-class whiteness" (Dubrofsky, 2018, p. 156) by using crass and discriminatory language about women, people with disabilities, immigrants, and People of Color. The last three years have seen an increase in hate groups (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019) as well as an increase in hate crimes (Levin & Reitzel, 2018). This has been a time of blatant discrimination against People of Color, women, immigrants, people with disabilities, Jews, Muslims, and the LGBTQ community bolstered by a rhetoric of fake news that frames the free press as *the enemy of the people* (Dubrofsky, 2018; Strom & Martin, 2017).

This is America⁴⁰

The triple evils of racism, economic exploitation, and militarism.⁴¹

The European people came here.
They wanted to take over the land,
and they needed people to work,
to make towns and things.
They needed people to work and grow food.
So they took big ships over to Africa.
And they stole people.
And they filled up their ships with African people
and brought them to America to work as slaves.⁴²

Men chained
and packed like cargo.
Do you see that?
*They treated them like boxes on a shelf.*⁴³

⁴⁰ (Glover, 2018)

⁴¹ (King, 1967b)

⁴² From 8.17.2018 Poetic Memo

Now let us turn first to the evil of racism.
There can be no gainsaying of the fact
that racism is still alive all over America.⁴¹

So in North Carolina
there was still a statue of Robert E. Lee.
a symbol of the South
and how there used to be slavery in the South.
The city council thought they should take it down
because we shouldn't have that symbol of -
 Hatred, inserted my son.
Of hatred, I agreed.
So a group of people who hate
 Jewish people
 and hate Brown people
 and hate anybody who doesn't speak English
 and hate Muslim people,
 hate anybody who's not white
Came together about tearing this statue down
and they said it shouldn't happen
and we need to make America white.

So the people who lived in Charlottesville said,
"No, we can't have these bad people coming to our town."
And they got together.

Then a man drove a car
as fast as they could into a those people
because they believed something he hates.⁴⁴

The giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism and militarism.
We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values.
We must rapidly begin the shift from a 'thing-oriented' society
to a 'person-oriented' society.
True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar;
it is not haphazard and superficial.
It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars
needs restructuring.⁴⁵

⁴³ From 7.27.2018 Poetic Memo

⁴⁴ From 8.17.2017 Poetic Memo

⁴⁵ (King, 1967a, p. 93)

This is America

This is not just.

The Western arrogance that it has everything to teach others
and nothing to learn from them
is not just.⁴⁵

I did not enjoy Mount Rushmore the way I might have a few years ago.
It seemed wrong to carve the faces of white men into the ancient mountain
I felt a conflict within me-
Years of learning about the genius of Thomas Jefferson
The bravery of Washington
The compassion of Lincoln
The conservation efforts of Roosevelt
The veneer of their mythology
was cracked.⁴⁶

This is America

At breakfast, my son told us that Feivel's dad said there's no cats in America,
but there were.

Well, the cats are a metaphor, said my husband.⁴⁷

Kansas City

According to the United States Census Bureau (n.d.), the population of Kansas City, Missouri is 55.5% white, 28.7% Black, 10% Latino, 3.3% biracial, and 2.8% Asian. In this setting, race is often defined by a black/white binary. Kansas City is infamous for the so-called *Troost divide*, the persistent black/white racial residential division along Troost Avenue founded in real estate practices and school boundary maps designed to perpetuate racial segregation (Gotham, 2002; O'Higgins, 2014). When my children were in preschool, we crossed the Troost divide every day to get to the pristine suburb where their preschool

⁴⁶ From 5.30.2017 Poetic Memo.

⁴⁷ From 1.15.2018 Poetic Memo.

was located. The preschool where they attended and I worked was attended by nearly all white children and families. My children's transitions from this white preschool setting to the multiracial elementary school was an important part of their racial identity development.

Bifurcated by the Troost divide, Kansas City is also characterized by several pockets of *racially concentrated areas of poverty*, defined by “both higher than average poverty rates and higher than average nonwhite populations” (Mid America Regional Council, 2014, p. 29). As a result of difficult and contested process of desegregation the Kansas City Missouri school district has struggled to maintain accreditation and experiences ongoing white flight with a student population that is more than 90% children of Color (Caruthers, 2005; Moxley, 2018).

An historic railroad town and center for the cattle industry, my family has enjoyed the many cultural experiences available in this city, including major league baseball, world-class art museums, and a state of the art zoo. Kansas City is currently experiencing a revival that includes refurbishing of the city center. The 18th and Vine jazz district was recently showcased in the National Geographic Travel Guide (Duckett, 2019), but many white residents still worry about visiting the district *after dark*, and many people of Color and working class people who live downtown worry about being displaced.

Billboard on Blue Parkway

driving on
Blue Parkway
each morning
passing the Smoke and Go
LC's Barbecue churning smoke
heading west toward
The Country Club Plaza

on my way to work

a billboard
bright white
and orderly
purple letters
announce
Convoy of Hope
at a local park
 resume help
 practice interviews
 professional clothes
 haircuts
 portraits
Much more!

each afternoon
heading east
through campus
away from the art museum
with its lights and lawn
and comically large shuttle cocks

going home
across the tracks
the same billboard
only its westward facing side
the familiar orange and brown
an image of a pistol
large and clear in its iconography
it is time for the annual gun expo
but this year the title is longer
more big brown letters
across the top
Survival and Gun Expo

one side of the sign
hope
one side
fear
one side
help
the other
hurt

I wonder who pasted these messages
with a bucket and broom

brushed them up and down
smooth until they stuck
Did he chuckle?
Did he cry?
Did he even notice,
or was he too close to the signs to read them?
Was he just doing his job?

Our Church

We attend a Unitarian Universalist church 30 minutes west of our home. Unitarian Universalism is a religion founded in 1961 with the merging of Unitarianism and Universalism (Harris, n.d.). Unitarianism developed during the first three centuries of Christianity when “believers could choose from a variety of tenets about Jesus” (para. 1) and it was acceptable for Christians to believe in universal salvation. This freedom of choice ended “in 325 CE when the Nicene Creed established the Trinity as dogma” (para. 1) Universalism developed in the United States during the 1700s. “The Universalists believed in a God who embraced everyone, and this eventually became central to their belief that lasting truth is found in all religions, and that dignity and worth are innate to all people regardless of sex, color, race, or class” (para. 12). The Unitarian Universalist Association was founded in 1961 and promotes “pluralism that includes theist and atheist, agnostic and humanist, pagan, Christian, Jew, and Buddhist” (para. 19). Unitarian Universalism is a religion described as “unbounded, drawing from scripture and science, nature and philosophy, personal experience and ancient tradition” (Unitarian Universalist Association, n.d.). The religion holds environmental and social justice ideals. The second guiding principle is *Justice equity and compassion in human relations*, and the seventh principle is *respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part* (Unitarian Universalist Association, n.d.). Despite

its universalist ideals, Unitarian Universalist Association remains a predominantly white institution that struggles to dismantle white supremacist culture within its own systems (Beasley Doyle, 2018; McArdle, 2019). Our church is no different. While our congregation reflects gender and sexual diversity along with some income diversity, it has limited racial and linguistic diversity. During the duration of the study, I helped create a service on white supremacy and served on a committee that organized *White Supremacy Teach Ins* designed to educate members about the ways white supremacy operates at the micro and macro levels and encourage conversations about personal experiences on this topic.

Our church has been an important place for my family's spiritual growth and a site of refuge during difficult political times. A young white lesbian minister who does not shy away from topics of race was hired in 2017. She balances realism with hope and love in her Sunday sermons and has been involved in local social justice movements. She has also made time to talk with me privately about this study and the ways that whiteness operates in the larger society, in our congregation, and within my family several times over the course of this study. I include the following poetic memo to illustrate the culture of our church.

The Enduring Heart

On November 4, 2018
our minister
called all of the children and teens
to come forward from the congregation
I need to talk to you about something serious, she said.
Has anyone heard of a synagogue?
A synagogue is like our church,
but they have Jewish traditions and Jewish songs
while we have Unitarian Universalist traditions and songs.
Far away from here
a man who hates people who are Jewish
went to a synagogue and shot people
and some of the people were so hurt

that they died.

There are lots of people here in Kansas City who are Jewish.
There are people who are here in this room who are Jewish.
There are eight synagogues who are our neighbors.
Today we are going to write a letter to our neighbors at Beth Shalom
To let them know we are thinking about them
And our hearts are broken for them
What do you think we should put in our letter?
There are probably other little kids in these congregations.
What do you want to say to them?
This is our chance to say something from our church
to our neighbors.
Children began to speak and adults began to write.

We are sorry this happened.

We are angry and sad just like you.

We support you.

Our pianist says, *Zochreinu means*

We will remember you.

My daughter's voice says,

We can trust each other.

More children speak

We can be friends.

We will share with you.

Our pianist says,

Shalom means peace.

The letter is written and the young people are sitting on the floor of our sanctuary.
Our minister says,
When we have these sad thoughts in our bodies,
There is always something we can do.
And it's sing a song.

They stood in a circle looking at one another.
We adults sat in rows of chairs watching.

Ana
music theologian
and tattoo artist
joined with her guitar and
asked us to follow
as she sang.

*Loosen, loosen baby.
You don't have to carry*

*the weight of the world
in your muscles and bones
Let go let go let go.*

We sing and release our arms,
sway them at our sides

The song continues
circling in the air
and through our bodies
until we all know it
and sing it together.
Believing that we can both be engaged in the world
and not let it break our hearts.

Our City

According to the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the city we live in, which I will call Our City, is considered a first tier suburb of Kansas City, Missouri (personal communication, May 2018). Median household income for Our City in 2012-2016 was \$48,565 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d). See Table 3.1 below for racial and income data from the 2010 and 2016 census. Based on the statistical data, it is logical to conclude that the neighborhood is experiencing white movement out of the neighborhood as more Black families move in. My experiences interacting with people in Our City further demonstrate tensions about changing racial demographics, as demonstrated in the poetic juxtaposition, *The Panoptics of Dollar General in Our City*, included in this section.

Table 3.1. *Racial and Income Data for Our City*

	2010 Demographic Data	2016 Estimated Data
White alone	67.7%	61.8%
Black or African American alone	25.1%	30.6%
Hispanic or Latino	5.1%	6.1%
Two or more races	3.5%	3.7%
	Population: 29, 526	Population: 29, 366

Our City has a downtown, but most small businesses do not stay long. We have seen many restaurants come and go. The coffee shop is closed now, but the diner and a doughnut shop have been there for years. Our City's public library is organized and friendly. When the children were little I took them to story time there every Wednesday. Now there is a designated shelf for English/Spanish children's books. Our City has its own school district that serves some families with Kansas City addresses. They are expanding the early childhood program.

The Panoptics of Dollar General in Our City

Citizens living in Our City
took much pride in their community
and started signing petitions to
remain a distinct place
separate from Kansas City.
Our City was incorporated as a city on
July 17, 1950.⁴⁸

According to the state...
In 2000, 11.8% of students in Our City's school district
were Black, 0% were Hispanic, and 85.0% were white.
In 2017, 44.1% were Black, 8.7% were Hispanic, and 38.1% were white.⁴⁹

According to Our City's Chamber of Commerce president,
*People move for all kinds of reasons
urban flight or whatever you want to call it
crime,
lot size,
schools.*
*Each business normally has a demographic they follow
We have people all the time who don't want*

⁴⁸ Our City Chamber of Commerce. (n.d.). History. Retrieved from <http://raytownchamber.com/history/>

⁴⁹ MDESE, (n.d.) *Missouri comprehensive data system*. Retrieved from: mcds.dese.mo.gov/guidedinquiry/

*Pay Day Loans,
Dollar Generals,
Family Dollars...
People worry they bring in*

those people.

*Who do they think those people are?*⁵⁰

The following,
according to an order
published at the end of the seventeenth
century,
were the measures to be taken when
the plague appeared in a town.

First, a strict spatial partitioning
each individual is fixed in his place.

Driving past the blinking school zone sign
I pull into the Dollar General parking lot.
Across the fence
grass and a playground
an elementary school
and the early childhood center.

This enclosed, segmented space,
observed at every point,
in which the individuals are
inserted in a fixed place,
in which the slightest movements are
supervised,
in which all events are recorded.

At the little league soccer team party
Another mom said,
*People say there are a lot of Dollar Generals in Our City,
and there are.
People say the schools aren't good,
but I think they are.*

⁵⁰ Thomas, R. (2018, August 23). Personal interview with Chamber President.

I said,
You know what they're really talking about.
She said, *Yeah,*
I know what they're really talking about!
I said,
The problem with the schools is that there are Black kids in them.
Yeah, she said,
My friends send their kids to private school.

The plague is met by order; its function
is to sort out
every possible confusion:
that of the disease, which is
transmitted when bodies are
mixed together;

Directly in front of me
at the Dollar General
drilled into the cement wall
a large
NOTICE

*For protection of our
customers,
employees,
and property*

this location

is being monitored and recorded.

The penetration of
regulation
into even the smallest details of
everyday life through

the capillary functioning of power;
the assignment to each individual of
his "true" name,
his "true" place,
his "true" body,
his "true" disease.

I walk inside.
I am greeted with

Good morning
from the cashier
the shelf stocker
both Black
and uniformed.

At once real and imaginary
the haunting memory of “contagions”
of the plague,
of rebellions,
crimes,
people who appear and disappear,
live and die in disorder.

Then an announcement over the speaker system

*For protection of our
customers,
employees,
and property*

this location

is being monitored and recorded.

[Panopticon] call[s] for multiple
separations,
an organization in depth of
surveillance and control,
an intensification
and a ramification
of power.

All the authorities exercising control
according to a double mode;
that of binary division
and that of differential distribution

I walk down the
crowded narrow aisles
namebrand, off brand, Dollar brand
underwear
toilet paper
Ziplock bags
snack cakes
makeup.

A wall of soda and energy drinks,
a spinning rack of romance novels.
At the front desk
deodorant
locked behind a glass panel.

The constant division between
the normal and the abnormal.
The abnormal individual,
to brand him and to alter him.

Panopticon is the architectural figure
an annular building;
at the centre, a tower;
this tower is pierced with wide windows
that open onto the inner side of the ring.

The peripheric building is divided into
cells,
each of which extends the whole width
of the building;

All that is needed, then,
is to place a supervisor in a central tower
and to shut up in each cell
a worker
or a schoolboy.

Power should be visible
and unverifiable.

The Panopticon is a machine
for dissociating the
see/being seen

dyad:
in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen,
without ever seeing;

in the central tower,
one sees everything
without ever being seen.

Another announcement
muffled and computerized

unintelligable.

Power has its principle not so much in a
person
as in a certain concerted distribution of
bodies,
surfaces,
lights,
gazes.

The Black man stocking shelves with American cheese slices
says, *It sounds like your speaker's broken.*

The clerk replies,
It's not broken; it's just him.

It's always hard to hear

him.

There is a machinery that assures
dissymmetry,
disequilibrium,
difference.⁵¹

Our Neighborhood

We have lived in our multiracial, mixed-income neighborhood since 2004. Our neighborhood was built on farmland, and several of the homes on our street have multi-acre backyards despite the fact that it is a walking neighborhood with sidewalks that children use to go from home to home and adults use to walk dogs. There are lots with farm animals such as horses, turkey, and goats on our block. Our children's elementary school is three doors down from our house. The following poetic transcriptions demonstrate the complexities of racial discourse in such a neighborhood through the story of how my neighbors, who are

⁵¹ This column is a found poem drawn directly from Foucault (1979) writing on Panopticism.

Black, and my family responded when new residents hung a confederate flag in their window. Figure 3.2 further illuminates this story.

What to do when a Confederate Flag Moves into your Neighborhood

August 20, 2018

As we walked our children to school,
I pointed out the Confederate flag
the new renters had hung in their window
in the little white house on the corner
by the school crosswalk.

My son asked what flag we were talking about.
My husband explained that it was the flag
of the Southern states who wanted to keep slavery.

My son asked why people put it up.

I said some people say it is because they are proud
of being from the South and their family members fought in the Civil War.

My husband said people use it to show their Southern heritage
and to show that they don't think the government should control them.

But,
we said, many people see it as a symbol of hatred
and racism
and it is not okay to us.

August 21, 2018

On my way to work,
I saw a woman stop her car
get out
take a photo of the flag in the window.

I thought about it all day.
What it means for our neighborhood
for the children who drivewalkridethebus past it
every morning and afternoon.

August 24, 2018

I texted my friend and neighbor
who is Black and has Black children

who walk by the house every day on their way to elementary school.

Have you seen the confederate flag hung in the window of our new neighbors on the corner? It is really bothering me, and I'm trying to figure out what to do about it.

She said she would bake cookies
Which was also my husband's suggestion.

September 17, 2018

My neighbor, Rosetta,
decided she should wait until her husband could go with her
to deliver cookies.
When they went, no one was home.

I baked an extra orange cream bar
then gave it to Rosetta's husband
instead of the new renters.

I stitched up a heart flag as big as a curtain
and pinned it up in my window.

September 20, 2018

Mom, your heart!
my son said as we
walked to school.

You remember why I did that?
I asked.
Oh yeah! he said.

You put up a mean flag,
I put up a big flag about love.
I said,
making sure he knew why.



Figure 3.2 Heart Flag I Later Hung in our Window

Our Elementary School

My children attend our local public elementary school, which was established in 1961 (Our City Quality Schools, n.d.) and currently serves approximately 401 students (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). The school receives Title I funding with 63% of students qualifying for free and reduced price lunch. The demographics of the school reflect the changing demographics of the community. As noted previously, in

2000, 11.8% of students were Black, 0% were Hispanic, and 85.0% were white. In 2017, 44.1% of the students were Black, 8.7% were Hispanic, and 38.1% were white. (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). Despite the racial diversity of the students, the teaching staff continues to be overwhelmingly white and female. This mirrors national statistics as described by the U.S. Department of Education's report entitled *Racial Diversity in the Education Workforce* (2016):

In the 2011–12 school year, 82 percent of public school teachers were white. In comparison, 51 percent of all 2012 elementary and secondary public students were white. In contrast, 16 percent of students were black, and 7 percent of public teachers were black. Likewise, while percent of students were Hispanic, 8 percent of teachers were Hispanic. (p. 6)

As a result of legislation such as No Child Left Behind, enacted in 2001, and its recent iteration, the Every Student Succeeds Act, enacted in 2015 (Heise, 2017), like most schools in the country, my children's school has experienced a shift toward structured curriculum, standardized testing, and behaviorist child guidance curricula. There is a clear focus on literacy and math instruction and a de-emphasis of science and social studies, especially in the primary grades. In later elementary school, the state-authorized social studies curriculum is facilitated. The school implements School-Wide Positive Behavior Support including a token economy in which my children receive paper money to spend at the school store when they exhibit *good* behaviors. The Parent Teacher Association organizes fund-raisers and facilitates holiday parties in the gym. While I find these movements toward standardized and behaviorist curricula and superficial parent involvement somewhat cold and alarming, my family has had a positive experience with the school in general. My children have had several dynamic and caring teachers whom they have enjoyed learning with, and we have found school faculty receptive when we have brought up concerns. The school is a

place where my family feels welcome and my children have developed interracial friendships. There are teachers at the school for whom we will be forever grateful due to their dedication to our children's care and education. Below I have included two poems. The first is meant to illuminate the culture of the formal social curriculum of the school. The second provides insight into the social studies curriculum of the school.

May 15, 2018 Poetic Juxtaposition: Meeting with the Principal⁵²

My daughter's second grade experience
was especially trying.

At the end of the school year,
I met with the principal
to talk about the ways
rewards and punishments
for
behavior and academics
have
shaped my daughter's thinking
about herself,
about others,
about school.

A school's environment is led by norms,
values, beliefs, rituals,
symbols, ceremonies, and stories
that in turn all collectively define and contribute
to the school's culture. (p. 426)

She came home last week
saying that she made the biggest improvement in reading scores
in her class
and that she would get extra recess.

She gave us a note explaining
children who made improvements to their reading scores
in the first tier

⁵² The narrative in the left column is a poetic memo. The text in the right justified column is found poetry from Reno, Friend, Caruthers, and Smith (2017).

would receive one extra recess and a snack
Those who made second tier improvements
would receive
two extra recesses and a snack.

There have been numerous efforts
in our schools designed to
control the behavior of students
with limited attention given
to the cultural norms
that undergird such efforts. (p. 425)

I told the principal I was concerned
that my daughter
who had not talked this way before
seemed to have a sense of superiority and competition
in regard to her reading progress.

The principal said she told the teachers
they could incentivize improvements in reading scores
since third through fifth graders
may be feeling a lack of motivation
after annual standardized testing.
She thought all students would be rewarded
because all would have made some improvement over the year
and she did not expect that some teachers would make tiered incentives.

I told her I worried that reading
was being reduced to scores
and incentivized through rewards.
I pointed out a lack of joy in learning.

I told the principal about the change in the way
my daughter frames her own behavior
and that of others.
Now she talks about herself as good
and says other kids get in trouble.
She says things like,
I'm always quiet in the halls.

A critical definition of culture
suggests how the values and norms
of the school may be shaped
by hegemonic narratives of
race, class, gender, and sexual orientation

by individuals inside the school. (p. 426)

I said the end of the year celebrations
were being framed to name some kids good and some bad-
children can only participate if they have good behavior.
My daughter pointed out in the yearbook
the four children in her class
she knew would not be able to participate.

I told the principal that I coach my daughter
that school is easier for her
than it is for some people
and there might be things
that are easier for them than for her.
I have asked her how she might be able
to help other people who have difficulty at school.

Schools attempt
to offer opportunities for students,
however
often within the same setting,
reproduce existing social classes. (p. 427)

I said I did not think the teachers meant to promote this
atmosphere of good and bad,
competition,
but my daughter was receiving the message.

I told her I worried that my daughter
was developing a sense of superiority
to people who do not do as well at school.

Our Elementary School Curriculum in Three Acts

1. February 2017

We sat next to Carl and Rebecca
in folding chairs in the gym
waiting for the third grade music program.
As the music began,
Carl leaned over and groaned,
I forgot it was Black History Month.
The children went on to sing
Pick a Bale of Cotton
and Mamma's Little Baby Loves Shortnin' Bread

Each song was introduced by a child who had memorized the neatly packaged history of field songs and soul food.

The next day I emailed the music teacher.

*I am writing as a parent and a teacher
grappling with racism in America
while living in this multiracial community.
I was troubled by some of the song choices,
songs that have complicated and racist histories,
originally included racial slurs,
trivialized the work done by enslaved Africans
limited African contributions to American culture
to food and entertainment.*

I told Carl I had written the email.
He said, *Good*, and
What will they be singing about next, lynching?

2. September 2018

The fourth grade newsletter mentioned a new unit on *The Prehistoric People of Missouri*.
I asked and
Mrs. Z sent me the state-manufactured slide show.

I emailed back
*I noticed that the unit moves very quickly from prehistoric times to slavery
The bullet points seem to gloss over the devastating effects of European expansion on
Indigenous people.
The term “conquered” is only used when describing action between tribes.
Then there’s this quote that doesn’t quite put any blame on Europeans,
I also think it is important when we talk about Indigenous people that kids understand
that tribes are still in existence today.*
I requested books on the Osage tribe from the library.
Sent her books and shared websites from a colleague.

3. March 2019

My son told me about practicing for the fifth grade music program.
He had missed several practices due to orchestra and the gifted classes,
and the program was that night.
He said they sang a Native American song about *leading*.

Then he said,
*Why are we singing a song all happy
about Indians
when they were sent away on the Trail of Tears?*

He said they sang another song called
We're all American from Head to Toe.
They were supposed to put on sunglasses and dance and sing.
*With American heart and American soul, made in the USA!
We are brown or black or white, American in many ways.
And we are true to the red, white and blue: the colors of the USA!*
He said he didn't sing.
I told him he didn't have to go to the program that night.

The Ball Fields

Both of my children play soccer and baseball at a local church-affiliated sports complex ten minutes west of our home. My husband helps coach their baseball teams. The sports program is a mission of a large multi-ethnic, multiracial Christian church. It is typical to hear multiple languages and see multiracial families at sporting events. In this setting, People of Color and white people are in coaching positions. Global Futbol Community (Global FC), a local Christian organization with a mission to “use soccer as a vehicle for transformative impact” (Global Futbol Community, n.d.) has a team of racially and ethnically diverse children, many of whom hold refugee status that competes in the league. In January of 2019, my son was invited to play as goalie on the Global FC Team. In this setting, games begin]with a prayer, and coach-talks often end with them. This puts my children, my husband, and I in a somewhat awkward position as we do not identify as Christian. Sometimes I find that we use our knowledge of Christianity as the dominant religion to pass as Christian. I include three poetic memos below to more deeply describe this context that has become so important in our lives.

January 6, 2017

My daughter and I sit on the metal bleachers
watching my son's baseball game

My daughter says,
RJ is my favorite player except for my brother.

RJ is the only African American kid on the team.
He plays catcher and his grandpa cheers for him calling him Baby Salvy.
(Our Royals did win the World Series right down the road.)

My son
nine years old
pitches the last inning
lets too many walk
loses the game.

He cries quietly
as the team walks to their meeting place
in the patchy grass
for a team talk and snacks.

The first baseman walks next to my son,
puts a hand on his shoulder,
talks to him quietly,
walks on.

The team sits
on the grass and dust.
RJ sits next to my son
puts his arm around his shoulder.

My daughter says,
I told you he's my favorite.

September 20, 2018

After soccer practice
Coach Jose
pointed to the baseball glove
and football
on my son's shirt.

It is okay if you play baseball and football.

*They are popular in the United States.
You can have fun playing them.*

*But say your parents take you somewhere
out of the USA
somewhere in Latino America
You only speak one language, right?
You speak English?*

Right.

*But with soccer
anywhere you go
Latino America
Mexico
Even if you don't speak Spanish.
The Middle East
Qatar
Israel
Even if you don't speak Hebrew.*

*You have this.
He put his foot on the ball.*

*This is your language.
You don't know how to say,
Do you want to play?
But you have soccer, you can play.*

*You can go to China
All the way on the other side of the world.
You can play.
Soccer is your language.*

September 20, 2018

We walk out of the ball fields
down the long sidewalk
lit by streetlight

Three boys
as dark as ebony
walk ahead of us
carrying bottles of neon green Gatorade
calling behind them

the familiar phrases of the ball fields
Good game!
Nice job!
With just a hint of an accent.

At the end of the sidewalk
a pristine white church bus
is lit from within.

We pass
walking to our car
trying not to stare
though each of us wants to.

My son asks,
Where do the refugees live?
I'm not sure, I say.

I mean do they live with their parents?
I think so.
I think they have parents or
other family members to take care of them.
I think they ride the bus because their families
don't have cars.

We put the soccer balls
in the back of our
family-rated compact SUV.
Buckle our seatbelts.

In the parking lot one tall white coach
Held the hand of one small brown boy.

Did that guy adopt a kid?
asks my son.
I don't know maybe.

See the kids getting on the bus to go home?

We drove past the church bus
unafraid to stare now
from behind our windows
at the dark-skinned boys in light blue soccer uniforms
and the one tall brown girl wearing a skirt and hijab and cleats.

Data Collection

Data collection began in August 2015 and spanned three years and 8 months ending in March 2019. Sources of data for this project include audio-recordings of spontaneous and initiated conversations about race, audio-recordings of family readings of multicultural children's literature, researcher field notes detailing conversations and experiences in community settings, photographed artifacts, personal email and text communications, and my researcher memos. I transcribed more than 75 audio recordings, recorded 310 field notes, photographed 37 artifacts, and documented 10 pieces of personal email and cell phone text communications. Data collection was situated in our mixed race geographic community, the natural home environment, and any other context our family visited throughout our daily lives including out of state trips to museums.

All data was organized by date and stored in password-protected folders on the university's secure storage system. Audio recordings, photographed artifacts, field notes, and researcher memos were saved using the date they were recorded as a title so that they were organized chronologically. As I transcribed audio recordings, I labeled them by date and topic and added transcriptions to the chronologically organized data set. A simplified timeline of data collection and analysis is provided in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 *Study Timeline*

Data Collection	Data Analysis: First Level Analysis	Data Analysis: Second Level Analysis	Concentrated Data Reanalysis
August 2015 to March 2019	August 2015 to April 2019	June 2016 to April 2019	February 2019
Collection and organization of audio recordings, transcriptions, field notes, memos, and photographed artifacts.	Poetic transcription and memoing; grouping of data into larger themes.	Combining poetic transcription, field notes, memos, literature, and everyday texts to develop themes and compose analytic poems.	Focused reanalysis and recategorization of data to develop major findings

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is “a continuous, iterative enterprise” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013, p. 14) that consists of repeated listening, viewing, and reading of data and leads to the recognition of patterns and the emergence of themes. Due to the cyclical nature of data analysis, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously throughout the majority of the study (see Table 3.2) resulting in the emergence of patterns and themes and nascent answers to the research question (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles et al., 2013). Here I will detail the processes of first level data analysis, second level data analysis, and concentrated data reanalysis.

First Level Data Analysis

Throughout the study, whenever new data was collected, I utilized first level analysis. At this level, I analyzed transcriptions, field notes, and researcher memos through poetic

transcription and translation. I examined each piece of data individually reading through each source several times, extracting salient quotes and condensing language to what I understood to be its central meaning. When creating poetic transcriptions from verbatim transcriptions, I sometimes went back to listen to audio recordings to gain deeper understanding of participant meanings and speech rhythms. Then I created poetic transcriptions that were “chronologically and linguistically faithful to the transcript” (Glesne, 1997, p. 207). I used white space, line breaks, and sometimes the omission of spaces to communicate meaning and draw attention to certain ideas. When translating my own words, such as field notes and researcher memos, into poetry, I took a similar approach but allowed more freedom with word choice and word order since these data sources. If field notes included participant quotes, I did not alter them. As I adapted data into poetic form, I labeled the file with the date the original piece of data was collected and marked it as poetry in the title. Then I added the individual poems to the data set alongside the original data source. Through this process, I developed a growing data set organized chronologically with audio recording, verbatim transcription, and poetic transcription of one piece of data organized side-by-side.

As the data set grew and themes emerged, I created thematic tables in order to “permit a viewing of the full data set in the same location” (Miles et al., 2013, p. 108). These tables were organized chronologically and included dates, the children’s ages, and thematic notes. See Table 3.3 for the thematic table organizing data for one pattern theme: God as Metaphor.

Table 3.3 *Thematic Table: God as Metaphor*

Date	Child Age in Years and Months	Notes S= Son, D= Daughter, R= myself, H= Husband
2016.07.08	S-8 y,5m D- 6 y, 2m	S-traditional wise fatherly figure except half brown and white “He tried to stop the wars, but he couldn’t do that.” D- traditional fatherly white figure who helps kids
2016.08.17	S-8 y, 5m	S-I think of him um, as a person swinging through our bodies at every moment.
2017.09.27	S- 9y, 8m D-7y, 4m	S-”I’ve thought about this a lot. God is the wind. They always say God is in us. And we breathe in air, and air is the wind. D- “God is animals” H interpreted-god is an element like oxygen.
2017.11.04	D-7y, 5m	D-”I think God is half boy and half girl. And the girl is part brown and part white.”
2017.11.23	D-7y, 6m	D-”I think the sun is a girl... Those things that come out of it look like hair.” R-”sometimes boys have long hair too. Uncle has long hair.” D- “I just think it’s a girl. I think it’s a god.”
2017.11.24	D-7y, 6m	R-”Yesterday you were saying that the sun is a girl.” D-”Yep, that’s what I think and the moon is a boy and they are gods”
2018.02.28	D-7y, 10m	D- “God is air... And wind.” R- “So how can air and wind make people?” M- “to blow life into them.”
2018.06.17	D-8y, 1m	D- “A Brown person which is a boy, a Brown person which is a girl, a white girl and a white boy.”
2018.06.24	D-8y, 1m S-10y, 5m	While watching Son of God... When Jesus inhaled and exhaled D asked, “Is that God?” S-”He is the son of God, so he might look a little bit like God. I always thought God looked like that guy.”

First level data analysis also included organizing poetic transcriptions, memos, and field notes into thematic sets of poetry. Creating these sets of poetry was an act of processing and organizing data into manageable units making them accessible to deeper analysis and further condensation during reanalysis (Miles et al., 2013). These poetically portrayed data sets maintained and presented the emotionality of the data necessary for ethical analysis (Hill Collins, 2003) that was not attainable in the thematic tables. A list of poetic data sets can be found in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 *Thematic Sets of Poetry*

Thematic Sets of Poetry	
Initial Sets Created during First Level Data Analysis	Sets Created during Concentrated Data Reanalysis
Countering Dominant Definitions of Beauty Black Superheroes Conceptions of God My Daughter's Critical Writing My Son and Brayden Resistance to Curriculum National Political Context Race Words and Their Rules	God as Metaphor for Humanity National Politics Race Labels That's Racist The N Word

Second Level Data Analysis

After translating data into poetry through poetic transcription and organizing it into thematic tables and thematic sets of poetry, I engaged in second level data analysis. Poetic inquiry at this level allowed for more creative license as I “connect[ed] a discrete fact with other discrete facts, then grouping these into comprehensible and more abstract patterns” (Miles et al., 2013, p. 292) and attempted to express field work, theory, and the larger culture evocatively (Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

During second level data analysis, a new technique emerged which I term poetic juxtaposition. Poetic inquiry embodies analysis and presentation (Prendergast et al., 2009). Like Glesne (1997), I “found myself ... searching for the essence conveyed, the hues, the textures, and then ... juxtapose[d] details into a somewhat abstract representation” (p. 206). As I immersed myself in the data and literature on children’s conceptions of race, critical race theory, and critical whiteness studies, I found song lyrics, audio from podcasts, lines from popular books, and other people’s poetry permeating my analysis. Recognizing that autoethnography is the study of the larger culture through the personal and a method that encourages creativity, I decided incorporating popular and everyday texts into my analysis was both logical and beneficial. By incorporating words from the broader culture, I seek to “acknowledge the various standpoints that exist within one [family] and to situate them culturally” (Boylorn et al., 2013, p. 18).

I define poetic juxtaposition as the act of making associations and physically placing words/ideas side by side is an act of both making meaning and preparing a mode by which to share meaning. At the second level of data analysis, I reread thematic sets of poetry, examined thematic tables, re-immersed myself in relevant literature, and sometimes went

back to raw data sources including audio recordings. I created poetic juxtapositions that brought together poetic transcriptions, field notes, and memos with found poetry from the literature (Prendergast, 2006) and everyday texts from popular culture. In creating poetic juxtapositions, I arranged poetic data chronologically and interspersed it with relevant excerpts from the literature and popular texts in order to illuminate themes and “trigger minds into being not so much asleep by using art” (Anderson, 2018).

This technique combines poetic transcription and found poetry literature review and includes contemporary texts. Incorporating contemporary texts both documents the current sociocultural milieu and brings forth “subjugated knowledge of subordinate groups” (Hill Collins, 2003, p. 48) by giving voice to non-academics who articulate the subtleties of culture through art. The texts I have chosen to include are popular texts that I encountered through news and social media as well as my own social networks and are often the work of People of Color. My hope is that the text excerpts both ground and decenter my own white voice. Poetic juxtaposition is an attempt to make visible the sociocultural ways in which I make sense of the world, reflecting the theoretical framework I operate from. My intent is to display the texts and interactions that have influenced my understanding alongside each other so that larger themes become apparent to the reader. I propose this new iteration acknowledges Cahnmann-Taylor’s (2009) assertion, “[W]e cannot separate the form of writing from the content of our research: we have to show through writing that what we have done both builds on what has been done before and adds to it in fresh and vital ways” (p. 16).

Concentrated Data Reanalysis

As the study came to a close, I transitioned from data collection to member checking and entered a period of concentrated data reanalysis. At this stage, I spent time with the

entirety of the data set holding the research question in mind while reanalyzing data. The goal of this stage was to clarify themes into findings that answered the research question. To develop these findings, I refined poems and created new poems through poetic juxtaposition. This work served as both analysis and representation as the poems completed during this time are included in the findings section.

Member checking, “sharing your notes with the people you are studying to see whether or not they agree” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 89), occurred throughout the study but was especially important in the final stage of reanalysis. During the three years and seven months of data collection, I sometimes tried to initiate and conduct informal interviews around emerging themes as member checks. My children often responded to these conversations by demonstrating a desire to give right answers or exhibiting discomfort (Long & Long, 2014, p. 127) and fear of punishment. For example, on February 6, 2016 when I explained to my son that I was working on research for school and wanted to know his definition of Mixed, a word he had used a few times in conversation, he replied, “Mixed, add two things together and mix it.” When I pressed, “But when you are talking about people?” he responded, “Um, mixed is um, a girl, your father is Brown, your mom is white. That’s a mix. Or if the mom’s Brown and the dad’s white. That’s a mix, right?”

Often my son seemed worried that his teachers would find out that he or another student was talking about race. On October 7, 2015 (and as noted in the poem describing him) my son asked me if there was such a thing as “Black rap.” I asked him where he had heard that phrase. He said he had heard it from a child at school. The following conversation transpired:

Myself: About, he was just talking about music? What did he say?

My Son: I forgot.
Myself: Hm?
My Son: I forgot. He just told me, “Do you know, did you know that there was Black Rap?”
Myself: That’s all?
My Son: Mmhmm. Are you gonna email the teacher?
Myself: No, no, I just want to talk to you about it. I don’t want to get anybody in trouble.
My Son: Probably get me in trouble.
Myself: Huh?
My Son: Probably get me in big trouble.
Myself: No, I don’t want to do that. I just want to talk about it because people say a lot of stuff and it’s hard to know what to do.

My son’s worry about adults finding out that children were talking about race was extended to other school years and even to our home. In October of 2017, he told my husband and me that he and a friend were looking at a book at school and had seen a photograph of a Black man who had been lynched. I asked if they told their teacher about it. He said, “No, it was too bad to talk to the teacher about.” On October 22, 2018 my son and I talked about a child in his class who said the N Word. Even though I did not ask who the child was, in the midst of our discussion, my son said, “I’m not telling you his name.”

While my son demonstrated a desire to give “right” answers and a fear of punishment when I instituted interview-like conversations, I also grew uncomfortable with the tone and implications of these conversations. Long and Long (2014) assert, “Being asked to sit down and respond to a list of questions removed from the context in which they were significant to the children gave power to the questioner, not to the children” (p. 127). In my study, parent-led interviews felt unnatural and introduced an heir of being right or wrong to the culture of our home that seemed inappropriate for conversations about the nature of race, which is a notoriously shape-shifting concept. One example of this was on November 6, 2017 when I

decided to ask my daughter what color some of our friends were. We had begun a friendship with a family who lived down the street. The blended family identified as Black and one child was biracial. The siblings in the family had a variety of skin tones and hair textures. I wondered how my daughter perceived them racially. While my daughter and I cuddled on the couch one day, I asked her what color our friends were. My daughter responded that the light skinned friend was *cinnamon cookie*, the dark-skinned friend was *chocolate chip cookie*, and she identified herself as *sugar cookie*. I was immediately uncomfortable with the conversation I had initiated, and decided to end it before my daughter realized I was attempting to race our friends and use our mother-daughter time as research.

Due to these sociocultural factors, I avoided conversations that had the tone of formal interviews when conducting member checks during concentrated data reanalysis. Instead when checking my deductions with my children, I brought up my hunches casually. For example, on February 27, 2019, as we crossed paths in the kitchen, I told my son I had been thinking about something and asked him, “Do you wish we were Mixed?” He responded with caution, “I don’t know, I don’t really care.” “Sometimes I wish that,” I said honestly and to give him comfort that there wasn’t a right or wrong answer. He replied, “Maybe if I was Mixed, I’d get along better with lots of people. Some Mixed or African American people at my school don’t really like me because of my color.... Why are we talking about this? I feel scared.” I responded to his discomfort by opening up about my own experiences. I said, “It happens to me too sometimes. Like when I went to the conference last weekend, some people were like, *Why are you talking about this stuff when you’re white?* . . . So what I did at the conference was really tried to keep talking to people who seemed like they didn’t want to be around me, instead of walking away. I listened to them when they talked. I think a lot of

People of Color are used to white people being a certain way, like a Trump way, and they have to get to know you before they can trust you.” In this interaction, I supported honest communication about race by sharing some of my own experiences and vulnerabilities. This is a technique promoted by Michael (2015) who specializes in facilitating conversations about race in schools. She writes,

[I]f I ask questions about race and reveal nothing about myself, I might get only cursory answers. The final product will be vastly different if I share some of my own experiences with race and break the racial contract within that relationship. (p. 106)

While some might worry that this kind of sharing might lead to my son changing his story so that it better matched my own, it is important to remember that I was checking a theme which had emerged based on multiple pieces of evidence and after my son had demonstrated fear of speaking honestly on the topic.

I discussed all themes and findings in detail with my husband, the children’s father. Together we considered our children’s personalities and individual needs within the context of the larger study. I checked my interpretations of our family interactions and the children’s words with him and made changes according to his insight. For example, an early theme was my children’s rejection of curriculum that I initiated. This curriculum was often on uncomfortable topics around race. I told my husband that I attributed our son’s rejection of this curriculum as associated with his desire to lead conversations and play and only spend time at home on topics he enjoyed. My husband pointed out that our son is also empathetic and sensitive and that he might also be rejecting these topics because they carry an emotionally heavy load. Indeed, as I looked back at my data, I found records of my son saying, “I just want to fill my mind about happy thoughts,” and “Okay, let’s stop talking about this. Let’s just go read books and make cards. That’s happier.” I found that discussing

emerging themes with someone who knew my children well lead me to be more “alert to [my] children’s possible discomfort” (Long & Long, 2014, p. 134) and to construct *multidimensional depictions* of my children (Long & Long, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

This study and its participants are very dear to me. The participants are my most dear ones, and in many ways this autoethnography is my life’s work. Thus, I hold this work very carefully in my heart, head, and hands. Because this research involves those I love more than anyone else, I have come to consider the principles guiding human subject research in a deeper manner. While the University of Missouri Kansas City Internal Review Board deemed this work *not human subjects research* because the sample size was so small as to not be considered generalizable, my ethical obligations were not diminished. Throughout the study, I kept the following three overriding ethical principles of human subject research in mind.

1. Inform subjects about the nature of the study and to ensure that their participation is voluntary.
2. Ensure that the benefits of the research outweigh the risks.
3. Ensure the risks and benefits of research are evenly distributed among the possible subject populations. (Curators of University of Missouri, 2014)

As a mother, my first responsibility is always to my children, as an antiracist white educator I am also responsible to the teachers and children I work with, and as a citizen I take seriously my part in improving our community and our democracy. In the context of this study, I have considered the benefits and risks of the research project, made decisions about what is shared publicly and confidentiality, sought to maintain trust throughout the study, and attempted to portray my children as full human beings.

Considering Benefits and Risks

Widespread and persistent white parenting norms perpetuate white supremacy (Bartoli et al., 2016; Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup & Holden, 2011). More work must be done to present new ways forward for antiracist parenting in the white home (Miller, 2014; Nishi, 2018). While seeking to produce transformative scholarship, I must also ensure that my work is not destructive to the lives I am most responsible for. Over the nearly four years of the study, it was necessary to consider the risks to my family members including how day-to-day data collection might affect our relationships and how disseminating the research might harm them. I took steps to reduce risk and also to help each of my family members consider how our story might benefit other families.

Like ParentCrit scholar Nishi (2018), I “explained that as we were talking about race and racism that I wanted to share our conversations so that other parents might learn how to talk with their kids about the same” (p. 10). I did this throughout the study and more formally on May 2, 2018 as we entered the final year of the study when I decided to organize a conversation around informed consent. In this conversation, I attempted to explain the purpose of the study and why they were such a big part of it. I told them they had unique perspectives because they had experienced going to an all white preschool and then an elementary school that has children of Color. “I think it’s important to tell our story so other families can learn about how to do it,” I said.

Deciding what is Shared Publicly

During this same May 2, 2018 conversation, my ten-year-old son stipulated that I must, “Say what you’re going to say first,” indicating that I not share family stories with others unless I get permission from family members beforehand. This agreement initiated by

my son recognizes the need “to be thoughtful of our research participants as our first audience and, indeed, our most important audience, for it is to them that we owe our care to compose a text that does not rupture life stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 173-174). This ethical consideration is especially important in parent child ethnographies as the parent-child relationship is characterized by intimacy, dependence, and power differentials (Long & Long, 2014). Even while my husband and I are legally able to give consent for our children’s participation in this research because our children are minors and further consent is not required because the study was deemed *not human subject research*, my family came to the agreement that I would review or member-check stories, artifacts, and recordings I wished to share with broader audiences before I did so.

Thus, on March 19, 2019 my family sat around the kitchen table and I went over the major findings and the evidence I would use to illustrate them. I listed the major themes, telling my children I wanted to tell people about how we used the words *white, Black, peach, brown, Mixed, The N Word* (my son asked if I wrote the real word and I assured him that I did not), and the phrase *that’s racist*. I told them I wanted to share their pictures and words about God being Black and white, girl and boy. My daughter said, “I don’t believe that.” I asked what she meant. She said, “I don’t believe that any more. I don’t think God is a person.” I told her I knew that, but I wanted to share that she believed it for a while. She said that was okay. I told my children I wanted to tell people that my son kneeled for the pledge and my daughter wrote zines. My daughter said her zine about the wastefulness of using Styrofoam trays in the cafeteria worked for a while, but Styrofoam trays are still used sometimes. Then both of my children expressed they were comfortable with me sharing their stories, and my daughter gave me permission to share pictures of her zines.

Even with my children's permission to share their stories, words, and textual creations, special care must be made to consider how my family members and I might feel about these stories being made public as the children get older and my professional and parental identity changes (Nishi, 2018). My husband and I have discussed potential problems with publishing and presenting stories that might embarrass or isolate our family. There have been a few things we did not feel were appropriate to share publicly, but ultimately we decided the potential benefits outweighed the risks. During one late night talk, my husband summed it up this way, "This work is important. I know we are not doing everything right, but I think we need to put it out there. Maybe it will help other families figure out how to talk about race."

Confidentiality

One important ethical consideration for which my husband and I made special accommodation is confidentiality. Maintaining confidentiality is impossible in parent child ethnography, thus many parent researchers choose to use their children's names in manuscripts and presentations (see Baghban, 2014; Long & Long, 2014; Miller, 2014; Nishi, 2018). However, in negotiating the terms of the research my husband, my children and I decided their names would not be used in publication to avoid any information popping up if someone were to conduct an online name search. Instead I use the phrases *my husband*, *my son*, and *my daughter*. When family members are mentioned, I use their titles as well, e.g. Uncle, Aunt, Grandma. In order to protect the identity of those in our community, all names used in the manuscript other than my own, are pseudonyms. In addition, while audio recordings and photographed artifacts are used as data, photographs of family members are not.

Maintaining Trust

Long-term ethnographies with children require assent throughout the study rather than merely consent at the onset of the study (Cocks, 2006; Kabuto & Martens, 2014; Long & Long, 2014). Parent-child ethnographers Kabuto & Martens (2014) assert, “Seeking assent ...requires that the researcher be observant of the needs and responses of the participants at all times” (p. 12). This kind of assent requires the ongoing maintenance of trust. I sought to maintain trust with my children by asking them before I began recording each of our conversations and watching for cues that they would like to end a conversation on a difficult topic (Long & Long, 2014). While my inclination was often to continue the conversation in recognition that race conversations are difficult but necessary (Michael, 2015; Singleton, 2015), I also allowed conversations to end or transition to a new topic when I saw that my children were growing fatigued. For example on February 14, 2016 on the car drive from church, my family talked about the Black Lives Matter sign being stolen from our church. We talked about this for several minutes. Then our children stopped answering our questions and began playing a game together on their digital device. When I asked what they were doing, my son said, “We’re trying to swap faces.” I said to my husband, “That’s enough heavy for now, huh?” He replied, “Yeah, that’s probably good.” Then I stopped the recording.

I also maintained my children’s trust by limiting data collection to conversations and interactions they knew I was a part of. I did not actively observe their play or conversations with peers. Therefore any descriptions of interactions with peers contained in the study are accounts of interactions as told to me by my children.

Portraying My Children as Full Human Beings

As I made decisions about how to present findings, I kept Long & Long's (2014) imperative to "be careful not to portray any child as one-dimensional" (p. 134) in mind. I sought to portray my children as interesting, multi-dimensional, and agentive people by describing their learning across time and contexts in both the methodology and findings chapters. I depict their experiences and subsequent conceptions of race through transcribed conversations, poetry, photographs of artifacts they created, and descriptions of their actions.

Positionality and Limitations

Positionality Poem

Sometimes the world has a load of questions
Seems like the world knows nothing at all
The world is near but it's out of reach
Some people touch it, but they can't hold on⁵³

Autoethnographic scholars...
theorize
 the complexities,
 intersections,
 politics,
 and nuances of identities.⁵⁴

She is moving to describe the world
She has messages for everyone

However, she is led to construct her narrative
in such a way that obscures some of
the real processes of racial domination.

⁵³ (Byrne, Eno, Weymouth, Harrison, & Frantz, 1980) All left justified text are lyrics from "The Great Curve" by the Talking Heads. I have been listening to Angelique Kidjo's cover of the Talking Heads album, Remain in Light. I like Talking Heads, and find the way that Kidjo, an African artist, interprets the songs compelling, especially this song about the feminine.

⁵⁴ (Boylorn, Orbe, & Ellis, 2013, p. 19)

This strategy might be necessary
insofar
as she avoids threatening her
(white)
audience
to the point that they discredit her message.⁵⁵

She is moving by remote control

whiteness is a system that, whether implicitly or explicitly,
whites do not even see⁵⁶

Hands that move her are invisible

the industry that produces white antiracists,
is a political economy
that rewards whites for a message
that people of color know
firsthand through experience⁵⁷

The world has a way of looking at people
Sometimes it seems that the world is wrong

She once wrote,
I'm never sure if I am doing it right,
disrupting whiteness
having conversations about race
but I know I can't wait for complete instructions.⁵⁸

She loves the world, and all the people in it.

When seven years old, her daughter said,
My favorite thing about Mom is she loves everyone and gives hope.
and
Hope is a mix between kindness and braveness.

Holding on for an eternity
Gone, ending without finishing

⁵⁵ (Leonardo, 2009, pp. 81-82)

⁵⁶ (McIntyre, 2002, p. 32)

⁵⁷ (Leonardo, 2013, p. 108)

⁵⁸ (Thomas, 2016)

She is prone to tears
She once wrote a poem that began
Upon deciding to stop crying in order to appear more professional⁵⁹

The world moves on a woman's hips
The world moves and it swivels and bops

At eleven years old,
her son wrote her the following note
and taped it to her bathroom mirror:
Thank you, Mommy
for helping me understand a lot of things.⁶⁰

A world of light, she's gonna open our eyes up

It is easy to stop thinking of ourselves as on a journey
and start thinking of ourselves as having arrived⁶¹
[but]
the white identity model is organized around
individuals getting to feel good
about being white in nonracist ways⁶²

She's gonna
hold it,
move it,
accepting one's whiteness as part of who one is
and being wholly oneself
while refusing to perpetuate whiteness
hold it,
move it
seeing how one can simultaneously be part of the problem
and part of the solution⁶³
hold it,
move it
hold it,
and move it.

Hopefully, our sons [and daughters]

⁵⁹ Poetic Memo 2.01.2017

⁶⁰ Photographed artifact January 2019

⁶¹ (Thompson, 2003, p. 20)

⁶² (Thompson, 2003, p. 15)

⁶³ (Michaels, 2015, p. 4)

have what they have learned from us,
and a howness
to forge it into their own image.⁶⁴

She's gonna open our eyes up.

I recognize that it is difficult to see how whiteness moves within and around my family and myself. Audrey Thompson (2003) puts it this way, “universal ethical systems reliably favor those in power . . . We trust profoundly in our ability to think critically and responsibly about things, and it is this very trust that betrays us” (p. 19). Throughout the study, I have consulted with mentors who understand CRT and CWS deeply as well as colleagues and mentors who understand children (Long & Long, 2014). Throughout the study, and especially during data analysis, I have asked myself in what ways might I be reifying bias and white normativity and have used both critical conversations and critical readings to better understand my own positionality in whiteness. Still I know I have blind spots that permeate this work.

My positionality as a white female teacher informs my sensibilities and perspectives. Like all white women in the American context, I “have been enveloped in socially constructed whiteness from early childhood and [my] process of becoming White continues into adulthood as [I] interact with those who are not [w]hite” (Miller, 2017, p. 127). From a young age, I was socialized to be a caregiver and provider of charity and help to those *less fortunate* than myself. This socialization was comfortable for me and became part of my gender identity as intended. Thus, the role of teacher seemed a natural fit, and working with *children of poverty*, which I had once been, seemed the right life's mission. During my

⁶⁴ (Lorde, 1984, p. 73)

undergraduate teacher preparation experiences in Kansas City, Missouri I began to more deeply associate poverty with children of Color, and I found myself easily taking on the role of “[w]hite female teacher benevolently serv[ing] the nation through her good intentions of saving children of color” (Leonardo & Boas, 2013, p. 319). What I did not see during these early years in my teaching career was my own “privileged position of representing the needs and desires of others through charity, politics, and schooling” (Leonardo & Boas, 2013, p. 319) or the fact that “racialized pedagogical orientations, school policies, and classroom practices are underwritten by [w]hite, cisgender, feminine, and middle to upper class social and cultural norms” (Warren & Hancock, 2017, p. viii). While I have learned much since those early years, these ideologies continue to shape my perspective and my work in ways that are sometimes invisible to me. In other words, while I strive to understand my own positionality, there are still ways in which I unknowingly “carry out the reproductive work of whiteness” (Leonardo & Boas, 2013, p. 315) as a member of an education system that is made up primarily of white women and structured to maintain white supremacy.

In this chapter, I have included descriptions of my own experiences of racialization in education settings, and I have been straightforward about the theoretical framework I operate from. I fully recognize that others might interpret the experiences and interactions I describe in this study differently based on their own unique points of view. Therefore, I have included many detailed descriptions of interactions in both traditional and poetic form so that readers might draw their own conclusions. I concur with Miller (2014) who acknowledges that her interpretations of her children’s actions are both enriched by her knowledge of her children’s communication styles and biased due to her position as mother. She writes, “[W]hile my interpretations of those nuances are certainly biased by my role as their mother, so would the

interpretations of any researchers studying my children because of the bias inherent in the role of any qualitative researcher” (pp. 47–48). Further, I have taken into consideration that any research with children must acknowledge the power dynamic that is always at play between adults and children recognizing that some of my children’s behavior may represent “what they [feel] I would positively value and respond to” (Connolly, 2017, p. 114), and have made this recognition part of data analysis.

A major limitation of this study is my own intimacy with the participants, which also, is of course, a strength. Qualitative researchers understand that there is no objectivity in research, but research within the family adds another layer of complexity. While being the mother to study participants allows me unusual and long-term access and an intimate insider perspective, it also means that there are aspects of my children and my family that may be invisible to me. For this reason, “[P]arent-researchers need to be critical of themselves by acknowledging that, as ‘research tools,’ they harbor their own assumptions about society, families, their children, and their children’s experiences in society” (Kabuto & Martens, 2014, p. 10).

Moving Forward to Paint a Broader Picture

In this chapter I have described the qualitative research methodologies that structured my study including autoethnography, parent child ethnography, and poetic inquiry. I provided poetic/artistic and traditional descriptions of the context and participants. In the following chapters, I present the experiences and understandings constructed by my family over the course of the study—the findings. First, however, I present the poetic field notes and poetic transcriptions that respond to this study’s research question and that were composed throughout the course of the study as Level 1 Data Analysis. These pieces are presented

before formal presentation of findings, where the stories shared within them will be shared again, but with full context and elaboration through poetic juxtaposition and traditional academic writing in order to paint a broader picture of the antiracist home curriculum.

CHAPTER 4

POETIC TRANSCRIPTIONS AND MEMOS

This chapter is completely comprised of the poetic transcriptions and field notes created during data collection and Level 1 Data Analysis. They are included here to provide greater context to the findings chapter and a broader picture of the home curriculum. This chapter is organized by five major themes:

1. Race Labels
2. That's Racist
3. The N Word
4. God Metaphors
5. National Politics

RACE LABELS

9.30.2015 Annie is Black POETIC TRANSCRIPTION

My daughter and I are alone in the car.
She is five years old.
She is in kindergarten at our local school.
We have recently watched
the 2014 movie rendition of Annie
in which Annie is played by Quvenzhané Wallis.

Annie is Black,
my daughter says
and I turn on the recorder.

We watched a movie of it.
She is Black.

What does that mean?

Wait, she is brown.

Yeah. Her skin is brown.

Mhmm. Her whole body is.
Well, all of her skin is brown.
Not all of her body.

What part of her body are you thinking of?

Fingers not brown,
she says shyly.

What color do you think her fingers are?

White.
Kind of.

You mean like the skin on her palms is a lighter color.

Mhmm.

Do you have friends with brown skin at school?

No.

Are there kids in your class who have brown skin?

Yeah.

*What color is Jabari?
What color skin does he have?*

Him is not in my class.

*Oh.
But he is your friend.
What color skin does he have?*

*The same color.
The black,
wait brown.*

Brown.

Jabari is my best friend who has brown skin.

*Only one skin friend I have at this school,
but him's not in my class!*

*Okay.
You've just been thinking about how
people have different color skin
like Annie.*

I wanna watch that movie.

*And she is brown.
For real life.
She is brown.*

1.23.2016 Are we a mix? POETIC MEMO

At breakfast, my son says,
Are we a mix?
No. No, I already know.

Do you mean one parent has white skin and one has dark?

Yes.

A kid in my class is mix.

*Do you know where kids who were a mix
went to school when there were schools for Black and white?*

*I don't know.
There weren't as many kids like that then
because it was against the law to marry
someone with a different color skin.*

Really?

Yeah, isn't that silly?

6.07.2016 What does colored mean? POETIC TRANSCRIPTION

My son and I are in the car.
He is eight years old.
He asks about racial terms and I turn on the recorder.

You asked, What does colored mean?
I repeat for the recorder.

It means you're white, right?

*Well, it's kind of the opposite meaning.
So it's an old-fashioned word
that people used to use to mean Black people
or people with brown skin.*

So it means people with brown skin?

Uhuh.

But that's old fashion.

*Yeah, so people don't say that anymore.
Now sometimes people say "People of Color."
And that can mean brown or dark brown skin,
Black people,
or Latino people.*

People of Color.

7.24.2016 Jason Black? POETIC FIELD NOTE WITH MEMO

It is morning
I am working at the kitchen table
reading
typing
reading
while my family sleeps.

My son creeps into the kitchen
and crawls onto my lap.
He has had a bad dream.
He looks at the tiny tattoo on my chest.
He is reminded of my brother's many tattoos.

We had visited my brother,
his son,
and his step son
in California a couple weeks ago.

*I didn't know Jason was [my cousin's] brother,
my son says.*

I explained that the boys
had the same mom
and different dads.

*That's weird,
he says.
Is Jason's family Black?*

No, his dad is Latino.

Do those people look Black?

Brown.

So that's why Jason looks Blackish?

*Yeah, his skin is darker.
(Darker than what? I wonder now.)*

Do they speak English?

English and Spanish.

So they are from Chinese?

Mexico.

Is his mom from English?

*She looks like a white person,
but I don't know.
She might have some Latino ancestry.*

12.11.2016 No Brown People here POETIC TRANSCRIPTION WITH MEMO

The four of us drive thirty minutes south
to a rural town
to watch our niece's dance recital.
We sit in theater seats with the lights turned low.

My six-year-old daughter sits on my lap
watching the dancers on the stage.
After a few performances
she leans into my ear
and says
in a disgraced whisper,
There are no Brown people here.

I look at each dancer and notice one tall elegant dancer
with light brown skin and black hair.
I point her out to my daughter.

In the car afterward, I tell the family,
[Our daughter] noticed there was only one dancer who was brown.

*I didn't see any dancers who were brown,
says my son.*

*Wait, I think she was light brown,
clarifies my daughter.*

Yeah. And she had black hair.

No, like, like Londyn is.

Oh, cause Londyn's mommy is brown and her daddy is white?

Oh, was she big?

*She was tall,
my husband chimes in.
He had noticed her too.*

She was very thin and tall.

Yeah, okay.

Very pretty.

*Well, she wasn't brown.
I don't think she was brown,
says my son.*

How do you know if someone's brown?

I don't want to interview stuff.

*Okay,
I say and ask my daughter,
What did you think about there only being one Brown person there?*

*There wasn't any Brown people!
my son insists.*

*Okay, what did you think about there being zero Brown people!
It looked like it bothered you.*

Me?

*Yeah, you looked at me like you
didn't think it was right to have zero brown people.*

*She nods.
Because it's not nice if they don't have Brown people.*

*I think that
just not that many Brown people
live in that town.
But I like it better to live in a town
where there's Brown people and white people.*

*There's three colors.
Light brown,
white,
I mean peach,
and brown,
explains my daughter helpfully.*

*I saw a girl whose skin was
so dark, dark brown,
it looked almost black,
I add not wanting to leave anyone out.
I've seen some people like that.
There's lots of different colors of skin.*

01.27.2017 good to have brown friends POETIC FIELD NOTE

After movie night at school my daughter said,

*Did you see Jamiya?
She hugged me.
She likes me.*

Are you two friends?

*She is not very good at math.
When the teacher says what is two plus two she says five.*

*Some people are not good at math.
Maybe you can help her learn.*

*A lot of my friends are brown.
Jamiya is brown.
Fernando is kind of brown.
Tushar is kind of brown.
It is good to have brown friends.*

03.2017 Three Readings of Mixed Me

17.03.14 Mixed Me POETIC FIELD NOTE

My son picks up the copy of Mixed Me
I had strategically placed
in the backseat of my car.

He reads silently to himself
asks,
What does this sentence mean,
Why do we have to choose one race?

*You remember race is a made-up way to put people in groups?
We are in the race called white.
She is saying she doesn't want to be friends with just one race and she is not just one race.*

He says,
Yeah, she is mixed.

3.17.2017 Mixed Me POETIC TRANSCRIPTION

In the car again
my daughter
six years old
reads slowly,

Why pick only one color or face?
Why pick one race?
Some kids at school want me to choose who I cruise with.
I'm down for fun with everyone.
Why pick one race?

*You're down with fun for everyone aren't you?
You have friends who are all different colors.*

No.

No! why not?

Um, sometimes I can't play with everyone.

Oh, like not with everyone at the same time?

No, so that's why.

But in that story, she was saying she's friends with people who are brown and people who are white, right?

Yeah, I have friends what are brown and white.

*So when you were first reading that book,
you were reading that people say that
her mom and her dad don't match.
And you told me it's because
one of them is brown
and one of them is white
and you said it doesn't matter what color they are.*

Just be nice to them.

*Just be nice to them.
That's like what you wrote on the board at church this morning.*

3.25.2017 Mixed Me POETIC TRANSCRIPTION

It is bedtime,
and we gather on the bed
with a copy of Mixed Me.
Even though each child had read it in the car
this is the first time we read the book together as a family.
My husband notices that the book was written by Tai Diggs

*He's the same one who wrote Chocolate Me,
I say.*

My daughter begins to read
and insists that I hold the book for her.

Hey now they call me Mixed up Mike.
My hair is wow, super crazy fresh cool man yeah...
Hey, sweet boy, sweet pie, honey boo...

Okay, wait a minute, wait a minute. This is a girl,

No, it's a boy. His name is Mike.

*This is a boy.
I thought this was a girl, but it's a boy,
I say reorienting myself.*

Mhmm.

My mom coos. She's my one and only never lonely...
Sometimes when we're together,
people stare at whatever.
Your mom and dad don't match, they say.

What does that mean, they don't match?

That means they're not right for each other.

Why?

Because they don't match.

What doesn't match about them?

*Because one's Black and one's white,
but I think that doesn't mean they can't marry each other.*

*I think they look like a good match.
Looks like they love each other.*

When people see me and they look at us funny.
My mom and dad said I'm a blend of dark and light.
We mixed you perfectly and got you just right.
Some kids want me to choose who I cruise with.
I'm down for fun with everyone.
There are so many flavors to savor and taste.
Why pick only one color or face?
Why pick one race?

Why pick one race. What does that mean?

*Color,
says my son.*

*Do you remember what we talked about
how color is a little different from race?*

*Yes.
Race is when you think
you're better than someone.*

Kind of, race is like the groups people made up

*so people say there's a white race and a black race.
Race is made up so that some people can have more power.
And color is just the colors of people's skin.*

Um, who made this book?

Tai Diggs.

Is he a famous actor?

*Mmhm.
After we finish the book,
we can look.*

*And if they care too much about my hair,
too much that it's not straight enough.
It's my hair, don't touch.*

*I think there's another part of this story
that I didn't understand about boys having long hair.
Cause I thought this character was a girl.
What do you think?*

*I don't think it's really about that.
I think it's about, um, race.*

*Sometimes Black people have curly hair
that's really fluffy
and people ask to touch it
and that can bother someone
if they're always saying can I touch your hair.*

*Mom, I just want to ask,
is the person who made this book
Black or white?*

He's Black.

The guy who's a famous actor.

Yeah, Tai is Black.

Huh.

If you don't get it, then you don't get it.

I'm doing my thing, so don't forget it.

What do you think Mike is meaning here?

Um, I don't really now.

*I think Mike is saying,
if you don't get it, that's your problem.
I'm just going to be me.*

Okay.

A beautiful blend of dark and light.
I was mixed up perfectly and I'm just right.
They call me Mixed Up Mike,
but that name should be fixed.
I'm not mixed up, I just happen to be mixed.

What does that mean?

*That Mike is two races
because his mom is white
and his dad is Black.
People call that mixed.
And he's saying I'm not mixed up, I'm mixed.
I'm two races. I'm black and white.
And that's why race doesn't really work
because you can't put all people in a group.*

It works for paint.

It works for paint, but that's color, not race.

Well actually it is race if you...

You mix it up.

*But race is different than color.
Color is just your skin, but race is more.*

My son takes my phone from
my hand and begins to search
for a picture of Tai Diggs.
The recording ends.

7.02.2017 Price Chopper-Blacks, Browns, Colored, poor POETIC FIELD NOTE

We stop at Price Chopper after church.
We usually go to HyVee
on the other side of town.
Price Chopper is not as sleek
as our normal grocery store,
but it is clean and has
a well-stocked produce section and bakery.

We walk through the parking lot.
All of the other shoppers are African American.

My son says,
This is going to sound bad, but-
Well, nevermind.

Maybe we can talk when we get back in the car,
I say.

Inside the store,
most of the shoppers are African American.
There are a few white families.

We pick up mandarins
and a box of crackers.
We say thank you to the clerk.

On the way out, my son says,
There were a lot of Blacks and Browns
at that Price Chopper.

I tell him,
I don't want you to say Blacks and Browns.
I want you to say people.

He says people go to Price Chopper
because they didn't have much money
and the prices are lower.

I tell him those families
have about the same money as us
and the prices at Price Chopper
are like the prices at HyVee.

I tell him I'm worried about him thinking that People of Color don't have enough money.

He says,
All the really rich people are white.

I say it is true that more white people than Black people are rich.
It is harder for Black people to
go to college,
get loans,
get hired to do a job,
but many do it.

We get to the car
and I tell him
not to call people Blacks and Browns.

I say he could say Black People or Brown People.

I can say colored,
he says.

No, you can say People of Color.

The words can be tricky,
but it is important.

The best thing to do is ask people what they want to be called.

When can we play with Maya again?
he asks.

10.14.2017 Mexican is Like Black POETIC FIELD NOTE

I wait in line at Carl's food truck
at Maya's tenth birthday party.
Rebecca had rolled her eyes,
but Carl said the kids would like
going outside and getting their food from the truck.

A line of children snaked down the sidewalk.
I overhear a 4th grade girl say,
I'm Black and white.
The younger boy next to her says,
I'm Mexican.
That's like Black.

11.06.2017 What color is Hayden? POETIC FIELD NOTE

I've been wondering how my daughter delineates
who is Black
and who is White
and who is Brown
terms she uses often.

The family down the street,
who we are getting to know better,
has several skin tones and hair textures.
I wonder how my children conceive of their race.

As I ponder all this
on the couch
staring at my laptop
my daughter approaches.

I set aside the computer
and welcome her under my blanket.
we cuddle together
warm on the couch for several minutes.

Then I say,
I've been wanting to ask you,
What color is Hayden?

She is cookie-color.
Like a cinnamon cookie.

I am like a sugar cookie.

What about Tali?

Chocolate chip cookie!

I decide to stop there.
I had asked about color
not race
and it didn't seem right to label our new friends.

We cuddled some more
without talking.

10.11.2018 DNA Report POETIC TRANSCRIPTION AND MEMO

My children ask where our ancestors are from.
I say I'm not really sure but I had a DNA test that we could look up.

We gather around my laptop
at the kitchen table.
I enter the code
And read the news
95% European
2% Middle Eastern.
I open the map.
Layers of red blanket Europe
Four sheets of pale green are neatly stacked on Northern Africa.

So we're African,
says my son
as if this is what he was seeking to confirm
in the first place.

Um, well, I don't know,
I say worried about claiming we are African American
remembering the label Middle Eastern on the opening chart
knowing my geography is no good.

Yeah, so people here would have darker skin,
I fumble, sensing that his image of African is likely South African.

So this is where my DNA test said that my ancestors are from.
Mostly Europe,
95% Europe
but some of these Middle Eastern
countries here like
Morocco,
Algeria,
and Tunisia.

That's African,
says my son.
And he is right.

I wanted to live in China!
my daughter wines.

Well, you can live wherever you want.

This is just where our ancestors are from.

*I know.
I want my ancestors to live in China
or India.*

I remember her friend Tushar's family
is from India.

*Well, that's not going to happen,
says my son.*

*Yeah, I mean you don't get to decide
who your ancestors are.
I turn back to the map*

*See how it's really dark right there?
Switzerland,
France,
Italy,
England.
And then some over here too from Poland and the Ukraine.
Greece.*

So, so you're European.

*Oh look, up here,
Finland!*

*So we weren't the people who took over?
he asks hopefully.*

*Yeah, European people are the one's who-
European settlers um from
England
and France
and Spain
came over to the United-*

No, no, no, Columbus was in Spain.

*He was in Spain, yes.
But England was the ruler
of the New Wor-
New England.*

Oh.

*So my ancestors were
European immigrants to North America,
I conclude
telling myself and my children
neglecting that patch of green
across the sea in Northern Africa.*

*Dad's ancestors ,
I'm pretty sure, are from Afghanistan.*

*Dad's?
What makes you think Afghanistan?*

*There's pictures of his like
great grandpa's from Afghanistan,
something like that.*

*I don't know,
but I have Daddy's code,
we can find out.*

Oh, let's see!

*I gather my husband's number
and prepare to type it in.*

*Does everyone have to do this?
asks my son.*

No, it was a choice. We paid to do it.

*I bet Dad is going to be fifty-fifty or something,
he predicts.
My husband's skin is a shade darker than mine.
He has dark straight hair.
Fifty-fifty what? I wonder.
Black and white?
African and European.?
It is becoming more clear that this is what my son wishes for.*

And then the news-

My husbands ancestry is 97% European
with no other whole percentage to report.
My son seems a bit disappointed
But goes on about his evening
watching YouTube
reading graphic novels
thinking.

12.19.2018 Crystal isn't Mixed POETIC FIELD NOTE

Crystal lives down the street
with her cousins and their grandma.
She can do a back flip on the trampoline
and everyone is a little scared of her.

My husband used to walk them home
from school
and play baseball with them
in the backyard.
But now Crystal is in fifth grade
and talks about boyfriends
and says her cousin says she and my son would make a cute couple.
And now my son says he doesn't want to play with them any more.

Tonight at dinner,
my son says,
Do you think Crystal is mixed?

I say,
I don't know,
even though I'm pretty sure
she's not.
She has straight blond hair
just like her grandma.

She's not Mixed,
my son insists,
but she is telling everyone she is.

Do you think she's Mixed?

It can be hard to tell if someone is Mixed.
I don't get to say that about her identity.

Why do you think she's saying that?

Well, most of the kids at our school are Black.

You think she wants to be close with them?

I guess so.

THAT'S RACIST

That's racist, but what is racist? Fractured understandings, incomplete curriculum.

6.21.2016 Different?

*That's racist,
says my son.*

*This is something we've been hearing from him
a lot, and we know we need to address it.
My husband gives it a shot,
Well to be racist means you're mean to someone who is
different from you.
You are mean to someone
because they are different.
Not even mean, you treat them different-*

*You think about them differently,
I add trying to help.*

*You think about them differently because they're
different which usually ends up being mean.*

03.11.2017 Not racist, race?

*That's racist...I know what racist is,
insists my son
again.*

You know what racist is?

*Yeah. It means when you think someone is Black,
and you say that they should do jobs.*

*Kind of like that.
I've been meaning to talk to you about this
because I've been thinking about it,
and we haven't talked about it.
But like, race is something like made up.
Like it's not even real.
Like people made it up.
Like it's not a science thing.
Like it's um, hm....*

Then why [do you have] a book called Let's Talk about Race?

*Well, it's not a book, it's an idea.
And people made up this idea so that
some people could have more
and some people could have less.
And so they made up this idea of race.
And so being racist means that you think that some people should get less
or they're not as good because of -*

*their skin color,
says my son
knowingly.*

*Yeah, that's the thing.
America has a lot of racism in it
so it can be part of
movies,
books,
and everything that is around us.
So that's why it's so important for us to learn about race
and do better than the history of the United States.*

May 2017 Denver Museum of Contemporary Art POETIC FIELD NOTE

On our way back from Yellowstone,
we stop at the Denver Museum of Contemporary Art.
We are especially taken with the Native American wing

a pile of quilts two stories high
beadwork on leather
life-size effigies
a video projected on a white wall
a giant stick of butter with the Land o Lakes princess
 painted on the side,
 smiling and motionless
next to an equally large box of American Spirit cigarettes
 with it's black Indian in headdress
 passively smoking a peace pipe
A canvas filled with images
 Chief Wahoo, red and grinning
 Little plastic men, arrows drawn
 Disney's Pocahontas
 and Tiger Lily

I read artist's statements
sometimes to myself
sometimes to my children
who hold my hand
and look into my face
questioning
 smallpox blankets
 cultural appropriation
 myth of extinction
 cultural myths
 objectification
 generalization
 identity as a marketable commodity
 David P. Bradley's
 Land O Bucks,
 Land O Fakes,
 Land O Lakes

They stare at the broad white canvas stamped with familiar faces.
I try to explain Pocahontas sitting majestically

among her cartoon counterparts.

It's about people who aren't Native telling about Native people.

It's about stereotypes, thinking a whole group of people is a certain way.

It's about some of these images making Native people look dumb.

I keep trying to explain.

They nod

politely bored.

We head to the gift shop.

7.27.2017 Disney racist? POETIC FIELD NOTE

*Name one Disney movie that is racist,
challenges my son.*

Peter Pan.

*Not Peter Pan!
says my daughter
dismayed.*

Yeah, the way they show Native Americans in Peter Pan.

How?

*Do you remember what the Native people
look like in Peter Pan?
offers my husband.*

No.

They have red noses and they talk funny.

And I think they call them "the red man."

*I'm not talking about the old Peter Pan,
I'm talking about the new Peter Pan.
They don't have any Indians in it.
They all look like us.*

*Well, Tiger Lilly is Indian,
but they hired a white actress,
says my husband unsure if he
should introduce this new concern.*

*I don't want to talk about this any more.
I like it.
I don't care if it's racist.
It's just a good movie.*

*Movies are just to make money,
says my son knowledgeably.*

*Yeah,
I agree.*

*Some movies are,
and some movies try to get you to think
about things a new way.*

*Pocahontas!
They said this is what Native people look like.
says my son
remembering the art in Denver
sure he is right
about this one.*

*You guys, we have to be careful about saying racist.
We can talk about it here at home,
but you shouldn't call people racist.*

Why?

*If you call someone racist,
they will just get mad and not listen to you.*

*Yeah if you want to change someone's mind,
you have to get them thinking.
You could say something like,
I don't think all white people are like that,
or all brown people are like that,
or all Native American people are not like that.*

Or, I'm not going to make fun of them.

So what is racist?

Moving forward with fractured understandings and incomplete curriculum.

2.17.2018 POETIC MEMO

Someone on the radio mentions race.

*That's racist,
says my son.*

*Just talking about race
does not make someone racist.
Racist is thinking that a whole group of people
is a certain way because of their race.
Sometimes it is important to talk about race.*

*Okay,
he says.*

March 2018 POETIC MEMO

My daughter says,

*At recess a white boy told a Brown girl
that she was racist
and they had an argument.*

*She said she was not racist.
The boy said,
Yes you are because you're Brown.*

But that's not what racist is.

Racist is a white person saying some mean things to someone who is Brown.

3.11.2018 Pirate's Booty is racist POETIC FIELD NOTE

*My son says,
The pirate picture on the Pirate's Booty is kind of racist
because he's like, It's so good!*

*Yeah, it's more like a characterization,
I say.*

*They are saying all pirates are like that,
but pirates aren't a race, so it's not racist.*

4.26.2018 *Walk Like an Egyptian* POETIC FIELD NOTE

My daughter sits on the kitchen stool watching the
Walk Like an Egyptian video on YouTube.

My son says,
That's racist.

*Yeah, I've been thinking about that,
I say.
I think it's insensitive.
Remember we said we had to be careful
what we call racist.*

Why insensitive?

Because they're taking Egyptian art and making a silly dance out of it.

Well, it is racist.

*Remember racist is saying
a whole group of people
is a certain way?*

That [music video] is!

*Hmm, like all Egyptians are a certain way.
Okay, I see what you're saying*

*But [the female rockstars] are not racist.
They just put something on the person that made this,
says my daughter
defending the women
we both love-
their big hair
eyeliner and
general tough-girl attitudes.*

Why do you say the girls aren't racist?

*Because they're not doing the [dance].
Yeah, they do.*

*Yeah, and they wrote the song,
I admit.*

4.30.2018 Do Egyptians really walk like us? POETIC FIELD NOTE

My daughter sits in the bathtub and
sings Walk Like an Egyptian.
I come in to wash her hair.

She asks,
Do Egyptians really walk like us?

*Yeah,
I say.*

*Then I'm just going to do it like this,
she says,
dancing as if walking normally.
I'm not going to be racist,
I mean apperrerr.*

Apperrerr is the word she made up
to avoid using the word racist
after Daddy cautioned her against it.

*Egyptians are called Egyptian
and we are called American.*

*Yep.
Egyptians live in Egypt
and Americans live in America.*

And then I know that Walk Like an Egyptian
that beloved female pop classic,
a song I remember dancing to with my mom,
pumping our arms back and forth
through the living room,
a song I recently memorized
to sing during karaoke hour
if not outright racist

had achieved the effect of racism
relegating Egyptians to history,
turning people into characterizations,
for white entertainment
and consumption.

6.03.2018 Is racism judging people by their race? POETIC FIELD NOTE

My son and I are cleaning the kitchen.
Between spraying the glass door
and wiping it with newspaper,
he says,
Is racism judging someone by their race?

Yeah,
I say,
What made you think of that?

*At church, we were reading a book
and some 7th and 8th graders were with us
and the teacher read,
She was as dark as a chocolate bar,
and one of the 8th graders said,
That's racist.
And the teacher said,
No judging someone by their race is racist.*

*And the eighth grader said,
That's still racist.*

*The teacher's right.
Talking about skin color or about race
is not racist.*

We hadn't been to church for several days.
This must have been on his mind for a while.

6.24.2018 “Is This is America race?” POETIC FIELD NOTE

My daughter asks,
Is This is America race?

Do you mean is the song racist?

Yeah.

No, the song is about racism, but it's not racist.

What made you think about that?

It says Black in it.

Do you remember the sentence with black in it?

*Black man get your money,
inserts my son
who likes the song.*

Oh.

*Remember how African people were captured
and brought here with no money*

and then had to work for no money?

Well even after slaves were freed,

they didn't have money saved up

or houses that they owned.

So it was hard for Black people to get money.

That's what Childish Gambino is singing about.

11.08.2018 Asian, Japanese, Mixed POETIC FIELD NOTE

*Mom, I want to tell you about this thing at school that
I think is racist.
This one kid did his eyes up and said,
My mom is from Asia.
Then he did his eyes down and said,
My dad is from Japan.
Then he did one eye up and one eye down and said,
And I'm mixed.*

*You're right, that's not okay.
I've heard of something like that before
when I was a kid.*

Did you do that?

*Yeah, I did it.
And I didn't even know that it was wrong.
Are you thinking about
responding[to the kid at school]?*

*No, not really.
It happened like a month ago.
And it's this kid who always goes to the Recovery Room.*

*Well like I said some people don't do it to be mean
they don't even know it's wrong.*

Do you have any friends who are Asian?

*No, we have people from Mexico.
And Brendan is Irish.*

*I was just thinking if you had a friend who was Asian
You could say,
Hey, don't say that, I have friends who are Asian.
But maybe you could just say,
It's not cool to make fun of someone's eyes.*

And you know, there are kids at your school

*Who are mixed
Like they have one white parent and one Black parent
like Maya.
Just imagine if people said something like that about Maya.
Jalen told it to me
but not like in a mean way.
Like she wanted me to know about it
Because friends tell each other things.
And I told her it wasn't okay.*

THE N WORD

5.21.2018 The N Word POETIC TRANSCRIPTION

On the way to baseball practice,
we heard a song with the N word in it.
one of the kids asked what it meant.
I told them we could talk about it on the way home.

After practice, the four of us buckle in.
My daughter reminds me of the promised conversation.
I turn on my recorder.

*So I don't know how it started,
but it was used a lot during slavery
to mean a slave, a Black slave.
And it was a way of calling people, like
you're not worth anything.
So calling someone the N word meant that
they were like not even human,
you know that they were just property that could-*

*Like an animal?
asked my daughter
who had consistently
been perplexed by this idea.*

Yeah.

*So it would be something that white people
would call Black people to mean like really bad.
Like you are not worth-*

What if the Black person said the N word back to them?

*So this is the interesting thing that Black people have done.
So, Black people wanted to take the power away
from those white people who were saying you're worthless,
so they wanted to take that, that terrible, terrible word,
they wanted to take the power away from that word.
And so they turned it into an okay word for them.
And so some, some Black people,
not everybody,
some Black people will say the N word to each other*

*as like a friendly thing.
And so that's their way of taking the power away from that mean-*

And what does that mean?

*So turning it into a word that is cool
for Black people to say and to mean like your friend.*

*But not all Black people think it's okay.
And it's never okay for a white person to say it.
Okay?*

It's only okay for a Black person to say it, right?

*Only okay for a Black person to say it,
because that's a way of them getting power back.
Because so much power was taken away from them when they were slaves, right? And still,
and still we know that that they aren't always treated fairly, right?*

Mhmm.

*And so it's a way for them to take some power back.
And they're still working on it and we need to help-*

And so what-

-make sure that things are fair.

-does it mean?

*Well when white people say it,
it means you're not worth anything.
You're a worthless person.*

Does it-

What about when Black people say it?

*So sometimes when Black people say it,
you might hear somebody say like, You're my [N word with a at the end].
And that means like you're my buddy,*

*you're my friend.
You're cool with me.
And sometimes it has other meanings.
It has a lot of meanings,
but whenever a white person says it, it's not okay.*

*Is there a y word?
asks my daughter,
testing the waters.*

I don't know.

There's a thousand of [bad words].

*Do you have anything [to add]?
I ask my husband.*

*I think you said it all.
If you hear a white person saying it,
you need to say it's not okay.*

Okay.

You gotta be brave to do that.

Well is there any other bad words that we don't know?

That's about the worst one.

The N word is the worst one?

I think so.

*What if a white person says the N word
and gets in a fight with you?*

*Well, if you just say,
Hey it's not okay to say that,
I don't think that a fight would start.
Do you?*

It would if they said something like,

*Yeah it's okay to say that,
or something like that.*

*Then you just say,
Well you can't say it around me.
You could say that.
And then just walk away.*

They'll get in trouble.

*But what if he starts fighting?
Or she starts fighting?*

Then I would go away from that person.

Or just be like Gandhi.

Do you think Gandhi would get in a fight?

Yeah, you can just let 'em punch ya.

That's what Gandhi would do.

Don't fight back.

*I don't know, I don't know,
It's hard,
says my husband.
And I know he is thinking
of the violence in Charlottesville
and the good people on both sides farce.*

*Some people believe that that's the right thing,
and then some people don't.
Malcolm X said, We gotta start fighting back.*

Who's Malcolm X?

He's another African American leader.

*If either of you were in that situation
and you said, You can't say that.*

*Then whatever happens after that we would talk about,
but I wouldn't be mad at you.*

*If somebody said the N word and you said we can't say that
and they said, Yeah I can, you wanna fight me?
If you punched 'em, we'd talk about it but we wouldn't be too mad at you. Sometimes
somebody who says the N word needs to get punched.*

We laugh
breaking the tension.
Trying to figure out how to raise white children
who will do the right thing for racial justice.

It's better to let them throw the first punch.

*I would throw that shot,
says my daughter.*

*If they throw the first punch,
it's open game.*

*Yeah, but then I'll get suspended,
says my son.*

*It's really good to think about
the consequences of your actions,
I say.
And you can get really creative
about how to make change without being violent
like Dr. King
and Rosa Parks
and Gandhi.*

7.29.2018 The R word POETIC FIELD NOTE

My children play outside
with the twin boys who live next door.
They make costumes to reenact episodes of The Flash,
collect crawdads from the pond in their backyard,
wrestle on the trampoline.

A slightly smaller white boy,
perhaps my daughter's age
approaches the opposite fence.
I had seen him at the neighbors' house before.

Can I play?

Did your parents say it's okay?
asks my son.

Yeah, he says.

Okay.

The boy enters through the gate,
and the play is immediately made more mild
to accommodate him.

My daughter comes in and tells me her brother
let *a kid they don't even know* come to play.

It's okay,
I say.

She returns and they show him around,
catching him up on
the costumes,
my daughter's homemade slime collection,
the hot glue gun and paint.

Then they play together for another hour
without incident
observable from my perch at the kitchen table
adjacent to the sun porch.

After an hour,
I call my children in for dinner
and send the neighbors home.

The new boy seems cool,
I say to my children
as they come inside.

They are quiet.

A few moments later,
my daughter asks,
What's a retard?

Oh!
I said,
That's a very hurtful word.

Like a bad word?
she asks.

Kind of like a bad word,
I say,
You shouldn't say it.

She and my son decide to call it the R-word.

Where did you hear it?
I ask.

The new kid said it,
and I could tell it wasn't nice,
says my daughter.
But I didn't know what it meant.

I ask my son about it.
He says the new kid said to one twin about the other,
He looks like a retard.

The brother had been climbing the rope swing
and making a funny noise,

my son explains.
He said not to call his brother that.
And I said,
You can't say that if you want to play here.

Good,
I say.

So what does it mean?
they ask.

I tell them,
The word is short for mental retardation
which means slow thinking.
It was a very unkind word
and their friend did not have that-
he is very smart about animals.

Some people think that word is okay
and I am glad you told him it was not.
If he listens to you and doesn't say it again,
then he could be a good person to be friends with.
If he does say it again,
then he is not.

We eat dinner.
The kids take showers.

We read My Brother Charlie
about a boy with autism.
I say,
I don't think this sister would like anyone
calling her brother
the R word.

10.15.2018 Who can say the N word? POETIC FIELD NOTE

As I tuck my son into bed
he says,

*Mom, I have a really good question.
Is Eminem part Black?*

*I don't think so,
at least he doesn't look like it.*

Well, does he say the N word?

I don't know.

*Well, is it okay for someone who is
part Black
and
part white
to say the N word?*

I guess some people would say yes to that.

Why, did someone say the N word?

Yes.

Were they part Black?

*Yes.
Can we talk about this tomorrow?*

Yes.

10.16.2018 N word at school POETIC TRANSCRIPTION

So last night you were asking about who can say the N word.

I was asking if you can say the N word even though you're white, like seventy-five percent of your family, um is from Africa.

Well a lot of people who have one parent who's Black and one parent who's white, still consider themselves Black, and that's okay, they can do that.

Like, like if they're really both colors

Well, some people like to say I'm mixed, or some people say I'm Black.

Like, like Maya?

Yeah.

Um, her parents let her say it.

Let her say the N word?

Yeah.

Well, Carl also told me that Maya identifies as Black. And that's okay, she can call herself mixed because she has one white parent and one black parent or she can be Black.

*She's one of my bestest friends.
Like, Maya, Landon, and Brayden.*

Yeah.

*So for her family,
her dad said it's okay for her to say it.
But I don't think that it is okay for Brayden to say.
I don't think his family is okay with it even though he is Black.
You know?*

Why?

It's different choices for different families.

Why can't he say it? He's like 100% from Africa.

*Well, we don't know that.
Why are you thinking he's 100% from Africa?*

He looks a lot like an African kid.

*Yeah, well, it's hard to tell where somebody's from
just by looking at them.*

*I'm just guessing that it's not okay for him
because his family is really serious about no hatred.
That's something that is really important to them and
I just, I don't, I've never heard his parents say that.*

*But it's really not appropriate for white people to say.
It's different choices for different Black families.
So what was Maya saying about it?*

Uh, that her family let's her say the N word.

How did it come up at school?

*So someone said it,
and I'm the one who told on them
and Mrs. Z said that you have to do it in word form
instead of just saying N word.
I had to say it to Mrs. Z.
So I got really psyched out about that.*

*And they didn't really get in trouble because
they said that they said something else.
So he got away with it.*

What color was this kid?

He was white.

*Like he didn't, he didn't said to a Black,
Like a brown person.
But he didn't say it in an offensive way.
He was talking like friend way,
like trying to be like-*

Oh, like you're my N word?

*Well, like he said n-i-g-g-a.
Like that.*

And what did the friend think about that?

*He was like, Wow, well he just stayed there, I don't know.
But then I popped in and I said, You can't say that word.
And then he was like, Please don't tell on me.
But I think he should learn not to say it.*

*Well, you know, if somebody says, Please don't tell on me,
then they probably are thinking, I won't say it again.
I mean sometimes it's okay for you to just talk to the person
and then not tell on them, you know?*

Mhmm. But I thought it was kind of serious.

*Yeah. Well, if, if they're saying it in a friendly way,
that's something that you just talk to them about.
Like, they just need to know,
like white people aren't supposed to say that.
But if he is saying it in a hurtful way,
then I think it's time to tell, you know?*

Okay.

So then you and Maya ended up talking about it.

Mhmm.

Did Maya say anything about what she thought about what happened at school?

*No, she wasn't there. She wasn't there that day.
The next day she was.
Can I, can I go downstairs to clear my mind?*

*Yes.
I'm glad you talked to me about it.*

10.22.2018 N Bomb POETIC TRANSCRIPTION

I tell my son I have a book⁶⁵ I want to show him
and ask if I can record our talk...

*It is about these two people who become friends
And it is about their different perspectives
because she's white and he is Black.*

And it's a girl and a boy.

*So each page has a poem from the boy's perspective
and a poem from the girl's perspective.
But this is the one [I wanted to show you].
It's written from the boy's perspective.
It's called The N Bomb.
And it was like exactly what we were talking about the other day.
So listen to this, actually why don't you read it to me?*

No, cause I don't want to say the word.

*It doesn't have it in here.
They call it the N Bomb.*

Okay.

He reads aloud,

Mom holding my folded laundry passes as I'm nodding and swaying
Flowing into rhythms that make me start sliding my feet from side to side.
The rapper then punches out a word that makes her do a double take
Did he just drop the N Bomb?, she asks.

Yes, I say, but it had an a at the end of it, not an er, so it's okay.
No, it's not, she says no matter how you spell it,
It's still a spit in the face of our ancestors
who for far too long fought against the infection of that word.

⁶⁵ (Latham & Waters, 2018)

Sorry, I say, pressing the stop button.

And was it a white person singing?
he asks.

No.

I don't get why she's not letting him hear it.

So... you know how that word started.
White slave owners would call the enslaved African people that.
And it was this really mean thing to say to them.

Wow.

Some people, a lot of rappers take that word,
and they wanna take that mean power away from it.
And so what they do to take the power away from it
is they start using it.
And instead of it being an /r/ at the end,
it's an /u/ at the end, right?
How he said, But it had an a at the end, not an -er.
And um, and so they change it into this friendly word. Kind of like-

Hey, friend.

Yeah.
But this thing is something that people do
when they take a really hateful word
that has been hurtful to their people
and they change it into a word that is okay, if they say it.
So like another word like that is queer.

What's that?

Well it used to be a mean thing
that people would say
about people who are gay or trans.

Mhmm.

But now people will call themselves queer,

*and are proud of it.
So its this thing that people do.
They take a really hateful word,
and they take the power away from that word
by using it in a new way.*

Is there any other ones?

*Um, the B word.
You know what word I'm talking about?
That word used to be, and it still is,
a really mean word toward women.
And so now some women use that word like
"These are my B's!" like these are my friends.*

Oh yeah, like goth people do that.

And a lot of-

Regular people?

*Well, I don't like to say regular people,
because you know,
like what's a regular person?
But um, some of my girlfriends who are in my book club
say that.*

Huh. I see.

*I choose not to say it.
It doesn't feel right to me.*

*So, so is that word still mean bad girl?
What does it mean?*

*Well, that's the thing.
Like people change what words mean.*

*So once a person says it,
you don't really know what it means?*

Well, it kind of depends on how they use it

and how they say it.

*So his mom is telling him um she says,
No matter how you spell it,
It's still a spit in the face of our ancestors
who for far to long fought against the infection of that word.*

*Ooh. So like a long time ago.
Okay, I get it now, why she doesn't want him to say it.*

It's like our ancestors up in heaven still think it's a bad word.

*So she's saying that word was so hateful,
an infection is like something that spreads
to more and more people.
And she's saying it's so hateful that when we use it,
it just spreads more hate.
And he's saying yeah, but we're using it a different way now.
And she's like, It doesn't matter to me.
However people use it, it's still spreading hate.*

*So I, I just wanted to show you this
to show you that people
have lots of different ideas about it.
You know?*

*Okay.
Well, what about the people who are like
50/50 of like African and like all that stuff.*

You're talking about race?

*Yeah. Um, but they're still white.
The color is white.*

*So that's what really hard about race!
Remember race is like this made up thing.
Remember when we were talking about binary opposites?*

Uhuh, yeah.

And how they're usually not real.

*You know, like usually there's not just black and just white.
There's all kinds of different skin tones
and different hair
and different facial features.
People aren't usually just Black or White,
it's like these made up categories that aren't real.
Real people aren't that simple, you know?
So people might not look like what we think a Black person looks like,
but they might still be Black.
Like you could have really light skin and be black.
You can have blue eyes and be the race that's called Black.*

*No, but like they're all white, but like 50/50,
like their ancestors come and that stuff.*

*Oh, do you mean ancestors maybe not from Africa
but from Latin America
or South America?*

*No. African like ancestors that come from Africa
or England or those.*

*Well, if they have some ancestors from Africa,
then they can say I'm Black.
That's their choice.*

Okay.

*Yeah. Even if they just have um
like one grandparent who's Black.
If they want to say I'm Black,
then that's their right to say that.*

*Okay.
That answered it.*

*So are you thinking that kid
who said the N word
has some ancestors from Africa?*

Mhmm, but he doesn't consider himself Black.

How do you know he has ancestors from Africa then?

*He tells us.
I'm not telling you his name.*

*He said um like, N-i-g-g-a, space, w-h-a-t.
And he said it to a Black person.*

Yeah, I agree with you that's not right.

Yeah.

*It would probably be good if your class
could have a talk about that topic
so your class could get on the same page.*

*Mhmm.
Okay, Daddy, you ready to play ping-pong?
he says and gives me a hug.*

*I love you, buddy,
I say.*

GOD METAPHORS

7.08.2016 God is Half White and Half Brown Poetic Transcription

In the car after church,
my family began talking about God.

My son said,
I think that God,
part of his body is
white
and
part of his body is
brown.
He has a white robe.
He has a staff.
He made everything.
He tried to stop the wars, but he couldn't do that.
That's what I think.

That's what my thing was!
said my daughter.
I said him help kids all the time.
Him's wearing this round hat, and
him's hat was yellow and red and there,
there's this hook what's brown and
he has white skin
and blue eyes.
And him's up in the sky.
And him's helping kids.

What does he do to help kids?
I asked.
Well, everything.
she replied.

Nobody thinks of God as a woman?
I pushed.

I think God's a boy.
said my son,
I think God's sister is a woman.

I think God is everything.
He's made up of everything.
He's made up of love.
He's made up of harmony.
He's made up of everything

Even crystals?
my daughter asked.

We all paused
exchanged glances.

I think so,
I said.
I think so. Yeah, the earth,
my husband said.

Then I said,
Mmhm.
All the beautiful things in nature
and all the beautiful things that people do
like love
and taking care of each other in our family.

9.27.2017 God is Wind Poetic Field Note

At the breakfast table,
My husband asked
 Do you believe in ghosts?
 No, not really,
I replied.

 I do,
Said my daughter,
 Jesus is a ghost.

 God is a ghost.
Said my son.
 Because God's in the air.
 I've thought about this a lot.
 God is the wind.
 They always say God is in us.
 And we breathe in air,
 and air is the wind.

 Who says God is in us?
I asked.

 They always say it at church.
he replied.

 Oh, like God is an element, like oxygen.
said my husband.

 Hm. Like oxygen is essential for life,
I said.
A conversation about elements ensued.
My husband used his phone to learn how
many elements are in the human body.
Six.
And 65% of your body is made up of oxygen.

11.4.2017 Do you think God is a boy? Poetic Field Note

On a long drive home
from my home town
my family played a game of
twenty questions.

On my daughter's turn
she asked,
 Do you think God is a boy?

 When I was little I thought God was a boy
 because that is what they taught at church.
 Now, I don't think that
I answered.

She said,
 I think God is
 half boy
 and
 half girl.
 And the girl is part brown
 and
 part white.

11.24.2017 I think the sun is a girl. Poetic Field Note

Driving to their uncle's house
for Thanksgiving
my daughter said,
 I think the sun is a girl.

 The sun in the sky?
I asked.
 Yes, that sun,
she said
pointing out the window.

 Why do you think it is a girl?

 Those things that come out of it look like hair,
she said.

 Sometimes boys have long hair too,
I challenged.
 Uncle has long hair.

 I just think it's a girl,
she said.
 I think it's a God.

That night before bed
we read Giving Thanks:
A Native American Good Morning Message.
We are not Native American
and our church rarely teaches Native perspectives.
In the book the sun
is yellow and has the profile of a man
and is called elder brother.
I pointed this out to my daughter.
She said,
 I think the sun is a girl.

In the book,
the moon was a silver grandmother.
I showed her this too.
My daughter said,

 I think the moon is a boy.

2.28.2018 Nuns, God, and the Wind Poetic Field Note and Transcription

Yesterday we told the children about nuns
who sat in the capitol building
protesting immigration policy.

What are nuns?
they asked.

Women who dedicate their life to God.
Some say it is like being married to Jesus.

My son said he didn't agree with the nuns.
He said he didn't believe in God.

We were all a bit taken aback
but told him he got to choose what he believed.

The next day
my daughter and I were in the car
she said with some sadness in her voice,
So my brother doesn't believe in God.

Yeah, he said that.
I answered.

But why?
she asked.

I don't know, we'll have to ask him.

So who would make people that weren't alive yet?

Oh, like who would make the very first person?

Yes.

Um, well, do you remember the theory of evolution?

I attempted to explain.

But how?

Well, it takes a really long time.

Well, that's not what I believe.

What do you think?

I think God made it.

Like it says in the bible, like God got some dirt-

Yeah.

-and made a man out of it and then breathed life into it.

Uhuh.

So what is God then?

God is air.

And wind.

So how can air and wind make people?

To blow life into them.

So it's like a magic kind of air and wind?

Yeah.

I remember when Grandpa died
you said that Grandpa is the wind.

Yeah.

And the dead people go to the wind too.

Pocahontas always follows the wind,
following the path that is their life
like Pocahontas Two.
And Pocahontas likes to follow God.

I think Pocahontas believes that God is in nature.

I said.

And the wind.

Because she follows the wind of course.

6.17.2018 I like to draw pictures of God. Poetic Field Note

I like to draw pictures of God.
Come see my art show.

She showed me a picture of God and Jesus on a cloud
Poor people below
Flying angels above.

Here's Jesus and God on a cloud helping the poor.
God is a brown person which is a boy,
a brown person which is a girl,
a white girl
and a white boy.

See that?
That is called magic dust.
Jesus gets a spoonful of it
and he drops it
and the poor people turn into not-poor people,
no litter,
everything's clear
and they have lots of food.

I said we should learn more about Jesus.
She said we watched one movie, The Nativity.
I said we should watch a movie about Jesus when he's grown up.

6.24.2018 Son of God Poetic Memo

A man, light skinned and blue eyed
Walked through the desert.
He stopped, inhaled and exhaled slowly.

Is that Jesus?
my daughter asked.
Yes.

Is that God?

God is not a person that you can see.

No the breath, the air.
She clarified.
Yes, I think that is what the movie was showing.

Midway through the movie, I pushed pause on the remote control.
Something is bothering me,

I said
Jesus is the only one with brown hair,
everyone else has black hair.
And Jesus' skin is lighter than other people.

My son said,
He is the son of God,
so he might look a little bit like God.
I always thought God looked like that guy.

But that's because we've always been told
that Jesus looks like that.

I countered.
We get to decide what we think is true.

NATIONAL POLITICS

1.20.2017 Inauguration Day Poetic Field Note

My husband and I decided
to go to the local protest of the inauguration.

His parents agreed to pick up the kids from school.

That night, as I tucked my son in to bed,
he says he heard about a wall
and asks what it is about.

I remind him
that Mexico shares a border with the US.
Some people in Mexico live in places
 where it is not safe
 or there is not enough work.
And they want to come to the US
 to be safe
 and to work.

And that Trump wants to build a wall so they couldn't come to the US.

He responds,
 That's like slavery because white people are telling Black people what to do.

I am taken aback.

I explain that it is different from slavery
 because with slavery
people make others work for free.
 with the wall
people are saying you need to stay where you are
and not come here to be safe.

But the more I think about it,
 I see he's got a point.

 A larger point
 about racism in America.

3.12.2017 Church-All Lives Matter Comic Poetic Field Note

Waiting in the snack line at church,
my son reads a comic strip
featuring a character
spraying water on an unaffected house
when the house next door is aflame.
The character asserts,
All houses matter.

What is that about?
he asks.

It is about Black Lives Matter.

Why do people say Black lives matter?

Because police shoot Black people more.

Why?

Because in the United States,
we keep getting messages
that Black people are bad guys.

Some people don't like the Black Lives Matter slogan.
They say that all lives matter.

That is what the character in the cartoon said.

Right.
And that's true.
All lives do matter,
but it is Black people who are getting shot.

If you think about it this way,
that all houses matter,
we agree all houses matter,
but if one house is on fire,
you don't need to say all houses matter,
you need to talk about the house that is on fire.

And you need to help the house that is on fire.

7.28.2017 Tear Gas Poetic Field Note

In the car with my children,
NPR on the radio.

My son asks, *What is tear gas?*

It is a gas that hurts people's eyes.
It is used by police to break up crowds of people
during riots and sometimes during protests.

My daughter says,
I know one bad thing.
Police shot a Brown man for no reason and it made you cry.

The police officer shot him because he was scared,
I say,
because he thought every Brown man was a bad guy.

11.12.2017 NFL Kneeling TFK Poetic Transcription

The family gathers on the couch
to read before bed.

I take out a recent issue of Time for Kids

*Okay, so I've been wanting to read this one to you guys,
but I've been wanting Dad to be here too because he knows about sports.
So this thing that's been happening in our country,*

United States NFL Protests.

Do you know what NFL stands for?

*Mhmm.
National Football League.*

On September 24, more than 200 National Football League players protested.

Do you remember what protest means?

*Uhuh.
A protest is when you walk for something
that you want,
or that is right,
or sometimes it's not right,
something you believe in.
Walk for something that you believe in.*

That would be a march. That's a form of protest.

Okay, so these players, 200 football players

protested during the National Anthem.

Remember the National Anthem?

Mhmm.

*Okay. So what do we usually do
during the National Anthem?*

Sing with them.

Or keep our hats off.

I point to the picture,
We usually do what this player is doing, right?
Stand up and put our hand on our heart.
Okay, so instead,

They sat, knelt, or raised a fist.

Why?

Some locked arms on the sidelines.
Three teams stayed in the locker room.

Why!

Here's why.

In 2016,

So a year ago,

Colin Kaepernick played for the San Francisco 49ers.
He knelt during the anthem.
He did it to protest racism and injustice.

But why?

This is how I think of it,
we'll see if Daddy has anything different.
The National Anthem is about being proud of your country,
and he was saying I'm not very proud of our country right now.
We need to figure out racism,
so I'm not going to stand up and show that I'm proud.
I'm going to kneel down and show
that we need to work on this.

Dad?

That's how I see it too.
Black people have it harder.

*Oh yeah, it didn't say in here
that Colin Kaepernick,
he's Black, right?*

*Yes.
I think he was protesting a lot
the policing that was going on
and Black people getting killed at a higher rate
by the police than white people.
And Black people going to jail
at a higher rate than white people.*

So should I do that at school?

Do you sing the National Anthem at school?

Yeah.

You do Pledge of Allegiance?

*Only if you feel strongly about it.
But no, I don't think you should probably do that at school.*

*Why?
Mrs. Z says you don't have to do it.
She, she, she actually did.
Like she could be watching the news.*

*I bet she is watching the news.
I think most people in America know about this.*

*So, so you can hold a fist up?
Why would you hold a fist?*

I don't know. I need to find out more about that.

*So we probably shouldn't hold up a fist
unless you know what it means.*

*This fall the protests grew widespread
after President Donald Trump
spoke at a rally on September 22.*

He said, "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners when someone disrespects our flag, to say he's fired."

He said that!
shouted my daughter who had walked into the other room.

Yeah.

*He's saying wouldn't you be glad if the owner,
like one of the teams coaches said that they're fired
because they aren't doing the Pledge of Allegiance.*

Since they aren't doing the National Anthem?

Mhmm.

Many Americans believe that the protests show disrespect for the United States.
Trump was speaking for them.

*So a lot of people say, You know what?
America is really good,
and we should all stand up for the pledge and for the flag.
So some people think that that's the right thing.*

President Trump's remarks sparked discussion
about the US Constitution.

Who can fire Donald Trump?

Oh! Um, judges.

*Come on judges.
I wish Hilary Clinton could be president.*

Alright there's a little bit more here.

Donald Trump's words sparked discussion
about the US constitution.
The law protects you from being punished
by the government for sharing your opinions.

*So in the United States, you can say your opinion and you won't get in trouble.
Some other countries, you can't say bad things about the government.*

Now Trumps going to change that rule, I bet.

No, he can't change that.

That one's pretty, pretty strong in the constitution.

Many people support the player's message.

Robert Kraft owns the New England Patriots. He said players have a right to peacefully raise awareness in a manner they feel is most impactful.

I think what they're doing really does make an impact.

A lot of people are talking about it.

Mhmm.

The NFL has stood by its players.

Roger Goodell is the commissioner of the NFL.

"I'm proud of our league," he says.

4.18.2018 Black Panther Poetic Transcription

The four of us
are in the car.
A conversation starts about
the popular new movie, Black Panther
and the Black Panther Party.

*So the connection between the Black Panther Party
and Black Panther the character
is that the Black Panther Party,
was tired of everybody acting like
people with brown skin and curly kinky hair
were not beautiful
and that they should straighten their hair
and try to look more like white people.*

*And so they said Black is beautiful.
And they said Black people need more power in their communities.
They need to be in control of their community
instead of white people being in control.*

*And so I think that is the connection between the Black Panther party and Black Panther the
Comic Book character.*

*Did the Black Panther group kill any one?
asks my son.*

*I don't think so.
But they did believe that people should have guns
to defend themselves from the police.
So when Martin Luther King
and a lot of the ministers
were saying we're not going to hurt people-
even if the police officer hits you with a stick,
you just don't hit back, right?*

*And the Black Panther Party was like,
That's crazy.
If they're going to shoot at us and hit us,
we need to hit and shoot back.
But I don't think they killed anybody.*

*It was more about defending themselves.
Not going out to hurt anybody.*

*But they did make some breakfast for kids,
says my daughter.*

*But they did a lot of good things.
I think it is important to say Black is beautiful.
And they need to help their community by making sure kids have breakfast.
I think they said some really important things
and did some important things.*

*I bet Trump's gonna be disqualified,
said my daughter
taking a surprising turn.*

Disqualified for what?

President.

*I hope so.
He should have been disqualified for president
and not ever been elected.
But some people are working on it.*

How did he even become president?

*Some people agreed with the things he was saying
and voted for him.*

WHY!?

*I don't know.
It's hard to understand.
Because a lot of people still believe that white people
are better than every body else.
And that's kind of what he was saying.*

*Really I think what Trump was saying was like,
we're tired of always saying Black people,
and Mexican people,
and immigrants from other countries*

deserve good stuff in America.

*The people who deserve good stuff in America
are the white people who already live here.*

I mean really that's what he was saying.

Hilary was white.

Yeah.

She is.

I'm white.

I'm white.

*The thing about it is though,
we have to work for things to be fair for everybody.
Even though we're white,
we shouldn't try to have everything for ourselves.*

5.25.2018 Democracy and Kneeling Talk Poetic Transcription

At breakfast,
our son mentioned
he had been kneeling at school
during the Pledge of Allegiance.

My husband and I gathered around the kitchen table to debrief.
My husband began.

*So, the players were kneeling
because they wanted to bring awareness
and change to police brutality
against Black and minority people.*

That's why I'm doing it.

*Okay, and so you're saying that you've been kneeling all year
at school when they do the pledge of allegiance?*

Yes.

And you're the only one?

Yes.

Okay. And you asked me what I thought about that.

Yes.

*And I said, well I think you have to have
a very clear reason why you're doing it,
and you have to weigh that against
how you feel about the pledge and the country.*

*Like I know the pledge is good,
but I just don't think we should be doing it in a time like this.*

*Like the president here.
Ugggh,
inserted our daughter.*

*Well, that's kind of how our conversation started
because Dad said [to me]
Did you hear what the president said yesterday?*

*About the NFL players,
how they maybe shouldn't be in the country
if they don't kneel.
And how that's not an American thing to say.*

So what if a student kneels?

*Mm. Yeah, so like would President Trump
say that you need to leave the country?*

Maybe.

*And you're saying you kneel because
there's a lot of bad things happening in the country.
What bad things?*

*Well, like all the people are being mean to Black people,
says my daughter.*

*I do it because I don't want guns in school,
and I just want a happy country,
says my son*

*And how do you feel that kneeling
during the pledge brings awareness to that?*

*To show other people
that they should recognize this too,
and they should do it.*

*I think that's the thing,
the United states was founded on really good ideas.
But the problem is that right now, and for all of American history,
we haven't done those ideas just right.*

5.25.2018 Kneeling Emails Mrs. Z (Deidentified Data)

8:20am

Good morning, Mrs. Z!

Walden was talking to us this morning about kneeling for the pledge of allegiance. He explained that the class had read a Time for Kids article about Colin Kaepernick and he decided to kneel after that. I really like that you guys are tackling current topics and allowing the kids to respond.

Will you tell me a little more about how this went down and how the pledge is going nowadays?

9:24am

[Your son] brought the article form home and told me that after reading it, he was compelled to kneel. We discussed freedom of speech including non verbal communication. We also discussed the importance of being able to defend and support a stance rather than blindly following others. I have students who say the pledge and some who don't, but [your son] might be one of the first who has been able to give a reason for the choice. They have the freedom to choose. It was one of those sidebar teachable moments that [your son] has a way of supplying. :)

9:28am

Thank you for the details. We did read that article at home! I couldn't remember if he had read it at school first.

He is quite a kid.

And every day we appreciate that you see him for who he is and support his growth!

Have a wonderful last Friday of the year.

9:35am

I appreciate your kind words! I have truly enjoyed having [your son] in my class this year; thank you for sharing him with me!

6.19.2018 Poor People's Campaign Poetic Field Note

We caravanned to the Youth Services Center
in Kansas City, Kansas.
between
the juvenile court,
the county courthouse,
the county jail,
a Wyandotte casino,
and a Huron cemetery.

We filed into the building
with ministers
congregants
and one dog.

In the back of a large conference room,
there was a tree made of wires and rock
you could write your hope for the future
and wind it into the wires of the tree.
My daughter wrote,
I wish that Black people are safe and happy.
My son wrote, *I wish that all souls will be treated equally.*
They folded their papers and wrapped them in wire on the tree.

We chatted with folks around us
and made shapes with foil from our Food Not Bombs burritos.
Reverend Rose called us together
We each said our name and where we are from.
Maybe fifty of us.

She taught us a signal for quiet
that looked like the Black Power fist.
She told us that today's event would be somber
because there had been deadly shootings nearby.

We sang *There is more love somewhere*,
and I tried to sing harmony.

We were asked to make a line:
most impacted people in the front
least impacted people in the back.

We lined up among the able-bodied, cys-hetero, white folks
at the end of the line.
at the end of the line.

We walked silently two-by two
past the juvenile court,
past the Huron cemetery,
past the Wyandotte casino,
up the courthouse steps.

The leader spoke about the poor being held without conviction
because they can't afford bail
and the babies being taken from their parents at the border.

She said silence is powerful,
but our voices are also powerful.
And those who are not impacted
must use their voices,
white folks must use their voices
as partners.

Ana lead us in singing a song she had written,
Maybe tomorrow.
She invited us to add our own hopes for tomorrow.
I sang, *Maybe tomorrow the children will learn.*
When Ana approached my daughter
and asked what she hoped for
my daughter said,
"Brown people will be safe."

Rose invited impacted people to
speak their truth.
No one approached.
Her eyes searched the crowd
then she spoke about her own identity as a gay person.
My daughter asked, "What does gay mean?"
I whispered, "Lesbian."

Rose told us
how dominant narratives
make it difficult for us to see our true selves.

A Black UU minister spoke
said we need to stop saying *this is not us*.
“This is us,” he said.
“This has always been us.
The United States of America
has a long history
of racism
and hatred.
White people need to forge a new identity,
an identity that does not rely
on the labor of others
for success.
An identity in solidarity with People of Color,
not as allies,
but as partners.
The white voice can no longer be silent.”
Yes, Chris said,
and I said, *yes*.

A white gender-queer minister spoke,
telling us that there is no
their children,
there is only *our children*.
“Our children
are being separated and caged,
our children
are being jailed.”

Rose invited non-impacted people to speak.
A white minister with a long rainbow stole
came to the center of the circle.
She implored us to think about
what it means to be
not-impacted.
Are we not in relationship with impacted people?
Have we enjoyed our privilege by separating ourselves?
She explained that she teaches at both an elite institution
and a local community college.
Then she went on to explain the ways
her identity makes her a member of an impacted group,
her mental health,
her student loans.

I sat down, uncomfortable with this turn.

Now I saw the one patrol car that had approached
And delivered it's whop.
The officers stayed in the car.
The lights were not on.

Justice, the leader from the Black Lives Matter movement
spoke now
about false Christians using the bible
to justify separating children from their parents,
to justify slavery.
And how dare they speak about the law when we are on stolen land?

We prepared to leave,
to take a different route back.
Around the courthouse
and by the jail.

A young queer white person began to sing.
Justice said, "Ana support this young woman.
She has a beautiful voice."
My daughter took my hand and said,
"You have a beautiful voice."

They began to sing together,
*We who believe in freedom will not rest,
we who believe in freedom will not rest until it comes.*

We turned the corner around the courthouse.
The patrol car rolled alongside us without a noise.
I was not afraid.

Some of the event marshals saw the car
and took up their role,
directing traffic
and keeping our group together
on the sidewalk
and in the street.
The sun was setting.
Justice's husband, a large dark Black man,

began to marshal
and for a moment
I imagined he was shot in the back.

Other voices joined in,
We who believe in freedom...
I thought I heard Rose singing at the front of the line.

I began to sing
the words over and over past the jail.
My daughter held my hand
and when she learned the words,
she sang.
We walked up the hill,
we were running out of breath,
we sang the words as best we could

The patrol car drove on silently.

We came back together in the parking lot
of the youth center
singing until all had arrived.
Rose raised the quiet signal, the Black Power fist.
The Christian minister
whose niece was imprisoned kept his fist raised.

Rose said, "I hope that this event brought you some peace
and a sense of solidarity.
I hope that you found it meaningful
and rejuvenating
for we have more work to do."

6.19.2018 Poor People's Campaign Poetic Field Note

After
we went to McDonalds
across the street from where we parked.
Next to a large colorful mural of
dancing skeletons and women in traditional Mexican dress.

It was one of those McDonalds with a white and blue color palette
meant to exude calm and cleanliness
with photographs of smiling racially diverse families on the walls.

A Black security guard stood nearby
leaning on one of the half-walls, watching.

A lot of the McDonalds people are Spanish.
said my son.
You hear them speaking Spanish?
I tried to clarify.

We got ice cream and frozen Coca-Cola
and sat in a white circular booth.

What did you guys think of that?
I asked.
I felt like it really meant something.
my son replied.
Like I can do things to the world to change it.

Were you scared at all?
asked my husband.
I was scared when the police came.
he replied.
But they were kind of helpful. Not scary.
They made it so that we could walk in the street safely.
And they never disrupted us.
My husband and I reassured.

My daughter chimed in,
Well I think its because I heard this Brown police say, *I think it's fine*.
I never saw any of the officers. I don't know what color they were.
I challenged.

Well I did. It's like this movie theater, they were like

Did you have a favorite part?

I asked.

At the end when we sang *We who believe in freedom*.
answered my daughter.

I think that was my favorite part too.

I said.

My son said,

I don't have a favorite part. It's all based on one thing.

I like when we all went together and went close to each other,
my daughter added.

We remembered it was called
laying of hands.

My husband said,

I got real emotional at the very first part,
just standing there and listening to the stories.

And the first song,

I didn't feel like I should sing that song,

I felt that way too,

I agreed.

We are the children of those who didn't die.

We are the people of the children who can fly.

I didn't feel like that song was about me either, I said.

No, it was not about me, he said.

I liked the song that Ana sang, her song,
said my daughter.

And do you remember what verse you said? I asked her.

I hope Brown people are safe,
she remembered.

As we walked out I said, Have a good night,
to the security guard.

He said,

You folks have a good night too.

9.08.2018 Zine Con Poetic Field Note

All four of us attended the Zine Con.
We began by walking the lines of tables
zinesT-shirtsplushiesbuttonscoloringbooks

There were zines about
VeganeatingStoppingwhitesupremacyFeminismLGBTQBodylove

We went to a session on kids making zines
We all made zines in the session
And again in the Scraps KC room next door
We made
flowerpencilcolorfriendsonglyriczines

Then we went to the Civil Disobedience
Tricks, Traps, and Trials session.

Surprise!

Our minister and music theologian were leading the session.
As they spoke, the kids made more zines.

My daughter
Thoughtdrewwroteeraseddrewandwrotesome
with a pencil
next to me.

When she finished
she presented a neatly folded zine about
police brutality against
People of Color
to our minister.

She let me take a picture of it.

Here is what it said:

Don't hurt me
but sometimes cops are good
Just think about the world
What is us Who is they What is the world.

Why treat them like animals there just a different color
and know a lot of them are dead.
but we still bless everybody
but were peaceful

Later she talked to me about the illustrations.

She asked,

Do you know what that is?

It is someone kissing the coffin. Cause it's probably her dad

She showed me the picture

of the man and the whip

like a black and white photograph we had seen in a book

It's too much scars. So it turned all black.

She said

explaining that she had drawn

scaruponscaruponscaruponscaruponscaruponscaruponscaruponscar

9.14.2018 Nike Ad Poetic Transcription

There is a lot of talk
on Twitter
on the news
at work
and in the elementary school
about the new Nike ad.

My daughter had seen it
when it popped up
on youtube.

*The person that's talking is the football guy that took a knee,
she tells us.*

My family gathers in the kitchen
around my laptop
to watch it together.

You guys know what an advertisement is, right?

Uhuh

*Yes.
It tries to make you get something.*

And you guys know who Nike is, what kind of stuff they sell?

Shoes.

*So you remember Colin Kaepernick, the guy who took a knee?
You said you're still taking a knee, right during the Pledge of Allegiance?
I asked my son.*

*Mhmm.
Cause I think it's right to do that.
Cause I respect America,
but America needs to change.*

What do you think needs to change?

*Lots of things.
I just, I just usually think that America's
having something that's pretty bad,
and we just need to change it.
Cause someone's in the president...*

And litter.

Yeah.

And immigrants.

Uh huh.

*The wall.
And this is something,
so this girl named Zakiyah in my class,
there was this poster and she said this is the wall,
like Trump's wall
and then I read the whole thing down at the bottom,
and it was like not exactly the wall.
She didn't read it. That's why she didn't know.*

*She saw a picture,
and she was like,
oh this must be the wall between
the United States and Mexico?*

Yeah.

So you think kids at school are thinking about the wall?

Yeah!

*Okay, let's watch it,
my son says impatiently.*

*Before we watch it,
I think it's important to remember
what Colin Kaepernick is taking a knee for.*

He was taking a knee against police brutality against-

Black people or African Americans

*Yeah.
They get put in jail way more.
They get hurt more by police.*

*Yeah, that's what I was trying to get out,
but I just couldn't say it.*

*It's hard to say the right words.
Sometimes you have to be prepared
to talk to people about it,
you have to rehearse the right words.*

Yeah, and I wasn't ready for this.

Most people aren't ready when the time comes.

*Yeah. I want to wear my Black Lives Matter T-shirt
that I got at the Civil Rights Museum,
but I'm worried
that people won't like it
or think that I shouldn't wear it since I'm white.*

*But I'm going to try to wear it tomorrow
because Black people keep getting shot by the police,
and I think white people need to do something about it.*

*Okay, so Colin Kaepernick started taking a knee during
the national anthem to let everyone know
that he loves the United States of America,
but he thinks things need to change.
And then what happened to him when he did that?*

*Well, he essentially lost his job as an NFL quarterback
even though he was better than a lot of quarterbacks.
Nobody would hire him after that.
A lot of people think that the owners got together
and said that they weren't going to hire this guy.
Or maybe they just all decided
they weren't going to hire him.*

But he doesn't get to do what he loves to do any more.

And that's why Nike asked him to do this ad.

The ad begins.

We hear Kaepernick's voice.

If people say your dreams are crazy,
if they laugh at what you think you can do,
good.
Stay that way.
Because what non-believers fail to understand
is that calling a dream crazy is not an insult,
it's a compliment....

Don't believe you have to be like anybody to be somebody...

Don't settle for homecoming queen or linebacker, do both....

If you're born a refugee, don't let it stop you from playing soccer for the
national team...

Don't become the best basketball player on the planet, be bigger than
basketball...

Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything.

We all watch together

My daughter marvels at the athletes with physical disabilities.

My husband chuckles at the young woman

who was both homecoming queen and quarterback,
perhaps thinking of our own daughter.

My son is quiet, rapt

My eyes are full of tears.

It ends and the thirty seconds of magic breaks.

But I just don't get why it would be Nike, though.

Like so all of that for just Nikes? Shoes?

asks my daughter.

Cause they just want money?

inserts my son.

You think it's just about money?

*Probably they want to spread the word.
Spread the word and they also want to make money.*

*So a lot of people after this commercial
came out who don't like people kneeling
at the national anthem.
They burned their Nike stuff.*

*And there's one college here in Missouri
that used to get all of their equipment for their sports teams from Nike
and then they said, no we're not buying your stuff any more.*

I bet some college students just didn't bring some of their Nikes.

You think they really still had them?

Yeah.

Like probably not everybody on the team agrees?

*It's like, kind of like slaves, but really different.
And way less badder.*

*Do you mean that the people on the team
are kind of like slaves because they have to do
what the coach says, but really they might feel a different way?
So not really like slavery,
but somebody else is in charge
and we have to do what they say.*

*And it's like the tunnels.
So first white people that were taking care of the slavery people,
they didn't know they were digging tunnels.
And the people that were teachers and stuff like that did not know.
They were not punishing.
And giving in to them and stuff.*

*So some white people didn't help,
and they didn't know the secret stuff that was going on*

like the Underground Railroad?

Mmhmm.

*You're thinking maybe the people on the sports teams
are kind of being sneaky and getting Nike stuff
without their coaches knowing it?*

She nods.

So tell them what else happened with Nike.

*So after that the company didn't do as well
for the next couple days.
But since then it's done better than it ever has.*

How?

People started buying more Nike stuff.

How?

*Well, one reason is, Nike doesn't just sell
to people who live in the United States.
They sell to people who live in the whole world.
And I think most of the world
is made up of People of Color.
And so I think a lot of the world,
will probably understand better what Colin Kaepernick is
trying to say when he kneels.
And I think that's why Nike is trying to do that.*

What kind of people did you see in that ad?

*People who come from all places,
like that Indian girl that covers her head.*

I don't know if she is Indian or not, but she's wearing-

She wanted to box.

Did you see the swish on the side of her- what is it?

Hijab.
Do you know what that swoosh means?

My daughter shakes her head.

Nike.
So Nike is making hijabs
for women to wear while they play sports.

I think maybe what I'm learning from Nike
is that if you're brave enough to do the right thing,
that ultimately people benefit from that.

If you're brave enough to do the right thing,
at first some people might be mad,
but most people will be with ya.

Two days later my son asked if I thought
Nike would start a church after they go out of business.
I assured him that Nike was not going out of business any time soon.

9.15.2018 I wore my Black Lives Matter Shirt Today Poetic Field Note

I am wearing my Black Lives Matter shirt today.

I got it two months ago at the National Civil Rights Museum.

And this is the first time I've worn it.

Earlier this week,
Botham Shem Jean,
 a Black man,
was shot in his apartment
by a white off-duty officer.

The officer thought that he was in her apartment.

She was on the wrong floor of the building.

I read that his last words were,
 Why did you do that?

I worry that wearing the shirt might upset people
I worry I'll appear anti-police.
I worry about how people might perceive
 a white woman wearing it.

But today,
Black Lives Matter
seems like the simplest
and most important message.

My daughter gave me a thumbs up when I came to the breakfast table.

I was nervous all morning

at the kids' soccer games

at the grocery store.

Did anyone say anything?
my son asks.

No, I say.

Did any one give you a funny look?
asks my husband.

Not that I noticed.

Did you feel funny being with someone wearing the shirt?
I asked him

*No,
sometimes I thought about it,
but I didn't mind.*

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Despite the dominant narrative that children are innocent or naïve when it comes to race, multiple studies confirm children learn race and racism at a young age through interactions within a racialized society (Miller, 2015; Pauker et al., 2016; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). These interactions take place within “the everyday cultural routine[s] of life and [the] shared understanding which surround and scaffold them” (Weisner, 1996, p. 145). In this study, I sought to understand how my children constructed and expressed understandings of race in response to the home curriculum I enacted with my husband in response to the research question: How do my children construct and express understandings of race in response to the home curriculum? In this chapter, I present three major findings (see Figure 5.1) that answer that question:

1. Using Race Words
 - a. Using Race Labels to Talk About People of Color
 - b. Using Race Labels to Talk about Self
 - c. Using Dangerous Race Words
2. Using Metaphor and Analogy
 - a. Modifying the Dominant Image of God
 - b. Making Analogies Between Current Events and American Chattel Slavery
3. Designing and Implementing Political Actions

Figure 5.1. Major Findings of the Study

These findings are grounded in the emergent home curriculum which was co-constructed by my family members and myself within the context of a metropolitan

bifurcated by a Black/white racial binary and a country experiencing racialized political turmoil. The subject matter of the home curriculum was intended to be antiracist content knowledge and skills. Each finding section includes poetic analysis to center the emotional/intellectual/moral nature of this work (Freire, 1970) as well as discussions of the ways in which the setting and curriculum planner, myself, influenced the learning that took place.

Using Race Words

As I read through hundreds of pages from more than three years of transcripts and field notes made up of the words my family members and I spoke, the words that tell our story of learning race in this place and time; a few race words kept coming to the surface. Powerful words. Contested words. Words like Mixed, racist, and the N Word. Words that my children encountered in several discourse communities, including the home, school, and church. Words that lead them to ask *serious, really good, and really deep* questions, like *Is Eminem part Black?* and *Are you glad you're white?* These questions usually took my husband and me by surprise and often lead us to seek outside sources as we searched for responses to their questions.

The race words that became central to the home curriculum included words used to label a person's race and words associated with racism. These words, even when not well understood, became part of the discursive toolkits (Moje & Lewis, 2007) my children used to build their understandings of themselves and those they interacted with as racialized beings. In other words, they used these words to label themselves and others and to construct an understanding of the ways race and racism operate in their lived experiences. These words were gleaned from the larger cultural lexicon; from peers and adults they interacted with,

school curriculum, and popular media. Each word has a storied past and its meaning and use will surely change in the future. My children and I used race words to understand race as more than skin color, develop our own racial identities, and examine the power structures inherent in racial discourse. These words constitute what Park (2011) terms “vocabularies of difference (“the names”) as well as their operations (“how it works”) [which] may stand [in opposition to] institutional and cultural norms about what is appropriate and good to teach young children” (p. 416).

My children did not learn these words passively and use them mechanically by simply mimicking others. Once they encountered a race word, my children actively employed the word in communication with others. In conversations about race across settings, my children received verbal and nonverbal feedback from those they interacted with. They used this feedback to revise their talk and thus their conceptions of race. At times, they even invented new words to accommodate their developing understandings of race and racism.

In this section, I describe three ways in which my children used race words to construct and express understandings of race: using race labels to talk about People of Color, using race labels to talk about self, and using what I term *dangerous race words*. Each subfinding begins with a poem constructed through second level poetic analysis as an intellectual and emotional introduction to the subfinding. Each subfinding also includes a discussion of the ways in which the curriculum was restricted by the limitations of language as a cultural tool (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978) and my mediation of the curriculum as white parent/teacher (Leonardo & Manning, 2015). Finally, each subfinding includes a description of the conception of race that emerged from such talk.

Using Race Labels to Talk about People of Color

The Ballad of Black and white

“[T]he manner in which people use
biologically-based visual cues in processes
of racialization is not just a simple matter of
‘looking’
but rather a profound, difficult process
in which our senses have been regimented
to look at phenotypes and decide that
‘that is x’
[and ‘that is y’]
despite continuous variations
and contradictory signals,”⁶⁶
the usual two machines.⁶⁷

*Annie is Black,
my daughter said.
We watched a movie of it.
She is Black.
Wait, she is brown.
Her whole body is.
Well, all of her skin is brown.
Not all of her body.
Fingers not brown,
White.
Kind of.
Jabari is the same color.
The Black, wait brown.
Brown.
Jabari is my best friend who has brown skin.*⁶⁸

How are we to believe what we hear and we say and we do?

I didn't know Jason was my cousin's brother,

⁶⁶ (Kromidas, 2014, p. 425)

⁶⁷ Bolded text is from Muriel Rukeyser's Ballad of Orange and Grape.

⁶⁸ From a 9.30.2015 poetic transcription.

my son said.
Is Jason's family Black?
 No, his dad is Latino,
 I tell him.
Do those people look Black?
 Brown.
*So that's why Jason looks Blackish?*⁶⁹

One word large and clear, unmistakable, on each machine.

But my daughter says,
There's three colors.
Light brown,
white, I mean peach,
*and brown.*⁷⁰

A lot of my friends are brown.
Jamiya is brown.
Fernando is kind of brown.
Tushar is kind of brown.
*It is good to have brown friends.*⁷¹

A man keeps pouring the familiar shape.

I read aloud,
Mixed Me by Taye Diggs
Why pick only one color or face?
Why pick one race?
And pause,
What does that mean?

Color,
says my son.

Do you remember
how color is a little different from race?

⁶⁹ From a 7.24.2016 poetic field note.

⁷⁰ From a 12.11.2016 poetic transcription.

⁷¹ From a 1.27.2017 poetic field note.

*Yes.
Race is when you think
you're better than someone.*

*Kind of,
race is like the groups people made up
so people say there's a white race and a black race.
Race is made up so that some people can have more power.
And color is just the colors of people's skin.*

*The boy in the book is two races
because his mom is white
and his dad is Black.
And that's why race doesn't really work
because you can't put all people in a group.*

*It works for paint,
says my daughter.*

*It works for paint, but that's color, not race,
I remind them.⁷²*

Using race labels such as Black, Brown, and African American to describe People of Color and using no race label to describe white people is a firmly established discourse norm in white communities (Thandeka, 2007) and evidence that whiteness is defined as an absent racial category, the default, the norm. When my children transitioned from a nearly all-white preschool to a multiracial elementary school, transitioning from an education setting deep into the white side of the Troost divide to an education setting on the Black side of the Troost divide, they began using race labels in their talk about friends of Color. They had learned the colloquial terms Black and white in the everyday discourse of our Midwestern metropolis,

⁷² From a 3.25.17 poetic transcription.

but they often chose to use alternative race labels when talking about People of Color such as their cousin by marriage, friends at school, and people they encountered in our community.

While cultural vocabularies are always changing, currently the words most commonly used to name race in Kansas City, like many Midwestern American communities, are *Black* and *white*. These race labels are evidence of the racial binary that defines the dominant discourse on race in the U.S. This binary discourse positions all people on a continuum from white to Black and measures racial identity in terms of proximity to either of those understood-to-be opposite poles (Deliovsky & Tikossa, 2013; Harpalani, 2015). To better understand racial socialization's beginning in early childhood, it is important to consider Black and white are also words commonly known to young children as color words. If we take a moment to consider the typical preschool curriculum around the words black and white, we find that many children likely understand the terms *black* and *white* to be strictly distinct color labels without the room for variation that colors like blue or pink allow, such as light blue or carnation pink; any variation of black or white results in an entirely new color, gray. Black and white are also typically defined as opposites, words used to describe a distinct binary. Further, in children's stories and programming, black is often used to designate "bad guys" and scary places while white typically symbolizes goodness and safety (Deliovsky & Kitossa, 2013; Dobbins & Skillings, 1991). The race labels Black and white are not neutral, and children are socialized to understand black as bad and white as good at a young age.

While my children learned color words and were socialized to understand their symbolism at a young age, they were unlikely to learn that the words Black and white were also words to describe race in the white-dominant preschool where they attended and I

worked and where color evasiveness was the norm. Indeed, I did not begin the antiracist home curriculum that included vocabulary development around the difference between race and color until my son said, while preparing to enter kindergarten, “Will there be Brown kids there?” and “I don’t want to go,” when I answered that there would be. However, my children did demonstrate knowledge of the words Black and white to label race within the context of their racially diverse elementary school. It is likely they originally learned *Black* and *white* were racial labels through talk at home and via movies and other media. It is important to note here that “who we are and how we think is profoundly influenced by the discourses that we inhabit” (Janks, 2010, p. 55). It is illogical to think that my children’s understanding of the words black and white as color words that represent opposites and stand as symbols of good and bad did not affect their understandings of race.

While my family began having conversations about race when my son entered kindergarten, I began formally enacting antiracist home curriculum during the summer of 2016. This was the summer after my daughter completed kindergarten and my son completed second grade. This was also the summer I engaged in an independent study on critical and antiracist pedagogy in early childhood. During this time, I was a novice at designing and enacting critical and antiracist pedagogy in the home. Kemple, Lee, and Harris (2016) point out, “As a teaching strategy which is familiar and comfortable for most early childhood teachers, shared book-reading is a helpful way to raise conversations about racial diversity” (p. 100). Indeed, as shown in Table 5.1, the majority of the formal early home curriculum practices I enacted involved the shared reading of children’s books I selected due to their depiction of racially diverse people. Notice too that this approach resulted in my daughter observing on February 8, 2017 that I had a separate stack of library books she termed *Mom’s*

Brown books that were “books about Brown people.” This anecdote demonstrates my work to educate my children about racial diversity through children’s literature did not go unnoticed and may have contributed to their ‘Othering’ People of Color just as I had Othered books through my selection of books only about People of Color.

Table 5.1 Progression of Formal Home Curriculum on Race Labels for People of Color

Initial Impetus of Curriculum	Curriculum Materials and Delivery	Children’s Responses
My developing understanding of antiracist curriculum	6.21.2016 Shades of Black by Sandra Pinkney	My children thought the book was <i>weird</i> and asked, “Why did this always talk about Black people?” Though appearing uncomfortable with the concept, they concluded people with many different skin tones may identify as Black because, “They might have come from Africa.”
	8.03.2016 The Skin I’m In by bell hooks	While this book depicts skin color to be an identity marker that tells a partial story about a person’s identity, my son responded by attempting to predict if someone is nice or mean based on their hair texture and length.
	8.24.2016 Be Boy Buzz by bell hooks	My son described the book as cool. As a family, we responded by talking about gender, but not race.
	8.25.2016 Black is Brown is Tan by Arnold Adoff	Both children responded with disbelief that a family might include a Black mother and white father then my son realized the children’s appearance reflected “the husband and wife mixed together.”

	<p>11.16, 11.29 and 11.30.2016 Chocolate Me by Taye Diggs Due to its similarity to the plot of the book, I told my children about two biracial children I knew who “told a girl that she can’t play because her skin was too dark.” I reminded them about segregation laws and laws banning interracial marriage and said, “sometimes those laws are still kind of stuck in our heads... and make us think that people who are brown aren’t as nice.”</p>	<p>My son expressed discomfort with what he called <i>bullying</i> in the book.</p> <p>My children demonstrated critical literacy in expressing an understanding that making cupcakes, as happened in the book, would not solve the problem of racial discrimination. They came up with ways to tell people not to discriminate because of physical features associated with race.</p>
	<p>11.30.2016 Two Friends: Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass by Dean Robbins</p>	<p>My daughter asked me pray in order <i>to tell God</i> to thank the people who worked to end slavery and legal segregation.</p>
	<p>12.05.2016 Niño Wrestles the World by Yuyi Morales</p>	<p>The children enjoyed a lively reading of this book and attempted to say the Spanish words accurately.</p>
<p>2.02.2017 My daughter said there was a new kid at school who is Spanish and her friend Fernando is teaching him English. Previously she had denied or been unaware that her friend Fernando was bilingual.</p>	<p>2.07.2017 I Am René, the Boy by René Colato Laínez</p>	<p>My son pointed out accent marks in the text and said he <i>really liked</i> the book. He expressed that moving to another country like René would be <i>really hard</i>.</p>
		<p>2.08.2017 My daughter indicated that she wanted to read one of my “books about brown people.”</p>
	<p>5.01.2017 Shades of People by Shelley Rotner This book did not include race labels. It had many bright photographs of diverse children.</p>	<p>My daughter enjoyed looking at different photographs of children. Both children compared their own dimpled cheeks to the dimpled cheeks of one girl in the book. They did not engage in a discussion about the assertion <i>you can’t tell what someone is like by</i></p>

<p>March 2017 We read Mixed Me by Taye Diggs several times and in different contexts. My son asked, “What does this sentence mean, <i>Why do we have to choose one race?</i>” I responded by defining race as a “made up way to put people in groups.”</p>	<p><i>looking at them.</i> In a subsequent reading, he defined race as both “color” and “when you think you’re better than someone.”</p>
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From time to time, when my children talked about people from our neighborhood community and their elementary school, they utilized the race labels *Black* and *white*. As my children endeavored to make sense of and use the race labels Black and white, they necessarily went through the process of comparing their existing definitions of the words to the physicality of the bodies they were attempting to label. They responded by rejecting inaccurate color labels, creating race labels to describe proximity to Blackness, and seeking to learn the social rules and meanings of race labels.

Quvenzhané Wallis is Brown, not Black: Rejecting inaccurate color labels. Both of my children have rejected the words *Black* and *white* and replaced them with more accurate color labels when describing people. At five years old, my daughter watched the 2014 movie rendition of *Annie* in which Annie is played by Quvenzhané Wallis, a young African American girl. On a car drive on September 30, 2015, she attempted to describe the actor:

My Daughter: Annie is Black. We watched a movie of it. She is Black.
 Myself: What does that mean?
 My Daughter: Wait, she is brown.
 Myself: Yeah. Her skin is brown.
 My Daughter: Mm-hmm. Her whole body is. Well, all of her skin is brown. Not all of her body.

Myself: What part of her body are you thinking of?
My Daughter: Fingers not brown, (said quietly as if feeling shy)
Myself: What color do you think her fingers are?
My Daughter: White. Kind of.
Myself: You mean like the skin on her palms is a lighter color?
My Daughter: Mm-hmm.
Myself: Yeah, do you have friends like that at school?
My Daughter: No.
Myself: Do you have friends with brown skin at school?
My Daughter: Mm-mm. (indicating no)
Myself: Are there kids in your class who have brown skin?
My Daughter: (nods)
Myself: Yeah, are they your friends?
My Daughter: No.
Myself: Why not?
My Daughter: I don't know.
Myself: What color is Jabari? What color skin does he have?
My Daughter: Him is not in my class.
Myself: Oh. But he is your friend. What color skin does he have?
My Daughter: The same color.
Myself: The same color as who?
My Daughter: The black, wait brown, brown.
Myself: He has brown skin. See you have friends who have brown skin.
My Daughter: No, I mean, I mean Jabari is my best friend who has brown skin.
Myself: Yeah.
My Daughter: Only one skin friend I have at this school, but him's not in my class.

In this example, my five-year-old daughter indicates an awareness of race as associated with skin color. She applied race labels she had learned from the broader culture to describe differences in skin color. It seems as if my daughter was grappling with the fact that the actor playing Annie has skin that is neither black nor entirely brown. When she said that the actor's fingers weren't brown, I remembered observing with curiosity as a child, that the Black child in my class at school had lighter skin on the palms of her hands than on the backs of her hands. Due to my own experience and my daughter's expression of embarrassment at mentioning Annie's fingers, I wondered if my daughter had made a similar

observation, so I asked, “What color do you think her fingers are?” She responded with a word that more likely indicated race than color. She said, “White, kind of.” Looking back on this incident I see that my five-year-old daughter was seeking to understand the relationship between color and race through her use of both race labels and color words. However, I did not realize this at the time. I responded, “You mean like the skin on her palms is a lighter color?” She responded with an affirmative, “Mm-hmm.”

This interaction would have likely been avoided by many white mothers due to the shame that perpetuates color evasiveness (Bartoli et al., 2016; Pahlke et al., 2012; Vittrup & Holden, 2011). Recognizing children “use adult responses as important means of figuring out who they are, and how they are the same and different from other people” (Kemple et al., 2016), I chose to support my daughter’s inquiry. My response seemed to alleviate her embarrassment and lay the groundwork for “[r]acial talk [that] leads to greater racial understanding” (Michael & Bartoli, 2016, p. 3).

The interaction that my daughter and I had in the context of open racial communication indicated my daughter’s active work to understand the relationship between skin color, color words, and race labels. In essence, she found the word Black to be insufficient to describe the skin tones of the human beings she encountered in popular texts and face-to-face interactions. Ultimately she rejected the race label Black and used the color word brown to describe her friends and others with dark brown skin. Effectively my daughter used the word Brown as a race label to describe African American people.

Taking a critical sociocultural stance, I understand race labels to be cultural tools “transforming with the ideas of both their designers and their later users” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 276). Not only are racial categories “fake units of human diversity” (Pollock, 2004, p. 17),

they also reflect color symbolism associated with good and bad, clean and dirty (Dobbins & Skillings, 1991). This color symbolism remains intact within the broader culture today, notably for my children; some of their comic book heroes turned into villains who then wear black and have the word Black added to their name. When my children reject the color words Black and white to label race, they point out the falsity of these words, constructing an understanding that race labels are misleading. However, Beneke and Cheatham (2019) point out, “While [other color words] may better describe the skin tones of U.S. children than ‘Black,’ ‘Latina,’ or ‘White,’ they mask a history of racial inequity and collective belonging that may be important to children and families” (p. 124). In other words, in my position as white mother and teacher, I found myself “representing the needs and desires of others through charity, politics, and schooling” (Leonardo & Boas, 2013, p. 319).

Further, the replacement of one color label with another still upholds the façade of race being defined only by skin color. While I continued to utilize the common race labels Black and white in discourse, I also adopted Brown as a race label in conversations with my children. Even while employing binary discourses, I actively tried to challenge dominant narratives of the Black/white binary and race as color by reading the book *Mixed Me* by Taye Diggs with my family several times in March of 2017. In this book, the young protagonist labels himself “Mixed” and asks, *Why pick one race?* I used this opportunity to point out that race is a social construct rather than a color.

March 25, 2017

Myself: *Why pick one race.* What does that mean?

My Son: Color.

Myself: Do you remember what we talked about how color is a little different from race?

My Son: Yes. Race is when you think you’re better than someone.

Myself: Kind of, race is like the groups people made up so people say there's a white race and a black race. Race is made up so that some people can have more power, and color is just the colors of people's skin.
 (...)

Myself: (read) *I'm not mixed up, I just happen to be mixed.*

My Daughter: What does that mean?

Myself: That Mike is two races because his mom is white and his dad is Black. People call that Mixed. And he's saying I'm not mixed up, I'm mixed. I'm two races. I'm Black and white.

Myself: And that's why race doesn't really work because you can't put all people in a group.

My Daughter: It works for paint.

Myself: It works for paint, but that's color, not race.

We know that “[t]hrough language, people construct race by classifying, categorizing, and labeling” (Beneke & Cheatham, 2019, p. 111). As indicated by my daughter's comment, “It works for paint,” my children continued to grapple with the ways that race was and was not associated with color over the course of many conversations that utilized race labels. This indicates the power of language to shape our thinking: when people use color labels to categorize, we run the risk of defining racial categories as simply color.

Blackish and kind of brown: creating race labels to describe proximity to

Blackness. Throughout the study, my daughter continued to use the term Brown instead of Black or African American to label people she perceived as such. Her use of the color word brown seemed to evolve from color words used to describe skin tone to race labels she chose to use as more accurate than *Black*. I will indicate this in my writing through the use of the lower case word brown to describe color and the capitalized word Brown to describe race. My daughter used various labels such as *kind of Brown* and *light brown* to describe people I perceived as Latinx, East Indian, or multiracial. For example, on January 27, 2017, when she was in first grade, she described Jamiya, a girl with dark brown skin and box braids as

Brown, Fernando, a boy with tan skin and straight black hair who I have observed speaking Spanish as *kind of Brown*, and Tushar who identifies as East Indian as *kind of Brown*.

Notice the phrase *kind of Brown* in contrast to the phrase *light brown*. *Kind of Brown* seems to indicate that someone's race is *kind of like* the African American race, while *light brown* seems to indicate skin tone. When she says, "It's good to have Brown friends," I interpret that to mean *it is good to have People of Color as friends*. The idea that it is good to have People of Color as friends may be a sentiment resulting from friendships our family had recently developed with neighbors of Color, or as a result of our extensive family discussions and explorations about the pitfalls of segregation. Similarly, on July 24, 2016 my eight-year-old son described a relative by marriage as *Blackish*.

My Son: I didn't know Jason was [my cousin's] brother.
Myself: Jason and [your cousin] have the same mom and different dads.
My Son: That's weird. Is Jason's family Black?
Myself: No, his dad is Latino.
My Son: Do those people look Black?
Myself: Brown.
My Son: So that's why Jason looks Blackish?
Myself: Yeah, his skin is darker.
My Son: Do they speak English?
Myself: Spanish.
My Son: So they are from Chinese?
Myself: Mexico.
My Son: Is his mom from English?
Myself: She looks like a white person, but I don't know. She might have some Latino ancestry.

When my son said, "So that's why Jason looks Blackish" he was not describing Jason's skin color as *blackish*, he was describing Jason as someone who had physical features somewhat similar to those of a Black person. He then brought up language and ethnicity indicating an understanding that race is associated with physical features, language, and ancestry. In return,

I enforced binary thinking through my responses. I do not know Jason's father. I only know that he identifies as Latino. I do not know how he identifies racially or his language identity. This did not stop me from quickly answering my son's questions. When my son asked if Jason's dad was Black, I responded that he was Latino without pointing out that many Latino people identify as Black. I went on to assume that Jason's father spoke Spanish when people who identify as Latino speak many languages. Finally I made an assumption that Jason's dad was from Mexico. In this interaction, I was trying to help my son connect Jason's Latino identity to my son's current understanding of Latino people. The conversation was rushed and resulted in my essentializing of Latinx people and reinforcing the racial binary. Interestingly, I took the time in this interaction to discuss the ethnic/racial identity of Jason's mother in a more nuanced way. I do not know for sure if I did this because I know her better or because I perceive her as white. My intent does not matter as much as the result which was to essentialize Latinx identity and to nuance white identity.

These moves to describe racial identity in terms of proximity to Blackness are reflective of the larger culture of the U.S. and Kansas City in particular. Deliovsky and Tikossa (2013) assert the Black/white binary "reflects a process of negative and positive racialization that is a symbolic matrix (of inclusion and exclusion) that incorporates other racial/ethnic (and class) categories, albeit in a manner both contingent and hierarchical" (p. 165). My children sorted people in terms of their Black or Brown-ness, not in relation to their white or peach-ness. This Othering is a characteristic of white discourse in which "white becomes the norm from which other 'races' stand apart and in relation to which they are defined" (Leonardo, 2002, p. 32). Perry and colleagues (2003) point out that this orientation is historically grounded and thus deep in the cultural discourse. She explains,

whiteness is a social construction created in contrast to Blackness; “To be ‘white’ was to be ‘not-slave,’ ‘not-Black’” (Perry et al., 2003, p. 73). In other words, my children’s and my own language use maintained a race binary of white and not-white and a white supremacist ideology that measures all other identities against whiteness.

Language experiments with race labels and my white fragility. Along with an emergent understanding, and adoption of the concept that race labels are dependent on a socially-constructed binary, my son’s use of race labels lead to an understanding that race talk is rule-laden (Pollock, 2004; Rahman, 2012). As my son operated in the world, he heard numerous race labels and used them to better understand his world and the people within it. Each of his utterances constituted a “social action, an attempt to join a conversation...both a question and a response directed toward the adult world” (Park, 2011, pp. 394–395). Often his language experiments lead to discussions about how race labels “carry the historical and political baggage of conversations that have come before” (Park, 2011, p. 395). For example, when he was eight years old, he asked me directly what the word *Colored* meant. I explained,

It’s an old-fashioned word that people used to use to mean Black people or people with brown skin... people don’t say that anymore. Now sometimes people say *People of Color*. And that can mean brown or dark brown skin, Black people, or Latino people.

Establishing a socially acceptable vocabulary around race is not a quick process, and I did not provide a perfect curriculum. Notice in my attempt to avoid using binary language such as “people who aren’t white” I left out many groups in my definition of People of Color above.

More than a year later at the grocery store my son, then nine years old, noted, “There were a lot of Blacks and Browns at that Price Chopper.” He seemed to be applying the

grammar of the words *Blacks* and *whites* commonly heard in archival footage of the Civil Rights movement and in news stories I listened to in the car. He took the structure of the words and adapted them according to his observation and our family's discussions that skin was typically brown and not black; I do not believe that he had learned Brown as a race label taken up by Latinx, South Asian, and biracial people. However, I responded to his language experiment with a command filled with social anxiety and white discourse, "I do not want you to call people Blacks and Browns. You can say Black People or Brown People." White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), or deep discomfort around talking about race or being perceived as racist, permeates this interaction and the home curriculum in general. DiAngelo (2011) posits that whites suffer from a lack of racial stamina due to their insulation from racial stress and asserts, "it is critical that all white people build the stamina to sustain conscious and explicit engagement with race" (p. 66) in order to support antiracist efforts. Like Nishi (2018), a white motherscholar committed to antiracist parenting, I cannot be paralyzed by my own mistakes or white fragility. Instead I must work to "evolve and complicate these [race word] definitions in future conversations" (p. 17).

Using Race Labels to Talk about Self

In this section, I discuss the ways my children and I took up race labels to talk about and construct understandings of ourselves as white people. I utilized the race label white and attempted to enact home curriculum that explicitly provided models of antiracist white people to support my children's healthy racial identity development (Michael & Bartoli, 2016). My children encountered the race label Mixed in their school and used the word to develop their racial identities through talk at home and school. Ethnicity was tied to both the

race labels white and Mixed in dominant and home discourses, further contributing to their racial identity development.

Race Labels, History, and Identity

Deculturalization into whiteness requires a letting go of identity.

I do not know my ancestry.
I've only ever known I'm white.

*(Ask me but all my wisdom departed.)*⁷³

Great Aunt said we were *Swamp Yankees*
but she didn't know what that meant.

It means
of English colonial ancestry
 countrified
 stubborn
 independent
 less-refined
 minimally-educated
the undesirables
who left England
due to misconduct
and retreated to the swamps upon arrival.⁷⁴

(Ask me but all my wisdom departed.)

“Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence.”⁷⁵

After watching
footage from the Civil Rights Movement
 Black and white video
 of young Black people at lunch counters
 and marches
 of white police officers
 with snarling dogs
 and water hoses

⁷³ Right oriented text is made up of lyrics from “What’s the Bizness” by Merrill Martin Garbus and Nathaniel J Brenner of Tune-Yards.

⁷⁴ From a 9.20.2018 poetic field note and memo.

⁷⁵ (McIntosh, 1989, p. 11)

(Lift up, dig up, lift up, dig up and bleed)

my daughter said,
 When I was in your tummy,
 I was thinking something,
What? I asked.
 *I wish I was a white person.*⁷⁶

(I saw every bit of business that business could work through.)

“Diversity provided these children with opportunities to...
[contrast] a sense of self-identity with their growing awareness of others.”⁷⁷

My son said,
Are we a mix?
No. No, I already know.
*A kid in my class is a mix.*⁷⁸

Preparing for a birthday party my daughter said,
I want you to meet my friend.
She is a Mix.
*She has hair like me.*⁷⁹

(If you press your fingers down under my skin...)

White people need *a positive racial identity* that still “acknowledges one’s racial privilege and the history of racial oppression in the United States.”⁸⁰

But, the popular ancestry DNA “tests conflate something scientific, that is, DNA, with something social, which is race and identity.”⁸¹

We gathered around my laptop
I entered the code
and read the news:
 my ancestry is
 95% European
 2% Middle Eastern.

⁷⁶ From a 1.17.2016 poetic field note.

⁷⁷ (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001, p. 46)

⁷⁸ From a 1.23.2016 poetic field note.

⁷⁹ From a 2.21.2016 poetic field note.

⁸⁰ (Michaels, 2015, p. 4)

⁸¹ (Demby & Meraji, 2018)

I opened the map.
Layers of red blanketed Europe
four sheets of pale green were neatly stacked on Northern Africa.

*So we're African,
said my son
as if this is what he was seeking to confirm
in the first place.*

*That's African,
So we weren't the people who took over?⁸²*

*(If I represent the one that did this to you,
then cut away the parts that represent
the things that scar you.)*

*Mom, I have a really deep question to ask,
said my son,
Are you glad you're white?*

Um, well life in the United States is easier when you're white.

How?

*Well, the police usually think I'm a good guy,
and I can get a loan when I need to buy something,
and when I interview for a job people usually hire me.*

(I saw every bit of business that business could work through.)

*But I don't know,
if I was Black I might like being Black,
or if I was Latina, I might like being Latina.*

What do you think, Dad?

Oh, about the same thing.

*What about you?
I asked our son.*

⁸² From a 10.11.2018 poetic transcription.

*I don't know yet.*⁸³

Identifying as white, a movement toward an antiracist white identity. As part of the daily interactions that made up the home curriculum, I consistently labeled myself as *white* and my cohort as *white people*. I did this to acknowledge “I had been assigned a race by America’s pervasive socialization process...[and] give voice to [my] whiteness as the racial unsaid in [my] life” (Thandeka, 2007). When naming our race, I also sought to define whiteness for my children and support their racial identity development as antiracist white people. I understand an antiracist white identity as an identity of action, a white person who “refuse[s] to collude” (Michael & Bartoli, 2016, p. 4) with and instead actively counters white norms that serve to perpetuate white supremacy. This antiracist identity requires critical racial literacy, the ability to recognize and refute racist discourse in everyday life (Nash et al., 2018). Many scholars of Color point out this work is difficult if not impossible for white people to accomplish because “[w]hite attitudes and preferences masquerade as common sense and are embedded in the language we speak” (Leonardo & Manning, 2015, p. 6). In other words, most whites have been socialized from birth to perceive the world through the lens of whiteness, and changes to these ingrained ways of thinking are quite difficult to achieve. Herein lies the importance of antiracist curriculum implemented at a young age as well as the need for ongoing racial identity development for the teacher/student as curriculum planner as well as the student/teacher. Increasingly informed by critical theory on my own ongoing journey toward critical racial literacy, I encouraged the examination of our own racial position of power. I also consciously paired race labeling of my family as white with

⁸³ From a 11.21.18 poetic field note.

“stories of [white] antiracists throughout history . . . so that white students can envision possible ways to be white and antiracist” (Michael & Bartoli, 2016, p. 4).

My labeling of my family members and myself as white appeared to influence my children’s use of race labels to understand their own racial identities. As described in the section above, my daughter consistently used the term Brown or color words to name proximity to Blackness to label People of Color. However, she typically used the term white to label her own race, but would use the term *peach*, a more accurate description of our skin color, occasionally. An example of this can be found in Figure 5.2, a drawing my daughter made for me during the summer of 2017 in which she asserted, “You’re the color of peach.”



Figure 5.2 You’re the Color of Peach

This is both an example of her use of the word to describe my color and evidence that she understood the significance placed on skin color in our society. It is important to point out that the word peach is inscribed in the culture as a color word to describe skin tone rather than simply the name of a fruit, due to Crayola’s use of peach on the label of a pinky tan

crayon. Indeed, crayons are influential cultural tools in the lives of children. Tellingly, Crayola originally labeled this crayon that is often used to color in drawings of people, *flesh* (Fine et al., 1998). The name was changed to *peach* in 1962 during the Civil Rights Movement in order to avoid criticism that the Crayola Company was essentializing flesh to one (white) tone (Fine et al., 1998). As is common in many pre- and elementary schools, my children came to understand the word *peach* as a word used to describe the color of their skin. My daughter's use of the word *peach* to label her race and my skin color demonstrates an understanding that race is intimately associated with skin color.

While I often employed her use of the word *Brown* to label race in my own talk, I rarely used the word *peach* to describe race. This was not a conscious decision. Looking back, I believe my use of the race label *white* was an effort to acknowledge “the power and politics embedded in racial discourse in the U.S” (Beneke & Cheatham, 2019, p. 124), namely to acknowledge our social positions as white people. My decision to adopt my children's use of the word *Brown* to label African Americans likely stemmed from worry about my racing their friends, which of course they had already done by labeling them *Brown*. My decision to use the word *Brown* also may stem from my reluctance to label another person's race as I understand race to be both a social and personal identity marker (DuBois, 1961). For instance, when I learned that my son's friend, Maya, identified as *Black*, I began using the word *Black* to describe her race in conversation with my son, because that was how Maya chose to identify. Despite the reasons for my word choices, those choices inevitably impacted my children's racial discourse.

Along with an understanding that the race label *white* is at times marked by *peach* skin tone, my children used talk to demonstrate an understanding that *peach* skin comes with

power. On January 17, 2016 my family attended Our City's Martin Luther King Day celebration hosted by an interfaith alliance organization. At the event, videos and photographs from Civil Rights Movement included the lunch counter sit-ins of the early 1960's in which young Black people sitting at lunch counters had coffee poured over their chests and cigarettes put out in their hair, as well as the atrocities committed by white police in Birmingham in 1963 including hitting Black protestors with billy clubs, spraying them with fire hoses, and holding snarling dogs ready to attack. After the event, my five-year-old daughter said, "Mommy, when I was in your tummy, I was thinking something." "What?" I asked. "I wish I was a white person." "It is easier to be white in the United States of America, isn't it?" I responded. "Yes," she said (Thomas, 2016).

Violent images of young Black people being attacked by whites were effectively used in the 1960s to gain white sympathy for the Civil Rights Movement and put political pressure on the government (Theoharris, 2018). My impression of the Martin Luther King Day celebration we attended is that these same images were used to remind us of the work of King during that time. The problem with this approach to community curriculum is that it defines racism as "violent, aggressively personalized, and continually located in the 'barbaric South'" (Theoharris, 2018, p. 84). While this curriculum depicted racism as a thing of the past and "pa[id] tribute to the movement's successful and now completed battle against racism" (Theoharris, 2018, p. 4), my daughter took an important lesson about the power and relative safety that has been afforded to white people. I interpreted her statement to be an understanding that her skin color afforded her a level of protection against violence, the "luxury to be unafraid and analyze the very real fear of others" (Abdurraqib, 2017, p. 222). My response, "It is easier to be white in the United States of America, isn't it?" was an

attempt to clarify and confirm her conclusion and support an accurate understanding of race and racism as part of the antiracist home curriculum.

Another example of this approach is found in the following exchange that occurred on April 18, 2018.

- My Son: How did he even become president?
Myself: Some people agreed with the things he was saying and voted for him.
My Daughter: WHY!?
Myself: I don't know. It's hard to understand. Because a lot of people still believe that white people are better than every body else. And that's kind of what he was saying. Really I think what Trump was saying was like, *We're tired of always saying Black people and Mexican people, and immigrants from other countries deserve good stuff in America. The people who deserve good stuff in America are the white people who already live here.* I mean really that's what he was saying.
My Daughter: Hilary is white.
Myself: Yeah. She is. I'm white.
My Daughter: I'm white.
My Son: I can't believe-
Myself: The thing about it is, though, we have to work for things to be fair for everybody. Even though we're white, we shouldn't try to have everything for ourselves.

When trying to answer my son's incredulous question about how Donald Trump became president, I called out white supremacy and the way it operated in the election, attempting to explain how "[r]ace forms a basis for the exploitation and hoarding of material, political, and cultural resources" (Haney-López, 2010, p. 1068). As I often found myself doing, I paired this calling out with a vision for an antiracist identity pointing out "we have to work for things to be fair for everybody. Even through we're white, we shouldn't try to have everything for ourselves." What is absent here is the acknowledgement that even "good" white folks are complicit with systemic racism. Notice I did not point out the ways in which Hilary Clinton benefits from systemic racism and the exploitation of people of Color.

Instead, I positioned myself with “good white folks” by identifying as white in proximity to Hilary Clinton while separating myself from Donald Trump’s whiteness.

Throughout the study I found that I paralleled explanations of whiteness and exposures of white supremacy at work with possibilities for an antiracist white stance. My goal was to give my children “the tools--and the option--to become and identify as antiracist Whites” (Michael, 2015, p. 4). While I did not actively seek out texts that depicted white people acting in antiracist ways, I did point out antiracist white action in texts when we encountered them. Here, I will give three examples across three years of texts that depicted antiracist whites and how I attempted to mediate my children’s understanding of these texts. The first example occurred on October 13, 2017 after my children and I watched a local live production of *We Shall Note be Moved: The Student Sit-Ins of 1960* by Ed Simpson. During lunch we had the following conversation:

- Myself: What do you think you would have done if you were living in that time?
- My Son: Um, go to a different country, because I don’t want to be in that stuff.
- Myself: Maybe you could write a comic book about it and that could help people change their minds. And you wouldn’t have to feel scared. (...)
- Myself: I would go. I would sit at the counter. I would be scared, but I would do it.
- My Son: (Sweeping his hand over his face to illustrate.) But you would be white.
- Myself: There were white people who sat with the Black people. Remember the old lady and the white guy with brown hair, and the girl in the pink dress?
- My Daughter: If a white person went with a Black person, the Black person could stay longer. That’s what I wish would happen.
- Myself: You know, what you said about I’m white, but I could still go, right? Uncle, at his high school, people were treating kids who were gay mean.... and he started a group called the Gay Straight Alliance, and it was people who like, girls like boys and boys like

girls, so that's called straight, and people who were gay came together and said, "Hey, we need to treat everybody right." So it's really powerful for all kinds of people to come together, you know. It's important no matter who you are to stand up for what's right for everybody.

On July 27, 2018 during a trip to the National Civil Rights museum when looking at an exhibit about the Freedom Riders, I said to my son, "See, some white people helped [in the struggle for civil rights]. And that is what we need to do." On January 21, 2019, Martin Luther King Day, my family watched the movie Selma about the 1964 march from Selma to Montgomery Alabama that contributed to the signing of the Voting Rights Act. In the movie, many white religious leaders decided to join the march after viewing footage of Bloody Sunday on television. I said to my children, "See why it's important for white people to help? They wouldn't hurt the white people. It is important for us as white people to use the power we have to help." Actively using one's own racial advantages to support racial justice is a tenant of antiracist pedagogy (Leonardo, 2009; Michael & Bartoli, 2016; SURJKC, n.d.). Each of these three interactions focuses on historical texts depicting events that took place during the American Civil Rights Movement. While it is important to "connect present learning to the histories of racial, ethnic, and linguistic communities" (Paris & Alim, 2017) it must be acknowledged that the dominant discourse around the American Civil Rights Movement is:

narrowed to buses and lunch counters and Southern redneck violence. It became a key way that Americans publicly acknowledged the country's legacy of racial injustice—in the past—where the death-defying courage and sacrifices of these heroes and heroines vanquished it, as opposed to in the present, where our own resolve might be needed as well. (Theoharris, 2018, p. 2)

This curriculum of racism as an American institution of the past permeated the school curriculum as well as some materials I used in the home curriculum and thus influenced my

children's thinking. For example, on November 30, 2016, my daughter and I read *Two Friends* a book about Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony written by Dean Robbins. After reading the book, my daughter asked me to pray and ask God to say thank you "to the people what did that" because "it helps us be friends with everybody, and we can drink out of water fountains, go to any restaurants, and do anything." My daughter's assertion that we can now "do anything" indicates two shortcomings of the curriculum: first a focus on the benefits of desegregation for white people (we white people can now be friends with people of Color), and second an assumption that racial barriers have been effectively broken down.

As I actively learned more about antiracist curriculum and became more deeply aware of systemic racism, I became more comfortable enacting critical and antiracist pedagogy. I began to provide a curriculum that included modern day antiracist white action. I told my children often that I was happy we lived in a multiracial community, a way of pointing out and rejecting the tendency of whites to live in all-white communities with segregated schools (Leonardo, 2009, Michael, 2015). On June 19, 2018 our family participated in an action organized by our minister and members of the local Poor People's Campaign. Before the action, we participated in civil disobedience training, which was led by a local Black activist who was a part of Black Lives Matter protests in St. Louis. She pointed out that whites were typically at less risk than People of Color and thus would be positioned on the perimeter to protect People of Color. She talked about how to stay safe amid tear gas and arrests. The children were frightened after the training; we assured them we would keep them safe and that this action was planned to include kids and it was very unlikely there would be violence. The poetic memo excerpt below describes the antiracist curriculum of the civil disobedience

action we participated in as part of the Poor People's Campaign. The full poetic memo can be found in chapter four.

We were asked to make a line:
most impacted people in the front
least impacted people in the back.
We lined up among the able-bodied, cys-hetero, white folks
at the end of the line.

We walked silently two-by two
past the juvenile court,
past the Huron cemetery,
past the Wyandotte casino,
up the courthouse steps.

The leader spoke about the poor
being held without conviction
because they can't afford bail
and the babies being taken from their parents at the border.

She said silence is powerful,
but our voices are also powerful.
And those who are not impacted
must use their voices,
white folks must use their voices
as partners.

A Black UU minister spoke
said white people need to forge a new identity,
an identity that does not rely
on the labor of others
for success,
an identity in solidarity with People of Color,
not as allies,
but as partners.
The white voice can no longer be silent.
Yes, my husband said,
and I said, yes.

As we left, we sang
We who believe in freedom shall not rest
We who believe in freedom shall not rest until it comes
Sang it over and over past the jail.
My daughter held my hand

as we walked
and when she learned the words,
she sang along.

Throughout the event, we were reminded that our being white afforded us greater protection from violence and oppression and that our role was to work *in solidarity with People of Color*. We experienced walking at the end of the line, listening to the counter stories of People of Color, and waiting until last to talk to signal our position of power as well as our “interconnected and interdependent . . . connection to other racial groups” (Michael & Bartoli, 2016, p. 4). This experience was impactful to each member of my family. After the action, I asked my son what he thought about the experience. He said, “I felt like it really meant something. Like I can do things to the world to change it.”

Throughout the course of the study, my children came to more deeply understand their position and identity as white people and develop an antiracist white identity. By the end of the study, they exclusively use the race label *white* when describing themselves, just as I had modeled. My children’s talk about their own racial identity indicates they understood themselves to be white people and that white (peach) skin comes with a favored social standing. The antiracist curriculum of the home and church provided the children with examples of antiracist white people who took action for racial justice, and the curriculum included a political action that explicitly named our family as white people and positioned us as partners, at least for that event, in the struggle for racial and economic justice. My son responded to the event with a sense of self-efficacy. In the following section, I explore the ways in which my children took up the word Mixed as a race label including trying out the word to describe themselves as they strove to bridge racial binaries in their lives.

Are we a Mix? Mixed race label as a bridge between race binaries. Both of my children were interested in the race label Mixed seemingly because they interacted with children who had phenotypes similar to their own who identified as Mixed. Due to my upbringing in the Midwestern United States, a setting which situates “black and white as negative and positive polar extremes with other racialized categories distributed between them” (Deliovsky & Tikossa, 2013, p. 165), I have understood the race label Mixed to mean biracial and those two races to be Black and white. Despite the presence of Latinx people in my home town and my current Kansas City community, the term *Mixed* has been used in these settings to mean of Black and white racial lineage. In fact, my best friend is white and married to a Latino. I have never conceptualized her family as Mixed. In essence, I approximated his identity with my own white racial identity, in an act of erasure. When I asked my friend about the racial identity of her family, she explained that she had been confronted with the need to racially identify her children when filling out a form. Until then she had not conceived of her children as white, but had also not thought of them as Mixed. She considered marking Hispanic on the form. Upon discussing this with her husband, she learned he considered the children Mixed. My children utilized my over-simplified definition of Mixed as evidenced in several conversations throughout the study. Thus, it is likely that this narrow definition was perpetuated by myself and their peers through conversation in the context of a hyper-segregated city defined by whiteness and blackness. However, the term Mixed, like all race labels, has a definition that is context-specific, and has been defined in more complex ways by youth who identify as multiethnic and multiracial (Chang, 2015; Pollock, 2004).

My children seemed to be intrigued by the physical similarities between themselves and the children they interacted with at school who identified as Mixed. On January 23, 2016, my seven-year-old son asked, “Are we a Mix?” Then he immediately answered his own question as if embarrassed that he was unsure, saying, “No, no, I already know.” He went on to explain that a friend at school identified as Mixed and told him that her grandmother was Black. On February 21, 2016 when preparing for a child’s birthday party, my five-year-old daughter, who has loosely curly hair and very light skin said excitedly, “I want you to meet my friend. She is a Mix. She has hair like me.” Here my children encountered the word in conversation with peers and understood Mixed to be a race label and race to be an identity marker associated with skin tone and hair texture. Then they considered their own physical features in regard to this new race label and the person they heard identify with it. This was likely the first time they had encountered someone who looked like them but verbally claimed a race other than white.

Noting “how different words, gestures, and ideas link . . . other words and ideas together” (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 28), I posit that my children might perceive the race label Mixed as a color word in a manner similar to their initial understandings of the race labels white and Black. Colors can be *mixed* and the race label Mixed might be understood by my children to indicate a single new color made by mixing two colors rather than a dual-raced identity. Indeed, Critical Mixed Race scholars point out “[s]ingularity is the norm in terms of the construction of race” (Daniel, Kina, Dariotis, & Fojas, 2014, p. 14) and multiracial people might view themselves as both/either “parts of various or multiple monoracial communities . . . [or] constituents of a multiracial collective subjectivity” (Daniel et al., 2014, p. 14). My family engaged in discourses that reduce multiracial identity to color mixing when we read

Black is Brown is Tan by Arnold Adoff on August 25, 2016. After both children demonstrated disbelief that a family might consist of a white father, a Black mother, and brown-skinned children, my son looked at the illustrations and proclaimed, “They’re the husband and wife mixed together.” “The color?” I asked because I had also observed this aspect of the beautiful paintings in the book. “Uhuh, they’re tan,” he said. It was not until several months later on March 25, 2017 that we read *Mixed Me* by Taye Diggs in which the main character explained he was Mixed because his mother is the race called white and his father is the race called Black. In this book the character proclaims, “Why choose one race?” As cultural artifacts, “[t]he picture books, and their connected ideologies, mediated the conversations” (Beneke & Cheatham, 2019, p. 120). For example, Adoff’s book uses color words disconnected from race and Digg’s book engages race directly.

Beyond the use of Mixed to describe skin tone or hair texture, my son used talk to explore Mixed as a racial identity that bridged the Black and white binary. On October 11, 2018 when my son was ten years old, he expressed a desire to claim a mixed ethnicity while we explored the results of my and my husbands’ DNA tests. My husband and I decided to purchase genetic ancestry tests because neither of us knew our ethnic heritage; each of our families had bought into the ideology of white as simply American, and had not passed down information about ancestral migration to the Americas or cultural traditions from our European ancestry other than mainstream North American customs. Ultimately, my husband and I found our test results to be unfulfilling. On some level we understood “these tests conflate something scientific, that is DNA, with something social, which is race and identity” (Demby & Meraji, 2018). However, when our children learned we had ordered the tests, they asked to see the results. Upon seeing a small green patch on the map of Northern Africa next

to the large and deep red patch over Europe my son responded enthusiastically, “So we’re African.” The cause for his desire for African roots became clearer during a conversation we had on December 19, 2018 about a neighborhood friend who we had perceived as white. We also had numerous interactions with and perceived this child’s mother, grandmother, and grandfather as white.

My Son: Do you think Crystal is Mixed?
Myself: I don’t know.
My Son: She’s not Mixed, but she is telling everyone she is. Do you think she’s Mixed?
Myself: It can be hard to tell if someone is Mixed. I don’t get to say that about her identity. Why do you think she’s saying that?
My Son: Well, most of the kids at our school are Black.
Myself: You think she wants to be close with them?
My Son: I guess so.

My interpretation of this interaction is that my son understood the race label *Mixed* to be a desirable identity marker that can be claimed by people with light skin and utilized to bridge the Black and white race binary. This interpretation is informed by a critical incident from my experience as an early childhood educator (Thomas, 2016). During my student teaching semester in a predominantly African American second grade classroom, a dark skinned African American girl who was especially fond of me claimed that I was her mother. Another child asserted that I could not be her mother because I was white. The girl responded by asking me if I was Mixed. I told her that I was not, and the interaction ended. Upon reflection, I perceive her use of the race label Mixed as an attempt to bridge the racial divide that was imposed upon us through micro interactions and the macro structure of the school and larger culture. I did not perceive her question to be so much about my race as it was about my character and status. She seemed to me to be asking, *Are you someone I can relate to racially, someone I can trust?* and *Is there a way around these social barriers so we can*

become close? I'm reminded of the scene in Angie Thomas' (2017) commercially popular and award-winning book, *The Hate U Give* when, after a shared experience that included a harrowing night of protest, two Black characters who had previously rejected the main character's white boyfriend signaled acceptance by saying, "Man, you ain't white. You light-skinned" (p. 398). Here, the characters are not claiming that they had mistaken his race; they were labeling him as a different kind of white person.

I used my life experiences and developing understanding of racialization in America to interpret my interactions with my son, and on February 27, 2019 I checked my interpretation with my son in the following exchange:

Myself: Do you wish we were Mixed?
My Son: I don't know. I don't really care.
Myself: Sometimes I wish that. (I said this with honesty and to help him feel at ease in the conversation.)
My Son: Maybe if I was Mixed, I'd get along better with lots of people. Some Mixed or African American people at my school don't really like me because of my color.... Why are we talking about this? I feel scared.
Myself: It happens to me too sometimes. Like when I went to the conference last weekend, some people were like, *Why are you talking about this stuff when you're white?*
My Son: Was it a white person who said that?
Myself: No, it was a Latino man.
(...)
How do you know that they don't want to be around you?
My Son: They just don't want to be by me. They would rather be by a Black kid.
Myself: So what I did at the conference, was really tried to keep talking to people who seemed like they didn't want to be around me, instead of walking away. And listening to them when they talked. I think a lot of People of Color are used to white people being a certain way, like a Trump way.
My Son: Except Brayden.
Myself: And they have to get to know you before they can trust you.
Myself: [My Daughter], do you wish you were mixed?
My Daughter: I don't really know, it doesn't really matter that much.

Myself: Does that happen to you at school-what happened to me and [your brother]?

My Daughter: No. I think it's because I have known Jabari for five years and Tushar for four years and Jerome for two years.

Historically and today, “multiracial individuals have frequently sought to achieve social advantages closer to those of whites in the racial hierarchy” (Daniel et al., 2014) due to “pervasive bias that favors individuals of color across racial groups, who more closely approximate European Americans in physical appearance” (p. 24) conversely, white people across history and today have demonstrated a “fetishistic desire for temporary blackness or the benefits of blackness” (Demby & Meraji, 2019) through performances such as Blackface and the modern day Blackfishing, attempting to appear Black or biracial to gain notoriety through social media. The use of phenotypical features and racialized social behaviors as *racial capital* (Daniel et al., 2014) has been taken up by children seeking cross-racial friendship in multiracial schools (Kromidas, 2014; Pollock, 2004). Kromidas (2014) observed elementary-aged students in a multiracial school “were absolutely aware of, confronted, and struggled with and against the various [physical] ‘facts’ of race...because these facts stood as obstacles to their social relations” (p. 431) and “kids racialized as white that had to ... prov[e] that their whiteness ended at the skin”(p. 433). Rosen (2017) points out that while those who are phenotypically white can shed the racialized language and social behaviors when “‘cool’ becomes synonymous with criminality and violence” (p. 180), brown-skinned bodies are often essentialized in harmful ways. Thus, claims to be a person of Color cannot ethically be made by white people, instead social acceptance can only be given by People of Color. When white people claim a different race, it is deceptive (Bey & Sakellarides, 2016). I believe this is why my son demonstrated anger when talking about

Crystal's assertion that she is Mixed. He and I talked about the incident again on March 26, 2019. During this conversation, he explained Crystal "goes in the sun to get tanner" and uses an "African American style of talking." Here my son and Crystal demonstrated understanding of the "complex relations among language, race, and phenotype" (Alim, 2016b, p. 34). While Crystal's race-bending (Pollock, 2004) reveals a sophisticated, even if intuitive, understanding of race, it does "not explicitly critique or undo race in any way" (Alim, 2016b, p. 33), a requirement for ethical transracialization, or racial fluidity (Alim, 2016b). In contrast, the long path of relationship-building described by my daughter and I--"instead of walking away, listening" and being friends for a number of years--is a characteristic of an antiracist white person who does not deny their white racial identity and yet has "the skills and confidence to engage in healthy and reciprocal cross-racial relationships" (Michael, 2015, p. 5).

Over-generalization and racialization: learning that ethnicity is tied to race and histories of power. While the interaction around ethnicity described above indicate a desire for a mixed race identity in order to bridge social divides at the micro level, it also indicates an understanding that ethnicity is tied to race and historical-political power dynamics. Through our talk about our own ethnicity as determined by DNA testing, my children constructed and expressed an understanding that our own European ancestry is associated with a racialized history of being the bad guy. This conclusion was based on earlier conversations around white people from European countries colonizing the Americas and enslaving People of Color. For example, on October 8, 2018 seeking to disrupt the Columbus myth that perpetuates a *Doctrine of Discovery*, the ideology that the Americas were empty or savage lands waiting to be discovered by European explorers, and "a narrative about Puritan

settlers who had a covenant with God to take the land” (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 3) I read *Encounter* by Jane Yolen to the children. *Encounter* is a counternarrative/children’s book that tells the story of Columbus’ arrival at the West Indies from the Taino Indigenous perspective. We read that Columbus was from Spain, was interested in these new-to-the-Spanish islands because of the gold located there, and that the Spanish captured the Taino people as slaves. I connected this home curriculum to the school curriculum in the following exchange:

Myself: Okay, so this guy is saying um (read aloud from the book) *We lost our land to the strangers from the sky*. Like if we look around now in the United States, we don’t see very many Native American people.

My Daughter: Yeah.

Myself: A lot of them live in the West, not here where we live. Like, [My Son], you found out in your prehistoric Missourian unit that they all got kicked out of Missouri, right?

My Son: Mm-hmm.

Myself: And so um, so their land really was taken away.

This example demonstrates again how context mediates curriculum. Missouri currently has very few Indigenous residents. The Osage people of current day Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma were relocated by the United States government in the early 1800’s to a small reservation in northern Oklahoma (Saint Louis Art Museum, 2011). In addition to the immeasurable losses for the Osage people and all of humanity, the removal of Indigenous people from Missouri has resulted in a loss of culture and diversity as well as a lack of contact with Indigenous people that deepens the racial binary of the Missouri context. My own socialization to ascribe to the Doctrine of Discovery, bolstered by the erasure of Indigenous voice, is evident in my near use of the phrase *New World* (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014) in the exchange above.

Evident in talk about the book *The Encounter* as well as talk about the DNA test, my son was looking for absolution from the wrongs of our ancestors. Rather than protecting my son from discomfort, I attempted to help him understand we are “part of a racially socialized group [and] the ways in which wealth has been distributed and accumulated over generations to benefit whites today” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 59). Also evident in our talk of ethnicity as it relates to DNA testing is the over-generalization and racialization of the words European and African. Despite the cultural and racial diversity of both continents, our talk indicates an understanding of European as a race label for white and African as a race label for Black. These labels “falsely imply that clear dividing lines exist between geographically defined ‘races’” (Mukhopadhyay, 2008, p. 14) and omits Indigenous African voices (King & Swartz, 2016). For example, “many African cultures such as Arab, Berber, and Coptic were unrelated to the sub-Saharan cultures to which Blacks trace their heritage” (Smith, 1992, p. 508).

A conversation on October 16, 2018 when my ten-year-old son described his dark-skinned friend who identifies as Black further illustrates the ways in which African American identity was essentialized.

My Son: He’s like 100% from Africa.
Myself: Why are you thinking he’s 100% from Africa?
My Son: He looks a lot like an African kid.
Myself: Yeah, well, it’s hard to tell where somebody’s from just by looking at them.

This conversation took place five days after my children and I looked at my ancestral DNA results and includes the discourses of such reports which conflate and quantify DNA, ethnicity, and identity. Notice in this exchange that I countered the conception of race as equivalent to ethnicity, but I did not provide any curriculum around the diversity of the people of Africa, a large and diverse continent that is the origin of all human life, but is often

misconceptualized by white people as underdeveloped and monocultural (Boutte, 2017; King & Swartz, 2016). Kim TallBear asserts ancestral heritage tests essentialize identities. She points out,

Scientists who trace human migrations do not tell a story from the standpoint of those people who were encountered. They tell a story from the standpoint of those who did the encountering, those who named and ordered many thousands of peoples into undifferentiated masses of Native Americans, Africans, Asians. (Demby & Meraji, 2018, n.p.)

Essentializing discourses such as, “He’s like 100% African,” as well as discourses of pity like my daughter’s statement, “brown people who didn’t have water” inspired by a HyVee Water advertisement, lead me to enact a home curriculum about Africa including viewing and discussing Henry Louis Gates’ (2017) series Africa’s Great Civilizations. However, this curriculum has been woefully underdeveloped as it does not consistently center Indigenous or Afro-Indigenous voices (King & Swartz, 2016) and continues to employ discourses of pity which essentialize the African continent and people on that continent as poor, needy, hungry, war-torn, and drought-ridden (Miller, 2015) (see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Formal Home Curriculum: Africa

Initial Impetus of Curriculum	Curriculum Materials and Delivery	Children’s Responses
My developing understanding of antiracist curriculum	7.20 & 7.22.2016 <i>Nappy Hair</i> by Carolivia Herron While discussing the book, my children implied Abraham Lincoln single-handedly stopped slavery. I told them that many people worked together to end slavery including the enslaved people themselves and gave a brief history of the United States in which I said, “ <i>White people got on ships and started coming to America from Europe... and they fought with the Native American people</i> ” and “ <i>in order for there to be</i>	My children worried that the narrator was making fun of the child’s hair rather than celebrating it. They responded to information about American colonization and slavery with surprise and a desire to “stop talking about this.”

enough workers to build those cities and towns...they went to Africa and had a war and brought African people here to be slaves.”

8.27.2018 My daughter told me about a television commercial about “brown people who didn’t have water.”

8.28.2018 We watched the ad together in which proceeds from bottled water sales go to building wells in Africa.

My children exhibited pity and worry for the African families depicted. They pointed out the commercial drive behind the ad, i.e. “I think do they [the grocery store] just want it for the money?” My son noted that one African boy in the video looked like his friend, Brayden.

8.28.2018 We read *The Water Princess* by Susan Verde

We noticed that at the back of *The Water Princess* there was a feature about Ryan’s Well, an organization that raises money to dig wells in Africa.

8.28.2018 We viewed an online video about Ryan’s Well. We learned that the organization was started by a six-year-old white Canadian boy. The video explained that some African children who drank unclean water were ill due to parasites. The video also depicts a friendship between Ryan and an African boy named Jimmy.
When my children become curious about their ethnicity. I explain my parents didn’t know their ethnicity because, “part of being American and part of being white is that you don’t talk about your ancestors any more, you just talk about being American.”

My son compared Ryan and Jimmy’s relationship to his own relationship with his friend Brayden. We established that Brayden was African American and we are European American.

The children's interest in the Ryan's Well organization.	<p>September 2018 We read <i>Ryan and Jimmy: And the Well in Africa That Brought Them Together</i> by Herb Shoveller over several weeks. We learned that Jimmy was from Uganda and looked at Africa on the globe. We learned that Uganda was experiencing Civil War during this time and Jimmy was granted refugee status to come live with Ryan in Canada.</p>	My children began using the names of African countries, while before they had only said Africa. They associated Africa with war and poverty and America and Canada with charity. When I asked my son what he learned from the book, he said, "If people don't have clean water, it's not very good, so you need to help 'em"
My worry that the Ryan's Well curriculum was depicting white charity work in a one-sided and positive manner and my desire to deepen my children's conception of Africa.	<p>10.13.2018 We watched <i>Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s Africa's Great Civilizations, Episode 1: Origins</i>. The video explained all humans have a common African ancestor, that language originated, paint was invented, and ironwork began in Africa. A professor refuted the claim that pyramids were built by slaves. An historian spoke about the Egyptian search for gold.</p>	My children were interested in this video. They remembered a fictional movie in which slaves built pyramids. They made connections between the Egyptian quest for gold and Columbus' quest for gold they read in <i>Encounter</i> by Jane Yolen

While my children found that race labels are fuzzy, rule-laden, and tied to complex, racist tellings of history and constructions of ethnicity--fuzziness that I may have reinforced through a faulty curriculum on Africa--they learned words directly associated with racism are considered dangerous. In the following section, I describe how the use of two dangerous race words led to deeper understanding of race and racism.

Using Dangerous Race Words

Dangerous Race Word 1: Racist

We're all free to speak what's on our mind right?

Well I don't feel right when I look outside.⁸⁴

Looking at a copy of The Three Little Pigs
The pigs pink and round
The wolf black and springy
my son says,
*That's racist.*⁸⁵

That's racist...I know what racist is,
insists my son.
It means when you think someone is Black,
*and you say that they should do jobs.*⁸⁶

“[N]othing can be said about race that does not carry
the historical and political baggage of conversations
that have come before.”⁸⁷

I'm seeing ghosts, every move I make...

We visited the Denver Museum of Contemporary Art's
Indigenous People's wing

a pile of quilts two stories high
beadwork on leather
life-size effigies
a video projected on a white wall
a giant stick of butter with the Land o Lakes princess
painted on the side,
smiling and motionless
next to an equally large box of American Spirit cigarettes
with it's black Indian in headdress
passively smoking a peace pipe
A canvas filled with images
Chief Wahoo, red and grinning
Little plastic men, arrows drawn
Disney's Pocahontas

⁸⁴ All bolded words are lyrics from Joey Stylez' *First Amendment*.

⁸⁵ From a 6.21.2016 poetic transcription

⁸⁶ From a 3.11.2017 poetic transcription

⁸⁷ (Park, 2011, p. 394).

and Tiger Lily

I read artist's statements
sometimes to myself
sometimes to my children
who hold my hand
and look into my face
questioning
 smallpox blankets
 cultural appropriation
 myth of extinction
 cultural myths
 objectification
 generalization
 identity as a marketable commodity
 David P. Bradley's
 Land O Bucks,
 Land O Fakes,
 Land O Lakes

They stare at the broad white canvas stamped with familiar faces.
I try to explain why Disney's Pocahontas is sitting majestically
among her cartoon counterparts.

It's about people who aren't Native telling about Native people.

It's about stereotypes, thinking a whole group of people is a certain way.

It's about some of these images making Native people look dumb.

I keep trying to explain.
They nod
politely
and we head to the gift shop.⁸⁸

I'm seeing ghosts...

Someone on the radio mentioned race.

*That's racist,
said my son.*

Just talking about race

⁸⁸ From May 2017 poetic memo and field notes.

does not make someone racist,
I say.
Racist is thinking that a whole group of people
is a certain way because of their race.

Sometimes it is important to talk about race.

Okay,
he says.⁸⁹

We're all free to speak...

“For the child experimenting with new vocabularies,
the utterance is a form of social action,
an attempt to join a conversation...
both a question
and a response
directed toward the adult world.”⁹⁰

My daughter says,

At recess a white boy told a Brown girl
that she was racist
and they had an argument.

She said she was not racist.
The boy said,
Yes you are because you're Brown.

But that's not what racist is.

*Racist is a white person saying some mean things to someone who is Brown.*⁹¹

My son proclaims,
The pirate picture on the Pirate's Booty
is kind of racist.

I say,

⁸⁹ From a 2.17.2018 poetic field note.

⁹⁰ (Park, 2011, p. 394-5)

⁹¹ From a March 2017 poetic field note.

*But pirates aren't a race, so it's not racist.*⁹²

My daughter watches the
Walk Like an Egyptian video on YouTube.

My son says it is racist.

A few days later my daughter asks,
Do Egyptians really walk like us?

Yes,
I answered and knew my son was right.⁹³

I'm seeing ghosts every move I make...

Is racism judging someone by their race?
my son asks.
*At church, we were reading a book
and some 7th and 8th graders were with us
and the teacher read,
She was as dark as a chocolate bar,
and one of the 8th graders said,
That's racist.
And the teacher said,
No, judging someone by their race is racist.*⁹⁴

“Democracy...is not merely a form of governance in which people use free speech to express opinions...It is, rather, a way of life that involves shared objectives, open communication, and generous self-criticism.”⁹⁵

*Mom, I want to tell you about this thing at school that
I think is racist,
my son said.
This one kid did his eyes up and said,
My mom is from Asia.*

⁹² From a 3.11.2018 poetic field note.

⁹³ From 4.26 and 4.30.2018 poetic field notes.

⁹⁴ From a 6.03.2018 poetic field note.

⁹⁵ (Noddings & Brooks, 2017, pp. 20-21)

*Then he did his eyes down and said,
My dad is from Japan.
Then he did one eye up and one eye down and said,
And I'm Mixed.*

I'm seeing ghosts...

*You're right, that's not okay.
I've heard of something like that before
when I was a kid.*

Did you do that?

*Yeah, I did it.
And I didn't even know that it was wrong.*

*Jordynn told it to me
but not like in a mean way.
Like she wanted me to know about it
Because friends tell each other things.
And I told her it wasn't okay.*

I'm seeing ghosts...

Dangerous Race Word 2: The N Word

Bad words, utter them, and they count as a social act
(as profanity,
blasphemy,
social injury)⁹⁶
even if there is blood underneath a word⁹⁷

We hear the N word in a song and quickly change the station.
One of the kids asks what it means.

I try to explain,
*I don't know how it started,
but it was used a lot during slavery
to mean a slave, a Black slave.*

⁹⁶ (Fleming & Lempert, 2011, p. 6)

⁹⁷ (Abdurraqib, 2017, p. 38)

*And it was a way of calling people,
you're not worth anything.*

*Like an animal?
asks my daughter
who had consistently
been perplexed by this idea.*

*So it would be something that white people
would call Black people to mean really bad,
I say.
But this is the interesting thing that Black people have done.*

**We marvel about how creative
Black kids are.
Said they must be.
This world ain't never been safe
so they built new ones
out of scrap paper, bones, and possibilities.⁹⁸**

*Black people wanted to take the power away
from those white people who were saying you're worthless,
they wanted to take the power away from that terrible, terrible word.
And so they turned it into an okay word for them.
And so some, some Black people,
not everybody,
some Black people will say the N word to each other
as like a friendly thing.*

*And what does that mean?
asks my son.*

*So turning it into a word
to mean your friend.*

**You cannot kill blackness.
Too much of it is wrapped in unshakable joy,
and ain't that why they think we magic in the first
place.**

⁹⁸ Bolded words are from Javon Johnson's poem *Black and Happy*.

a word that,
out of the wrong mouth,
can still be a weapon⁹⁹

*If you hear a white person saying it,
you need to say it's not okay, says my husband.*

*You gotta be brave to do that,
I add.¹⁰⁰*

Caruthers (2007) asserts, “Teaching and learning is often influenced by the negative and distorted images and meanings that we carry in our minds about race, ethnicity, class, and gender” (p. 311). She terms these images and meanings *dangerous memories* (2005, 2007) and explains that they operate on the individual and macro levels. Specifically, *dangerous memories of race* are memories of experiences steeped in racism that are never fully deconstructed through discussion due to the painful and taboo nature of talking about race. It is this very color evasiveness that perpetuates racism, allowing it to soak ever more deeply into the cultural fabric, no longer a stain, but the color of the garment itself.

I draw on Caruthers’ (2007) work in my analysis of two words that were significant in my family’s talk about race: *racist* and the word we came to call the *N Word*. These words have significant political and cultural histories. They are products of dangerous memories at the individual and societal levels and thus have the power to evoke dangerous memories and produce new ones. The de-humanizing power of the N Word is clear, and the fear of being called a racist is the pinnacle of white fragility. In this section, I examine the role of these

⁹⁹ (Abdurraqib, 2017, pp. 37-8)

¹⁰⁰ From a 5.21.2018 Poetic Transcription.

two dangerous words in the home curriculum- the way my family members negotiated their meaning and use and what understandings about race and racism my children constructed from those discussions.

My children encountered the words *racist* and the *N Word* through interactions with peers and through popular media. While the use of these two words were heavily policed by adults and appeared to be off-limits at school, it was evident my children and their peers negotiated their use through ongoing interactions. My son in particular exhibited fear of punishment at school around the use, or even discussion of, these words. Even when he brought up conversations he had had with peers, he would often not tell me the names of the people involved.

It seems that my children learned the word *racist* as part of the phrase *That's racist*, which has become popular in our “post-racial” society in which “every group is now deemed to be an equal opportunity racist and the concept withers away in the color-blind era of U.S. race relations. Or worse, racism becomes an individual problem located in personal psyche” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 127). The phrase *that's racist* is currently common among children and adolescents across the country (Hutchinson, 2018; Priest et al., 2016). The phrase is typically spoken for two distinct purposes: 1) as a joke, a sort of social commentary on political correctness (Hutchinson, 2018) and 2) as sincere misuse due to misunderstanding (Hutchinson, 2018; Priest et al., 2016). Overhearing someone use the phrase as a joke or a misunderstanding contributes to confusion around the word *racist*.

My perception is that my children used the phrase *That's racist*, not in attempts at humor but in sincere attempts to understand racism and how it operates in texts. Over time, they moved from claiming, “That's racist,” to asking “Is that racist?” After our experience at

the Denver Museum of Art, they were especially curious about how representations of People of Color in media were or were not racist. Discussions about the word racist occurred over a span of two years when my son was eight to eleven-years-old and my daughter was six-to-eight years old.

Discussions about the *N Word* emerged later when my children were eight and ten years old and continued over 6 months. Data suggests my children learned the N word through music and interactions with peers at school. They were especially interested in the meaning of the word and who was allowed to say it. While my son was typically the driver of these conversations, my daughter also showed interest and got involved in the conversations when she was privy to them. During family discussions, we considered how both of these words are charged with socio-political meaning and highly socially-regulated. That is, by using and discussing these dangerous race words, my children learned that race is a socially-sensitive topic associated with oppression. Specifically through the exploration of dangerous race words, they constructed and expressed understanding that racism is difficult to define and encoded in everyday texts and dangerous race words are powerful and thus surrounded by rules and responsibilities.

Is that racist?: Racism is Difficult to Define and Encoded in Everyday Texts

When my children said, *That's racist*, or *Is that racist?* my husband and I responded by attempting to define racism. Our definitions were often stumbling and vague likely due to our own socialization to “deny the meaning of race...while viewing race in highly stylized and stereotypical ways” (Bartoli, 2016, p. 133). Like most white people, neither of our families did much talking about race. My husband and I were determined to break the cycle of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017) by “chang[ing] the norms and practices that allow

racism to exist” (p. 243) in the white home. Thus, we carried on clumsily. On June 21, 2016 my husband explained, “Well to be racist means you’re mean to someone who is different from you. You are mean to someone because they are different. Not even mean, you treat them different.” I attempted to help, “You think about them differently.” Notice here we defined race vaguely as difference and seemed unsure if racism required malicious action, any altered action, or could be constituted through thought alone. On March 11, 2017 in a conversation about the word racist, instead of defining racism as requested, I launched into an explanation of race as a social construction rather than biological fact. In this instance, I was meeting my own need to share information I had identified as missing in the curriculum rather than follow the emerging curriculum. My children responded by losing interest. All of this fumbling by adults also communicated that racism is something we did not have a clear grasp on. We were not used to talking about it, and we could not define it clearly (Bartoli, 2016). How curious it must have been to the children that the word racist was so prominent in the society that it was a phrase common in popular culture, but no one seemed able to define it.

A turning point in my children’s understanding of the concept of racism was our visit to the Indigenous People’s wing of the Denver Museum of Contemporary Art. There, my children encountered art that addressed generalization, stereotyping, and appropriation of Indigenous cultures for marketing purposes. I read them artist’s statements that included the word racist and attempted to explain how characters like Chief Wahoo reflected racist ideologies. This experience seemed to have an impact on them in that the curriculum of the Indigenous People’s art gallery introduced my children to the concept that racism is encoded in everyday and often beloved texts, notably Disney’s depiction of Pocahontas. Further, this

piece of the curriculum countered the Black/white racial binary through the centering of Indigenous people. It is important to note that we encountered this curriculum outside of the Missouri context. During the following months they responded to this curriculum by asking if nearly every text they encountered that depicted a non-white character was racist: the pirate on the Pirate's Booty bag, the music video for *Walk Like an Egyptian*, and the song *This is America*. It seemed that their world was destabilized; it was as if my children were trying on new glasses with critical racial literacy lenses and they couldn't quite see clearly. Everything was racist. Often our answers to their questions about racism were ambiguous and floundering. I began to worry that the home curriculum was failing and my children would never be able to identify racism in texts. But little by little, as I "transition[ed] from the liberal stand (i.e., being a good, tolerant person) to becoming an antiracist" (Bonilla-Silva, 2017, p. 243) through coursework, reading, and participation in antiracist groups, the curriculum became more refined. For example, on March 11, 2018 I explained the depiction of pirates on the snack bag was not racist because "pirates aren't a race." On June 3, 2018, a teacher at church explained to two older children who had claimed a children's book was racist, "Judging someone by their race is racist" further clarifying my son's definition of racism. During this time of discussions in multiple contexts around what is and is not considered racist, my son began accurately identifying texts as racist. During the week of April 26, 2018, my ten-year-old son identified a racist text that I had been actively denying. My daughter watched the *Walk Like an Egyptian* music video by the Bangles, a song I have loved since my childhood, on the computer. The following two interactions ensued:

April 26, 2018

My Son: That's racist.

Myself: Yeah, I've been thinking about that. I think it's insensitive. Remember we said we had to be careful what we call racist.

My Son: Why insensitive?

Myself: Because they're taking Egyptian art and making a silly dance out of it.

My Son: Well, it is racist.

Myself: Remember racist is saying a whole group of people is a certain way?

My Son: That is.

Myself: Hmm, like all Egyptians are a certain way. Okay, I see what you're saying.

April 30, 2018- I washed my daughters' hair in the bathroom.

My Daughter: Do Egyptians really walk like us?

Myself: Yeah.

My Daughter: Then I'm just going to do it like this. (*She mimed walking normally as an alternative to the "Walk Like an Egyptian" dance.*) I'm not going to be racist. I mean apperrer. (*Apperrer is the word she made up to avoid using the word racist after Daddy cautioned her against it, as will be explained later.*)

This example illustrates that beloved texts can communicate racist ideologies in ways that are unseen but never the less harmful. From a critical literacy perspective, the world is seen as a socially constructed text that can be read" (Vasquez, 2014, p. 3). My son had learned the rules of determining racist texts through interactions like those at his religious education class at church and at the Denver Museum of Contemporary Art. From these two experiences he learned to consider the following questions when seeking to judge a text: *is the text depicting a judgment based on race, is it positioning an entire group of people as the same in a disrespectful or dated way?* When he applied his new critical lens to *Walk Like an Egyptian*, he determined that the text was in fact racist. When my daughter asked, "Do Egyptians really walk like us?" she was demonstrating the harmful thinking that can result from careless depictions of whole groups of racialized people.

The children developed these literacies in the context of a critical literacy home curriculum. The curriculum *frontloaded* vocabulary “to articulate their racial realities in ways that did not adhere to dominant colorblind discourses” (Matias, 2016, p. 25). Some vocabulary, such as the word racist, was introduced by the children and my role was to help define it. I introduced other vocabulary, like the phrase *binary opposite*, as tools to understand abstract concept of race. These vocabularies helped us engage “issues and topics of interest that capture [children’s] interests ... and should be used as text to build a curriculum that has significance in their lives” (Vasquez, 2014, p. 3). It is the vocabulary within a culture of emergent curriculum and open dialogue that made complex racial understandings of a popular culture text possible.

My son also applied critical literacy skills to interactions at school. Despite my worry that he was labeling everything as racist and could not identify truly racist depictions and behaviors, the following example demonstrates that our talk around the dangerous word *racist* lead to him identifying truly racist discourse. This conversation took place when I tucked my son into bed on November 8, 2018 when he was ten years old.

- My Son: Mom, I want to tell you about this thing at school that I think is racist. This one kid did his eyes up and said, *My mom is from Asia*. Then he did his eyes down and said, *My dad is from Japan*. Then he did one eye up and one eye down and said, *And I’m mixed*.
- Myself: You’re right, that’s not okay. I’ve heard of something like that before when I was a kid.
- My Son: Did you do that?
- Myself: Yeah, I did it. And I didn’t even know that it was wrong. Are you thinking about responding?
- My Son: No, not really. It happened like a month ago. And it’s this kid who always goes to the Recovery Room.
- Myself: Well like I said some people don’t do it to be mean. They don’t even know it’s wrong. Do you have any friends who are Asian?

My Son: *No, we have people from Mexico. And Eamon is Irish.*
Myself: I was just thinking if you had a friend who was Asian, you could say, *Hey, don't say that, I have friends who are Asian.* But maybe you could just say, *It's not cool to make fun of someone's eyes.* And you know, there are kids at your school who are Mixed, like they have one white parent and one Black parent like Maya. Just imagine if people said something like that about Maya.
My Son: Jordynn told it to me, but not like in a mean way. Like she wanted me to know about it, because friends tell each other things. And I told her it wasn't okay.

When my son encountered derogatory discourse at school that was framed as funny, he accurately interpreted it as racist and reported it to me. He also reported to me that he told the friend the talk was *not okay*. Notice in our conversation that he at first tried to distance himself from the discourse by claiming that "it happened like a month ago" and was spoken by a "kid who always goes to the Recovery [discipline referral] Room." It was not until I reassured him that kids might repeat something like this without knowing that it was wrong, that he told me a close friend had told him the chant "but not like in a mean way, like she wanted me to know about it." He further distanced himself by adding "I told her it wasn't okay." The ways that my son distanced himself from discourse he interpreted as racist indicates his fear around race talk.

I'm not going to be racist: Defining our Own Discourse Around Dangerous Race Words

Race talk is dangerous in a color evasive society that refuses to confront its racist history. Some race words are more dangerous, or powerful than others often due to their proximity to our country's history of enslavement of African people. Through their use of and discussions around dangerous race words, my children learned there are context-specific rules regulating talk about race in different settings and by different groups of people. They

learned that their identity as antiracist white people comes with certain responsibilities around dangerous race words.

While a foundational aspect of the antiracist curriculum is openness to talking about race and racism, we found that sometimes this talk was uncomfortable. When it came to dangerous race words, my husband and I found ourselves teaching our children socially-regulated rules of discourse. Several times, we warned our children about the dangers of over-using the word racist. It was as if we wanted them to identify racism but not call it as such. Note the April 26, 2018 conversation above when I encourage my son to use the word *insensitive* rather than *racist*. Here I was carrying out my feminized role as a white teacher in perpetuating color evasiveness through “a kinder, gentler whiteness” (Leonardo & Boas, 2013, p. 319).

Indeed, the danger of certain race words was made so clear to my daughter, who is also being socialized into a feminized whiteness, that she came up with a novel solution for the problem of needing to talk about racism but being afraid of social sanctions for saying the word racist. Around April 2018, she made up a new word to use in place of racist. She told us that we should say “apperrer” instead of racist when talking about racism. She reminded us to use her new word in discussions saying things like, “let’s say apperrer” and on April 30, 2018, “I’m not going to be racist, I mean apperrer.” My daughter demonstrated an understanding of language as “flexible, innovative and adaptable to the demands of changing circumstances” (Mercer, 2000, p. 4). She exhibited agency through “the strategic making and remaking of ... cultural tools and resources, and histories, as embedded within relations of power” (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 18). In other words, she took control of the language she used and the actions she made in deeper recognition of the racial nature of society and her

growing identity as an antiracist white person who has the capacity to name racism (Michael & Bartoli, 2016) and the social skills to do so in a manner that will be effective with other white people (Michael, 2015).

Is Eminem part Black?: The N Word is Associated with Oppression and Agency

Perhaps the most dangerous race word of all (Low, 2007; Rahman, 2012) is the word that I am choosing not to write directly in this document. The N word “has multiple, situated, and changing meanings to users and interpreters” (Low, 2007, p. 150). The earliest variant, which ends with the phoneme /r/, was “at one time relatively neutral as a referential term employed by whites” (Rahman, 2012, p. 2) and is considered a racist slur in contemporary society. The second variant, which “pervades hip-hop culture” (Low, 2007, p. 148) ends with the schwa sound and “is a self-selected term for naming members of the group” (Rahman, 2012, p. 3). As my children asked me questions about the N Word, I realized that discourse norms around this word are perhaps the most complicated of any word in the English language. In my white family and many others, the N Word has *bad word* status similar to the D word (damn) and the B word (bitch). Our earliest documented conversation about the N Word, sparked by hearing it in a song, was on May 21, 2018.

Myself: So um, I don't know how it started, but it was used a lot during slavery, to mean a slave, a Black slave. And um, it was a way of calling people, um, like you're not worth anything. So calling someone the N Word meant that they were like not even human, you know that they were just property that I could and-

My Daughter: Like an animal?

Myself: Yeah.
(...)

Myself: So it would be something that white people would call Black people to mean like really bad. Like you are not worth-

My Son: What if the Black person said the N word back to them?

Myself: So this is the interesting thing that Black people have done. So, Black people wanted to take the power away from those white people who were saying like you're worthless, right? So they wanted to take that, that, that terrible, terrible word, they wanted to take the power away from that word. And so they turned it into an okay word for them. And so some, some Black people, not everybody, some Black people will say the N word to each other um, as like a friendly thing. And so that's their way of like taking the power away from that mean-

My Son: And what does that mean?

Myself: Hold on, let me finish real quick, let me finish real quick. It's their way of taking the power away from that other word and making it okay. Does that make sense?

My Son: Yeah!

Myself: So like turning it into a, turning it into a word that is cool for Black people to say and to mean like your friend. But not all Black people think it's okay. And it's never okay for a white person to say it. Okay?

My Son: It's only okay for a Black person to say it, right?

Myself: Only okay for a Black person to say it, because that's a way of them getting power back. Because so much power was taken away from them when they were slaves, right? And still, and still we know that that they aren't always treated fairly, right?

My Son: Mmhmm.

As we talked more about the N word, the complicated nature of the rules became clearer. For example, some Black families allowed for its use and some did not. Some Black people use the word to “elicit[] feelings of familiarity and shared cultural experiences” (Rahman, 2012, p. 4) while for others “the racist meaning obliterates and disallows the legitimacy of any positive meanings” (Rahman, 2012, p. 6). My husband and I made our stance clear to our children: Black families can make choices about using the N Word, but white families cannot. My children interpreted these social rules for usage as serious and believed that breaking the rules would lead to grave consequences at home and school. They did not joke about the N Word as they might other taboo topics like body functions or even

other *bad words* like the curse words they deemed the B word and the D word. They seemed to understand that the N Word is commonly known as “the most obscene word of the English language” (Henderson, 2003, p. 63) and “bears the weight of racist history” (Low, 2007, p. 158). As time went on, it became clear that my son’s peers at school were using the N Word. This resulted in more nuanced conversations like the conversations documented in a field note on October 15, 2018 after tucking my son in to bed and in a transcription of audio recorded on October 16, 2018.

October 15, 2018

My Son: Mom, I have a really good question. Is Eminem part Black?
Myself: I don’t think so, at least he doesn’t look like it.
My Son: Well, does he say the N Word?
Myself: I don’t know.
My Son: Well, is it okay for someone who is part Black and part white to say the N Word?
Myself: I guess some people would say yes to that. Why did somebody say the N word?
My Son: Yes. Can we talk about this tomorrow?
Myself: Yes.

October 16, 2018

My Son: I was asking if you can say the N word even though you’re white, like, like, like, like, like 75 of percent of your family, um is from Africa, places like that.
Myself: Well a lot of people who um, a lot of people who have one parent who’s Black and one parent who’s white,
My Son: Yes?
Myself: Um, still consider themselves Black, and that’s okay, they can do that.
My Son: Like, like if they’re really both colors?
Myself: Well, some people like to say “I’m Mixed,” or some people say “I’m Black.”
My Son: Like, like Maya?
Myself: Yeah.
My Son: Um, her parents let her say it.
Myself: Let her say the N Word?

My Son: Mmhmm.

Myself: Well, Carl also told me that Maya identifies as Black. And that's okay, if she-, she, she can call herself Mixed because she has one white parent and one Black parent or she can be Black. So-

My Son: She's one of my bestest friends.

Myself: Mmhmm.

My Son: Like, Maya, Landon, and Brayden

Myself: Yeah. So for her family, I think her family said, her dad said it's okay for her to say it. But I don't think that, um, that it's something that is okay for Brayden to say. I don't think his family is okay with it even though he is Black. You know?

My Son: Why?

Myself: It's different choices for different families.
(...)

My Son: Yeah, so someone said it, and I'm the one who told on them and Mrs. Z said that you have to do it in word form instead of just saying "The N Word." (...) Like so I got really psyched out about that. Not psyched, but like psyched in a bad way.
(...)

Myself: So um, I'm not going to talk to your teacher or anything, I'm just curious about who, who said it at school.

My Son: Well they didn't really get in trouble because um, they said that they said something else.

Myself: Mm.

My Daughter: People always make excuses.

My Son: So he got away with it.

Myself: What color was this kid?

My Son: He was white.

My Self: Hmm. Um, and where was he when he said it?

My Son: Like he didn't, he didn't said to a Black, like-

My Daughter: - a person

My Son: - Brown, Brown person, but um, like he didn't say it in an offensive way. He was talking like friend way.

Myself: Like what?

My Son: Friend way, like trying to be like-

Myself: Oh, like you're my N Word?

My Son: Well like he said n-i-g-g-a and then he said what. Like that.

Myself: Mmhmm. Where was he at when he said that?

My Son: In line.

Myself: And what did the friend think about that?

My Son: He was like, “Wow.” He just moved out of, well he just stayed there, I don’t know. But, but, but, then I popped in and I said, “You can’t say that word.” And then he was like, “Please don’t tell on me.” But-

Myself: Hm.

My Son: I think he should learn not to say it.

These conversations demonstrate the complex nature of social rules governing the use of the N Word and how my children learned about these rules through interactions with peers and conversations at home about dangerous race words. Through these interactions, my son not only learned about how carefully dangerous race words are policed, he also learned that race labels are tied to choices about identity and those choices dictate rules of discourse. In other words, “the acts of taking up, disrupting, and transforming discourses have implications for how one conceptualizes the constructs of identity and agency” (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 18). It is also important to note that my son did not accept the offending child as Black or Mixed apparently due to the child’s and his parents’ appearance. While my son originally asserted that he wouldn’t tell me the child’s name, a few months after the incident, when there was little fear that the child would get in trouble, my son told me his name. My family has met his parents at birthday parties and school functions; they each have tan skin and straight black hair. Like my son, I wonder if this child, like Crystal, is claiming the racial identity Mixed, for social gain. It is interesting how appearance also dictates the discourses we are allowed to engage in (Alim, 2016b; Kromidas, 2014). In other words, this child might truly be biracial, but due to his light skin and straight hair, my son and I perceive him to be white and therefore deemed it inappropriate for him to use the N Word.

I finished the October 16, 2018 conversation with my son feeling like the curriculum was incomplete, that my son still had questions about how to navigate the racialized nature of

his social world. I came across the following poem, *N Bomb*, in Latham and Waters (2018)

Can I Touch Your Hair?: Poems of Race, Mistakes, and Friendship.

Mom holding my folded laundry passes
as I'm *nodding, swaying, flowing* into rhythms
that make me start sliding my feet from side to side.
The rapper then punches out a word that makes
her do a double take. "Did he just drop the N Bomb?"
she asks. "Yes," I say, but it had an *A* at the end of it,
not an *E-R*, so it's okay." "No, it's not," she says, "No matter
how you spell it, it's still a spit in the face of our ancestors,
who for far to long fought against the infection of that word."
"Sorry," I say, pressing the Stop button, not knowing what kind
of music I can listen to anymore that will make me happy.

On October 22, 2018 my son and I read the poem together. In the poem, the Black child's mother does not allow him to listen to music that features the N Word, which she calls the N Bomb. The reading sparked the following discussion of reappropriation of dangerous words:

My Son: And was it a white person singing?
My Self: No.
My Son: Why – I don't get why they- she's not letting him hear it.
My Self: So, you know how that word started. Um, like white slave owners would call their- the enslaved African people that. And it was this really mean thing to say to them.
My Son: Wow.
My Self: Some, some people, a lot of rappers take that word, and they wanna take that mean power away from it. And so what they do to take the power away from it is they start using it. And instead of it being an /r/ at the end, it's an /u/ at the end, Right? How he said, "But it had an *a* at the end, not an *-er*." That's what he said, right? You know what I'm talking about? (My son nods.) And um, and so they change it into this friendly word. Kind of like-
My Son: Hey, friend.
My Self: Yeah. But this thing is something that people do when they take a really hateful word that has been hurtful to their people and they change it into a word that is okay, if they say it. So like another word like that is *Queer*.
My Son: What's that?

My Self: Well it used to be a mean thing that people would say about people who are gay or trans.

My Son: Mmhmm.

My Self: But now people will call themselves Queer, and be like proud of it. So its this thing that people do. They take a really hateful word, and they take the power away from that word by using it in a new way.

My Son: Is there any other ones?

My Self: I'm sure there are. I'm not thinking of any. Oh, um, the B Word. Um, you know what word I'm talking about?

My Son: Mmhmm. Like b-s-e

My Self: It's b-i-t-c-h, bitch. (My son giggles.) Is that the word you were thinking of?

My Son: Uhuh.

My Self: Yeah, so that word used to be, and it still is, a really mean word toward women.

My Son: Oh, really.

My Self: Mmhm. And so now some women use that word and be like "These are my- bitches!" like these are my friends, these are my bitches, but-

My Son: Oh yeah, like not so- well like, goth people do that.

My Self: And a lot of-

My Son: Regular people?

My Self: Well, I don't like to say regular people, because you know, like what's a regular person? But um some of my girlfriends who are in my book club do it, say that.

My Son: Huh. I see.

My Self: I don't- I choose not to say it. It doesn't feel right to me. Um-

My Son: So, so is that word still mean bad girl? What does it mean?

My Self: Well, that's the thing. Like people change what words mean. Right?

My Son: So we don't, so once a person says it, you don't really know what it means?

My Self: Well, it kind of depends on how they use it and how they say it. Right?

(...)

So his mom is telling him um she says "*no matter how you spell it, It's still a spit in the face of our ancestors who for far to long fought against the infection of that word.*"

My Son: Ooh. So like a long time ago. Okay, I get it know, why she doesn't want him to say it.

Myself: Will you tell me what you're thinking?

My Son: Um, like so basically it's like our ancestors still like, our ancestors up in heaven still think it's a bad word.

Myself: Mm. Mmhmm. And like she sti- She's kind of saying like they fought against the infection of that word. So she's saying like that word was so hateful, an infection is like something that spreads, right, to more and more people. And she's like it's so hateful that when we use it, it just spreads more hate. And, and he's saying yeah, but we're using it a different way now. And she's like, It doesn't matter to me. However people use it, it's still spreading hate. So I, I just wanted to show you this to show you that people have lots of different ideas about it. You know?

My Son: Okay.

I presented this poem about The N Word to my son as curricular material that demonstrated that Black families have different opinions about the use of The N Word. I don't claim to be an authority on the subject of what Black families share with their children, but I did want to show this perspective to my son to broaden his understanding about my perception of People of Colors' ways of thinking about the N Word, based on my readings of academic and literary texts as well as the Black families I know well. The conversation developed into a broader discussion about the way marginalized people reappropriate dangerous words as a way "to deal with labels and dysphemisms imposed on them" (Rahman, 2012, p. 3). Through this talk my son seemed to understand that oppressed people can take the power from hateful words by changing the meaning of the words. Notice upon hearing *the B Word* was reappropriated, he asked, "So, so is that word still mean bad girl? What does it mean?" demonstrating his understanding of "'semantic inversion,' in which the meaning of a word is flipped" (Low, 2007, p. 152) and its power is defused. Through our discussions of The N Word, my son constructed and expressed understanding that not all people in a racial group have the same opinion around dangerous race words, and racially oppressed people have used agency to reclaim the power of dangerous race words.

It was also clear to my children that, as white people, they did not have the option of using The N Word in any setting. Notice from the transcription above even in our own home, the N Word was only to be spelled unlike the B word which could be spoken aloud and giggled about on occasion. In fact, on May 21, 2018 during our first documented conversation about The N Word, my husband named The N Word as the worst bad word and dictated clear rules about its use.

My Husband: If you hear a white person saying it, you need to say it's not okay.

My Son: What?

Myself: Daddy said if you hear a white person say the N word, you need to tell them that's not okay.

My Son: Okay.

Myself: You gotta be brave to do that.

My Son: Well is there any other bad words that we don't know?

My Husband: That's about the worst one.

My Son: The N word is the worst one?

My Husband: *I think so.*

In the above conversation, my husband not only announces that The N Word is not for white people to say, he also provides directions about how to talk to other white people about use of the dangerous race word. This is not the only time talk around dangerous race words lead to discussions of racial discourse between white people. During a conversation about the dangerous word *racist* on July 27, 2017 my husband and I talked to our children about effective antiracist discourse.

My Husband: You guys, we have to be careful about saying racist. We can talk about it here at home, but you shouldn't call people racist.

My Son: Why?

My Husband: If you call someone racist, they will just get mad and not listen to you.

Myself: Yeah if you want to change someone's mind, you have to get them thinking. You could say something like, I don't think all white

people are like that, or all Brown people are like that, or all Native American people are not like that.

My Husband: Or I'm not going to make fun of them.

Here my husband and I are providing training on effective discourse for successfully interacting with other white people around the topic of racism. We are teaching them to avoid “a call-out culture in which White people try to one-up one another or shame one another, a culture that ultimately alienates more people than it persuades” (Michael, 2015, p. 110) and instead “create a climate of nonthreatening accountability” (p. 111). Based on the stories my children told me about interactions at school, the home curriculum around in-group racial discourse was somewhat successful. As described above, my son told a child whom he perceived as white that he could not say the N Word and told a white friend that a popular chant was “not okay.” This is not to say that my children have *arrived* at an antiracist stance towards racism through exploration of these dangerous race words. However, they have learned tentative ways to discursively address dangerous race words through linguistic cultural tools.

Vygotsky (1978) posited language is a cultural tool that “arises initially as a means of communication between the child and the people in his environment” which is converted to internal speech and “come[s] to organize the child’s thought, that is, become an internal mental function” (pp. 89–90). Since “[l]anguage systems are tools of thinking that both channel and result from communitywide ways of thinking and acting” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 267), when a child learns language to describe human beings in a racialized society, the child learns race. Learning race occurs whether adults intend to teach it or not (Bartoli et al., 2016; Boutte et al., 2011). Through the home curriculum, I have attempted to make learning about race explicit and counter to the dominant culture of white supremacy, silence about

race, and white fragility. Thus, my family engaged in conversations about race labels as well as race words that many in our culture have deemed dangerous. Due to the malleable nature of language, and the fact that “new words can be created as required, and they can be combined to make an infinite variety of meanings” (Mercer, 2000, p. 4), and the creative agency of human beings (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2010; Moje & Lewis, 2007) my children’s thinking was influenced but not entirely bound by the language of any one discourse community they were a part of as evidenced by my daughter’s creation of a new word to mean racist and my son’s linguistic experimentation with the race label Mixed. Through talk my children seem to have come to understand both race and racism in more nuanced ways. Through heavy mediation, they have come to call themselves white, a race label they identify as associated with peach skin and a certain level of safety and power that people with darker skin do not enjoy. They have also come to understand race labels are associated with ethnicity, language, and a history of white supremacy, though they have also certainly learned misinformation about African people and the African continent and need to learn more about attempts to erase and eradicate Indigenous language and knowledge through oppressive settler colonialism. They have come to understand that dangerous race words come with social risks and are laden with social rules because they are associated with racism, a topic that makes white people uncomfortable. Within the curriculum of dangerous race words, they also learned that racially oppressed groups are diverse and agentive, with some people reappropriating race words to regain power. At the same time, their learning about race and ethnicity was at times curbed by the limitations of my own (and my husband’s) knowledge and perspectives. When my children became concerned about a lack of water resources in African countries because of a bottled water advertisement (see Table

5.2). I initially didn't effectively counter their discourses of pity and monolithic conceptions of Africa promoted by the books I chose to read to them in response to their queries about Africa. Likewise, when my husband and I did DNA testing and shared this with our children, we may have been promoting false understandings about race—the very kinds of racial categorizations we had been working to undo through our antiracist home curricula. Through taking on this extended antiracist home curriculum with my children, my goal was an educational praxis that can engage both parent and child in a mutual process of teaching and learning about race, especially ones that debunk dominant messages about race” (Matias, 2016, p. 3). While I know it has not been without faults, I do feel that I have engaged in such a mutual process. There were other ways that my children used discursive linguistic tools as they constructed ideas about race and racism with me and my husband. In what follows, I will describe how my children used metaphor and analogy over time to describe and understand race and racism in the context of their home, community, and national cultures.

Using Metaphor and Analogy

In this section, I discuss ways that my children utilized metaphor and analogy to understand the racialized nature of their world. They developed these metaphors and analogies drawing on the cultural tools and historical understandings available to them and tested their perceptions through interactions with others (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). While no one taught them about metaphor and analogy explicitly, they learned these tools of thought through day-to-day interactions and applied them in personal ways. Rogoff (2003) asserts, “Cognitive development consists of individuals changing their ways of understanding, perceiving, noticing, thinking, remembering, classifying, reflecting, problem setting and solving, planning, and so on-in shared endeavors with other people building on

the cultural practices and traditions of communities” (p. 237). Through trying out race labels when discussing peers in their multiracial community setting, my children learned to associate physical human differences with race. As part of the home curriculum, they learned some historical foundations of race and to notice power differentials associated with race. Through their use of metaphor and analogy, they integrated these understandings in creative and agentive ways that were both intellectual and emotional, “through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Freiere, 1970, p. 72).

In this section, I describe two subfindings: modifying the dominant image of God and making analogies between current events and American chattel slavery. Each subfinding includes a description of the conceptions of race that emerged from the metaphors or analogies that were created. I conclude each subsection with a discussion of the ways in which the curriculum was restricted in terms of the limitations and affordances of metaphor and analogy as a cultural tool, my mediation of the curriculum as teacher, and the influences of our context.

Modifying the Dominant Image of God

The essence of a metaphor
is understanding and experiencing
one kind of thing in terms of another.¹⁰¹

What do you think God looks like?
asked my husband.

The theologian ought not merely interpret
biblical and traditional metaphors and models
but ought to remythologize.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5)

I think that God,
part of his body is
white
and
part of his body is
Brown.
He has a white robe.
He has a staff.
He made everything.
He tried to stop the wars, but he couldn't do that.
That's what I think,
said my son.

Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities.¹⁰³

He has white skin
and blue eyes.
And him's up in the sky.
And him's helping kids,
said my daughter.

A metaphor both highlights and hides aspects of the concept to be understood.¹⁰⁴

Nobody thinks God is a woman?
I ask.¹⁰⁵

New metaphors like conventional metaphors, can have the power to define reality.¹⁰⁶

My daughter comes to me with a picture
from the art show she is organizing in her room.
I like to draw pictures of God.
Here's Jesus and God on a cloud helping the poor.
God is
a brown person which is a boy,
a brown person which is a girl,

¹⁰² (McFague, 1988, p. 33)

¹⁰³ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 156)

¹⁰⁴ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, McFague, 1988)

¹⁰⁵ From a 7.08.2016 Poetic Transcription.

¹⁰⁶ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 157)

a white girl
and a white boy.¹⁰⁷

In their 1980 classic, *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson explain metaphor “is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). They assert metaphors govern everyday thought, and provide the example *time is money* which leads people to think and act in terms of spending and wasting time. From this perspective, it is reasonable to position God as a metaphor commonly used to understand humanity. Consider for a moment the ways in which the dominant North American image of God as an all-knowing white patriarch permeates the ideology of the United States. White men continue to hold positions of power in the U.S. Even after an historic 2018 congressional election, 60% of the House and 71% of the Senate was made up of white males (Zweigenhaft, 2018). It is easy to see how God, the white patriarch, is a *metaphor we live by*.

In fact the dominant image of God is so omnipresent, I am unsure as to how my children developed a distinct image of God as an old white man residing in the heavens except that it is a dominant cultural image present not only in Christian churches but also cartoons, books, movies, and daily discourse. My children demonstrated knowledge of the dominant image of God through the use of the pronoun *he* and talk of God as Jesus’ father. My husband and I also engaged in these discourses even though we do not identify as Christian. In a society where Christianity is the dominant religion, my children had questions about who Jesus was. As Unitarian Universalists, my husband and I thought it important to make sure our children knew about Jesus as a social justice activist who is viewed as the holy son of God in the Christian religion. While we actively sought to counter the dominant image

¹⁰⁷ From a 6.17.2018 Poetic Field Note.

of Jesus as a blue-eyed white man, our children consistently drew and described Jesus as a white man and sometimes related this image to God, Jesus' father. One telling anecdote is from June 24, 2018. While my children and I were watching *Son of God* (Downey, Burnett, & Spencer, 2014) I paused the movie and commented, "Something is bothering me. Jesus is the only one with brown hair; everyone else has black hair. And Jesus' skin is lighter than other people." My son responded, "He is the son of God, so he might look a little bit like God. I always thought God looked like that guy." These interactions speak to the assertion, "Convincing and persuading people to consent to society's rules is often the job of families, religions, schools, and the media" (Janks, Dixon, Ferreira, Granville, & Newfield, 2014, p. 5).

Even while my children consumed and reiterated dominant messages about God, they also countered them. Over the course of the three year and seven month study, my children developed multiple iterations of their conception of God, often including race. I posit that this reworking of the God image in regard to race (and gender) represents an intuitive understanding that God is a metaphor for humanity, a cultural tool for thinking that is "both inherited and transformed by successive generations" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 50). As my children encountered more People of Color in community and public school settings and the home curriculum expanded to include critical perspectives on race and gender, the human aspects of their God Image (race and gender) also changed.

My children's agency in adapting the dominant Christian image of God was supported by the culture of our Unitarian Universalist church, which is "grounded in the humanistic teachings of the world's religions" and described as "unbounded, drawing from scripture and science, nature and philosophy, personal experience and ancient tradition"

(Unitarian Universalist Association). Our Unitarian Universalist faith affirms the following seven principles:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. (Unitarian Universalist Association)

The cultural context of our church allowed for “inquiry, negotiation, contestation, and reimagination” (Vasquez, 2014, p. 1), the environment needed to carry out a critical literacy curriculum. This cultural context supported family conversations that began, “What do you think God is?” Grounded in our religious principles, my husband and I positioned the God metaphor as a cultural tool available for our children’s use. They took up this tool and used it to mediate their understanding of race and gender as aspects of human identity. Their desire to modify the metaphor also implies an understanding of the disparities inherent in the dominant metaphor. This provided an avenue for the examination of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2009) through conversations about race that were not “compartmentalized away from discussions of class and heteropatriarchy” (Nishi, 2018, p. 7). Though I will also point out how those discussions were imperfect and incomplete.

Over the course of three years, my children co-constructed God metaphors that reflected the ways in which they were attempting to make sense of concepts of race and gender (see Table 5.3). The use of conceptions of God as metaphor for humanity seemed to be sparked by a family conversation that occurred during the ride home from church in July

2016. When my husband asked the children how they envision God, my eight-year-old son replied, “Half of his body is white and half of his body is brown.” During this same exchange, my six-year-old daughter described her conception of God, “He has white skin and blue eyes. And him’s up in the sky and him’s helping kids.” Upon hearing their descriptions I implored, “Nobody thinks of God as a woman?” No one responded to my challenge about the gender identity of God until more than a year later. In November 2017, my then seven-year-old daughter presented us with her updated conception of God, which seemed to incorporate both my son’s dual-raced conception and my own challenge in regard to gender. In the middle of a family game of Twenty Questions, my daughter asked, “Do you think God is a boy?” I explained, “When I was little I thought God was a boy because that is what they taught at church. Now, I don’t think that.” She replied, “I think God is half boy and half girl. And the girl is part brown and part white.” My children’s conceptions of God stand in contrast to the established literature which is grounded in developmental theory and therefore focuses on the ways in which children’s conceptions vary by age and across cognitive developmental sequences (see Apfelbaum, Pauker, Ambady, & Norton, 2008; Barrett & Richert, 2003; Pnevmatikos, 2002; Roberts & Gelman, 2016). Instead of each child conceiving of abstract constructs like God and race in predictable ways according to their age, the children took up cultural tools available to them to understand constructs and adapted their conceptions through discourse. Their conceptions changed from day-to-day to meet their own needs, and sometimes they revisited previous conceptions if those conceptions served their current purpose. The methodology of studies grounded in developmental frameworks is often such that children have limited ways to express their thoughts, and conceptions are captured in only one session rather than over time. Such

studies focus on “when and in what order all children acquire certain cognitive abilities or schemas...[rather than] the processes through which they engage in such meaning-making work in their encounters with different people in different contexts” (Park, 2011, p. 392).

Table 5.3 Home Curriculum: Conceptions of God

Initial Impetus of Curriculum	Curriculum Materials and Delivery	Children’s Responses
<p>7.08.2016 During a conversation in the car after church, my son asserted God’s body is part brown and part white. My daughter described God as an old white man with a staff who cares for children.</p>	<p>7.08.2016 I pointed out that nobody described God as a woman.</p> <p>When asked, my husband and I described our own conceptions of God as disembodied force for good.</p>	<p>My son said, “I think God’s sister is a woman.”</p> <p>The children insisted we describe an image for God and suggested “daisies popping up.”</p> <p>11.04.2017 My daughter said, “I think God is half boy and half girl. And the girl is part brown and part white.”</p>
<p>9.27.2017 My son said, “I’ve thought about this a lot. God is the wind. [At church] they always say God is in us. And we breathe in air, and air is the wind.”</p>	<p>9.27.2017 My husband said, “Oh, like God is an element, like oxygen,” and uses his phone to look up how many elements are in the human body.</p>	<p>My son said, “People thought humans were made out of clay.” I told him the biblical creation story.</p>
<p>11.23.2017 My daughter said the sun is a girl and a god.</p>	<p>11.23.2017 We read Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message by Chief Jake Swamp in which the sun is depicted as an elder brother and the moon as grandmother.</p>	<p>My daughter maintained the sun is a girl and added she thought the moon was a boy.</p> <p>11.24.2017 My daughter drew a picture of two people who were far away with the moon and sun gods between them. She created a “joy bell” similar to the singing bowl used at our church. She drew the sun on one side and the moon on one side.</p>
<p>2.28.2018 My daughter said God is in air and wind, the dead people go into the wind, and Disney’s</p>	<p>I attempted to explain evolution to help her understand her brother’s current thinking.</p>	<p>My daughter said she does not believe evolution, she believes God made people. She equated Disney’s Pocahontas</p>

<p>Pocahontas always follows the wind. She expresses worry and confusion that my son has recently said he does not believe in God.</p>	<p>I told her, “Pocahontas believes that God is in nature.”</p>	<p>following the wind with following God.</p>
<p>6.17.2018 My daughter drew a picture of God and Jesus on a cloud with angels above, poor people below. God is “is a brown person which is a boy, a brown person which is a girl, a white girl, and a white boy. Jesus uses magic dust to help poor people.</p>	<p>6.24.2018 My children and I watched Son of God because I wanted them to get a better sense of the stories about Jesus. I pointed out that Jesus was the only character with light skin and blue eyes.</p>	<p>My daughter asked if the air Jesus breathed was God.</p> <p>My son said, “He is the son of God, so he might look a little bit like God. I always thought God looked like that guy.”</p>
<p>My concern about the binary nature of the image of God as half white, half Brown, half male, and half female</p>	<p>9.27.2018 I talked to the kids about the concept of binary opposites; that it is false to think of race and gender as binary categories.</p>	<p>My daughter pointed out that her friend Tushar is not white or Black. My daughter pointed out that his friend Maya was both Black and white.</p>
<p>My desire to complicate their conceptions of God as white and male.</p>	<p>9.27.2018 I showed the children paintings by Harmonia Rosales in which she reimagines classic religious work by depicting Black women as powerful.</p>	<p>My son searched online using the keywords “God pictures” and found images of Hindu gods. He remembered these from a trip to the art museum and called them Indian. We looked at images of gods who were half male and half female; half blue and half white. He then searched for “American God” and found images of American flags and eagles. My son wanted to know the artist’s race because he had noticed artists usually paint people who are the same race as them. Upon seeing The Birth of Eve, my son reminded us humanity began in Africa.</p>
	<p>I pointed out the painting of an eagle picking up a Black woman was called abduction, and an eagle</p>	<p>My son said, “Oh! Got it. That makes me feel really bad.”</p>

is a symbol for America.
My daughter said, “And
she’s brown.”

Indeed, my children’s conceptions of God did not remain stable. My children continued to adapt and update their conceptions of God based on their experiences and the ideas they were attempting to make sense of. In September of 2017 my son declared God to be “the wind” and in February of 2018, my daughter described God as *air* and *wind* that “blow[s] life into people.” However, when seeking to understand people, my daughter took up God as a metaphor for humanity again. She returned to her embodied conception of God on June of 2018. Then eight years old, my daughter drew an image of God and Jesus on a cloud. God was depicted as dual-raced and dual-gendered. Jesus appeared to be white. She described the picture, “Here’s Jesus and God on a cloud.” She pointed to her drawing of God (see Figure 5.3), “A Brown person which is a boy, a Brown person which is a girl, a white girl and a white boy.”



Figure 5.3 Jesus and God on a Cloud

Essentially, my children decided that the metaphor of God as a white man was no longer a metaphor they wished to live by. In using metaphor to construct an understanding of humanity as dual-raced, they attempted to place white people and Brown people on equal planes. I believe that they did use this new metaphor from time-to-time to read the world they live in, and in turn, their new experiences helped them further develop their metaphor. One example of an experience that may have been interpreted through the metaphor of a dual-raced God and then used to further develop my daughter's image of God is from December 11, 2016 when my family drove one hour south of Our City to see a dance recital. After a few performances, my six-year-old daughter leaned close to my ear and whispered in a disgraced voice, "There are no Brown people here." I interpret this to be an example of the way in which, "People of each generation, as they engage in sociocultural endeavors with other people, make use of and extend cultural tools and practices inherited from previous

generations” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 52). My daughter, armed with a developing understanding of humanity as racially diverse interpreted the all-white dance recital as deficient.

While the God images they created supported an understanding of race as an aspect of identity that should be, but is not represented equally, the images are also problematic. Since my children’s conceptions were informed by the larger culture in general and the Kansas City context in particular, their images of God are not neutral. Even while they seem to be creating conceptions of God to directly challenge dominant ideologies that position God as a white patriarch, they also reify race and gender binaries. My son’s original conception of God as *half brown* and *half white* counters the image of God as white but reifies racial binaries, leaving out all people but those who are deemed white or Brown. His conception also seems to reduce race to skin color rather than “a social construction in sociopolitical contexts” (Beneke & Cheatham, 2019, p. 123). The same can be said for the ways in which my daughter conceives of God’s gender; while she challenges the conception of God as male, she reifies gender binaries, reflecting the “uncontested gender indoctrination of children” (Menvielle, 2011, p. x) in the United States. These racial and gender binaries are communicated to my children through everyday discourse in our community and home. As discussed before, Kansas City is a metropolitan marked by Black/white racial segregation which influences the discourse and experiences that occur within this context. While cultural tools including metaphor can be adapted to support new ways of thinking, they “both channel and result from communitywide ways of thinking and acting” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 267) and thus include limitations framed by the larger society. In this case, the God metaphor is bodied and the language used to describe the God metaphor is binary. Even though my children set out to counter the dominant image of God as a white male patriarch, they were limited by the

language and ideas made available to them in their community and home. To illustrate, they could only counter a gendered image of God with a dual gendered God because they had no words to conceive of a God (or a human) without gender or with ambiguous or shifting gender. If they were to be socialized in a culture that includes a third gender identity “such as two spirit or Muxe in Indigenous traditions, Hijra from South Asia traditions, or Kathoey from Asian traditions” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 38) they would be better prepared to create a non-binary gendered God. While my children used agency “to enact powerful identities within cultural and structural relations, [they] at times challenge[d] oppressive regimes, at times only tweak[ed] them, and at time reproduce[ed] them” (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 24)

Making Analogies between Current Events and Human Enslavement

Text-to-World Connections:

**What I just read makes me think about _____
(event from the past) because...¹⁰⁸**

Analogies ...allow[] us to learn about a new situation based on prior knowledge about a similar situation.¹⁰⁹

After attending the local protest
of Donald Trump’s presidential inauguration
I tuck my son in to bed.
He says he heard about a wall
and asks what it is about.

I tell him
that Mexico shares a border with the US.
Some people in Mexico live in places
where it is not safe

¹⁰⁸ (Facing History and Ourselves, n.d.)

¹⁰⁹ (Krawczyk, 2017, p. 227)

or there is not enough work.
And they want to come to the U.S.
to be safe
and to work.
And that Trump wants to build a wall so they can't come to the US.

He responds,
That's like slavery because white people are telling Black people what to
do.¹¹⁰

The knowledge that children have
about objects and events in their worlds,
and the knowledge that they have
about the causal and explanatory structures underlying
relations between these objects and events,
is known to expand at a terrific rate
from the very first months of infancy...
[Y]oung children seek to *explain* their everyday worlds to themselves.¹¹¹

The point is to enable students of all colors to
more fully to comprehend
how these oppressive systems that began
in the historical past
continue misshaping contemporary conditions¹¹²

After watching the Colin Kaepernick Nike ad
my husband and I tell our children
that many people are angry at Nike
and burning their Nike products.

*And there's one college here in Missouri,
I say
that used to get all of their equipment for their sports teams from Nike
and then they said, no we're not buying your stuff any more.*

*I bet some college students just didn't bring some of their Nikes,
says my daughter.*

*You think they really still had them?
Like probably not everybody on the team agrees?*

¹¹⁰ From a 1.20.2017 poetic field note

¹¹¹ (Goswami, 2001, pp. 447-448)

¹¹² (Keating, 1995, p. 915)

The dominant curriculum around American chattel slavery is problematic and incomplete. The typical school curriculum around American chattel slavery decenters “the very people who were enslaved,” (King & Swartz, 2016, p. 67), “fail[s] to name white people as the enslavers”(p. 71), includes references “to enslaved people being treated well” (p. 72), erases “Black men and women in the abolition movement” (p. 71), and frames human enslavement as “something about which to debate and compromise” (p. 72). The dominant curriculum is typically conveyed with “an absence of collective struggles to dismantle the apparatus of white supremacy” (Bery, 2014, p. 334) and “the absence of Indigenous African voice” (King & Swartz, 2016, p. 75). Further, this curriculum is often taught as unemotional *dry facts* (Howard, 2018) disconnected from the experiences of students. Leonardo warns, “Enslavement, discrimination, and marginalization of the Other work most efficiently when they are constructed as an idea rather than a people” (p. 180). Although I did not directly observe the school curriculum that my children received, it seems that they learned several of the lessons of the dominant discourse around American enslavement of Africans at school (see Table 5.4). I attempted to supplement this curriculum at home. While I actively sought to teach American chattel slavery as cruel and violent, a tool for the accumulation of wealth, and abolition as a multi-fronted effort, I failed to fully center Afro-Indigenous voices in this curriculum (see Table 5.5). Acknowledging the shortcomings of the school and home curricula on American chattel slavery and the need to continue *stitching stories* “to connect present to past in humanizing ways” (Howard, 2018, p. 103) that counter master scripts and dominant narratives about American chattel slavery (King & Swartz, 2016), I posit my children used their basic understanding of the relationship between the enslaved and their

captors in analogies to better understand current events such as the building of a border wall and the pro-sports players' protests against racism.

Table 5.4 Human Enslavement in the School Curriculum

Data about the School Curriculum	Themes from Discourse about the School Curriculum
<p>3.01.2017 The school's music program included the song Pick A Bale of Cotton which was introduced as a song sung while enduring grueling slave labor in the cotton fields</p> <p>October 2017 My son said he and a classmate had seen a photo in a book of a lynched man but didn't tell their teacher because it was <i>too bad</i>. My husband and I told him it is important to talk about those really bad things. They are real and we need to know about them so that we can understand how things really are and make things better.</p> <p>2.26.2018 From the Fourth grade newsletter: <i>We will begin our social studies unit over the Civil War this week. Students will begin to discuss how the Civil War impacted transportation, communication, and education in Missouri.</i></p> <p>5.17.2018 My son was preparing to be William Clark in the famous Missourians wax museum. My husband and I told him there was an enslaved African on the journey named York. My son knew York was on the journey but did not know he was enslaved. My husband told him that York was owned by William Clark. My son said his teacher doesn't like to talk about slavery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ American enslavement of Africans is safely in the past ○ Violence associated with slavery and racial oppression is not to be talked about at school. ○ Slavery is a taboo topic at school. ○ Abraham Lincoln single-handedly ended slavery in the United States.

Table 5.5 Human Enslavement in the Home Curriculum

Texts Used in the Home Curriculum	Intended Themes within the Home Curriculum
<p>Books</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nappy Hair by Carolivia Herron ○ Two Friends: Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass by Dean Robbins ○ Remember the Bridge: Poems of a People by Carole Boston Weatherford ○ The Underground Railroad for Kids: From Slavery to Freedom by Mary Kay Carson ○ Unbound by Ann Burg ○ Encounter by Jane Yolen ○ Moses: When Harriet Tubman Lead her People to Freedom by Carole Boston ○ Light in the Darkness: A Story about How Slaves Learned in Secret by Lesa Cline-Ransome ○ Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave by Laban Carrick Hill <p>Motion Pictures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10,000 B.C. ○ Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s Africa's Great Civilizations, Episode 1: Origins. <p>Museum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ National Civil Rights Museum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Human enslavement as cruel and violent ○ Human enslavement as a tool for the accumulation of wealth ○ Human enslavement happening to many groups including Africans. ○ Enslaved Africans as agentive ○ Abolition as a multi-fronted effort

On January 20, 2017, my husband and I attended a local protest of Donald Trump's election. That evening, I tucked my son into bed. My eight-year-old son asked about the

protest and said that he had heard people talking about a wall. He asked me what the wall was about. I reminded him that Mexico shares a border with the United States. I told him that some people in Mexico live in places where it's not safe or there is not enough work, and that some people want to come to the United States to be safe and to work. I told him that President Trump wants to build a wall so they couldn't come to the United States. My son responded to this explanation by asserting that building a wall is like slavery because "white people are telling Black people what to do."

In his analogy, my son named race outright and was explicit about the power differential in the relationship. He stated the relationship of oppression outright: "white people are telling Black people what to do." He seems to be comparing the relationships between white slave owners and Black slaves to the relationship between the white U.S. president and the Mexican people whom he has established he perceives as "Blackish." My son used analogy to construct and express an understanding that race is associated with power differentials in historic and current contexts (see Figure 5.3). Admittedly, the home and school curriculum are lacking in terms of the history of Mexican people and sociopolitical relationships between Mexico and the United States. The Missouri social studies curriculum for elementary school covers history as it pertains to the state in particular. The topic of enslavement of African people in Missouri is introduced in third grade. While "the causes and consequences of westward expansion" (MDESE, 2016) is introduced in fourth grade, there is no mention of Mexico specifically in the social studies standards. Again, the Midwestern context and the particular Black/white racialized context of Kansas City profoundly influence the home and school curricula.

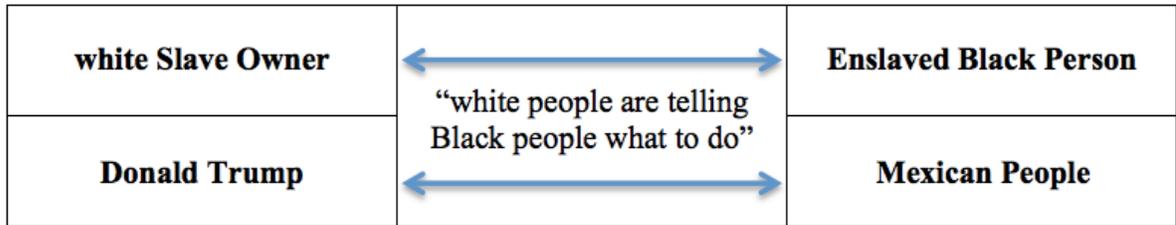


Figure 5.4 My Son’s Human Enslavement Analogy

On September 14, 2018, my family watched the viral Nike advertisement narrated by Colin Kaepernick together. I recorded and transcribed the following interaction that occurred after the video had ended:

- My Husband: So a lot of people after this commercial came out who, who, who um don’t like people kneeling at the national anthem. They um, they burned their Nike stuff.
- Myself: And there’s one school here in Missouri, a college that used to get all of their Nike stuff, get all of their, um, equipment for their sports teams from Nike, and then they said, no we’re not buying your stuff any more.
- My Husband: So Nike Company went down a couple notches after this ad came out.
- Myself: They didn’t make as much money for a little bit.
- My Husband: What do you think about that?
- My Son: It’s stupid.
- My Daughter: I bet some college students just didn’t bring some of their Nikes.
- Myself: You think they really still had them?
- My Daughter: Yeah.
- Myself: Mm-hmm. Like probably not everybody on the team agrees?
- My Husband: Interesting isn’t it?
- My Daughter: It’s like, kind of like slaves, but really different. (She began talking quietly as if embarrassed.)
- Myself: How do you mean that?
- My Daughter: And way less badder.
- Myself: Oh, you mean like- Do you mean that the people on the team are kind of like slaves because they have to do what the coach says, but really they might feel a different way?
- My Daughter: Mm-hmm.
- Myself: So not really like slavery,
- My Daughter: Yeah.
- Myself: But somebody else is in charge and we have to do what they say.

My Daughter: And it's like the tunnels.
Myself: Tell me about the tunnels.
(a short spat between siblings)
My Daughter: I mean like so first white people were taking care of the slavery people, they didn't know they were digging tunnels. And the people that were the teachers and stuff like that did not know [so] they were not like punishing and giving it to them stuff. That's all.
Myself: So like, um so some white people didn't help and they didn't know the secret stuff that was going on like the Underground Railroad?
My Daughter: Mm-hmm.

My daughter's analogy also describes an oppressive relationship, but race is only named in one situation. The novel relationship she brings to the discussion is the agency of the oppressed. She describes a parallel relationship in which the oppressed act agentively without the detection of the oppressor. What is especially interesting to me are the words I at first found so troubling, "taking care of the slavery people." In seeking to understand how the concept of care fit into her understanding of this relationship, I also noticed the word *teachers*. Then I came to see my daughter's analogy as threefold. She is comparing the relationship between slave owner and enslaved person to the relationship between coach and athlete to the relationship between teacher and student. Of course the teacher/student relationship is the one she is most familiar with. In this relationship one person has the power to provide or withhold resources, experiences, knowledge, and affection from a group of people with lower social status. Indeed, Leonardo and Boas (2013) describe white female teachers (all of my daughter's elementary school teachers have been white women) as *members of the white racial army* "drafted to carry out the reproductive work of whiteness" (p. 315) by socializing children into whiteness through a care-giving relationship. My daughter has experience acting agentively and in secret within this teacher/student

relationship, such as providing a book to a friend who was not allowed to read at that reading level and encouraging someone to be brave using a *level one voice* when they were supposed to be at *level zero*. While the analogy is uncomfortable, the parallels are authentic. The slave owner, coach, and teacher are in positions in which they are responsible for the care of other human beings. The enslaved people, athletes, and students are in positions where they might need to conceal their true intents and actions to preserve their humanity. Through analogy, my daughter constructed and expressed an understanding of race as an aspect of oppressive relationships in which the oppressed maintain agency.

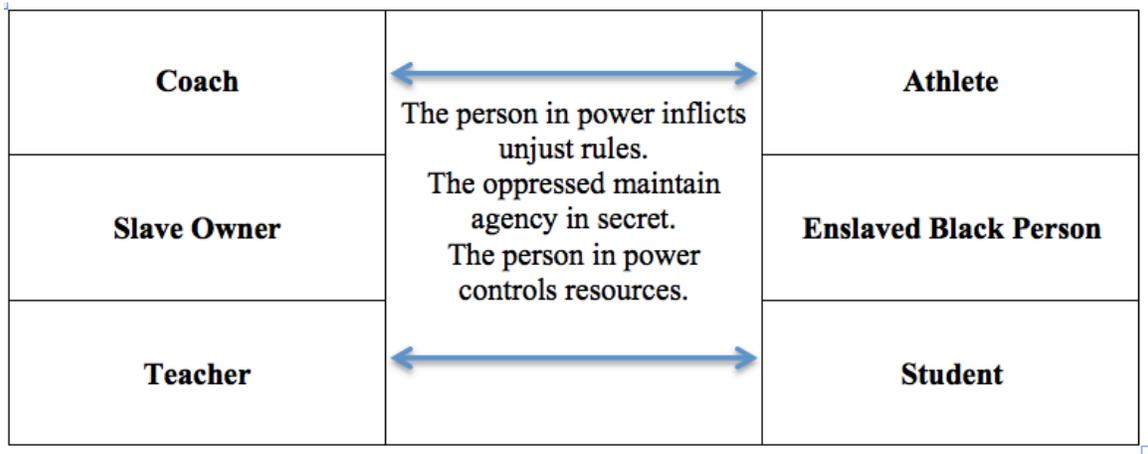


Figure 5.5 My Daughter’s Human Enslavement Analogy

My children used analogy to make connections between their understandings of race-based American chattel slavery to current events, and perhaps even the ways power operates in their own relationships. Through using analogies to understand the relationships between power and race in American history and present, they were “reading the world through a critical lens, a perspective through which to participate in the world...to work toward disrupting problematic inequitable ways of being” (Vasquez, 2014, p. 3). I understand this level of critical literacy to be a prerequisite to “more fully [comprehending] how these

oppressive systems that began in the historical past continue misshaping contemporary conditions” (Keating, 1995, p. 915).

It is also important to examine my reaction to their analogies. When my son shared his analogy with me, I responded by telling him that building a wall was different from slavery because with human enslavement, people make others work for free, and with the wall people are saying you need to stay where you are and not come here to be safe. When my daughter shared her analogy, I said, “So not really like slavery, but somebody else is in charge and we have to do what they say.” In each conversation, I acted out of color evasiveness, an active discomfort and avoidance of topics of race that “individually positioned [myself] as racially enlightened while simultaneously producing power and inequality in a system of white supremacy” (Annamma et al., 2017, p. 154). I reinforced that *slavery* was a dangerous race word that I was uncomfortable with my children making any analogies to. Of course the horrors of American chattel slavery and all it entails (King & Swartz, 2016) are incomparable to few other human experiences, and I was worried that my child might be taking human enslavement, the great and unspeakable American sin, lightly. However, when I look back at these conversations, I see the accuracies in and usefulness of their analogies. As a white teacher and parent in a color evasive society that considers human enslavement a taboo topic, my first reaction was to shut down child talk about slavery and negate my children’s analogies. My retreat reflects my own white fragility in the face of a “challenge to white taboos on talking openly about race” (DiAngelo, 2015, p. 2). My response is also reflective of the complex curricular decisions I was trying out as I created and recreated antiracist curriculum at home through “stitching together of undefined and untested pedagogical strategies” (Howard, 2018, p. 101) needed due to the shallow and color

evasive public school curricula I and my children are familiar with. King and Swartz (2016) discuss the importance of ethical re-membering which “requires teachers to know both content and themselves in order to engage with students about difficult knowledge” (Howard, 2018, p. 102). In order for me to deliver effective antiracist home curriculum, I must prepare to ethically re-member during and prior to discussing ideas about race and history. I can do this by deeply learning about the history of American chattel slavery and exploring my own emotionality about the topic.

In conclusion, my children used metaphor and analogy to construct and express deeper understandings of the racialized power dynamics at play in current and historical events and the larger social milieu. As cultural tools, metaphor and analogy offer affordances and are bound by limitations. Cultural tools for thinking are historically created thus carry racialized meanings of the past even when they are used to question those same meanings. Leonardo and Manning (2015) put it this way, “Meaning is socially driven and subject to change; yet it also reproduces a racial common sense as individuals put to use historically white tools they are afforded” (p. 7). Since metaphor and analogy are tools for abstract thought that both highlight and hide certain aspects of a construct or relationship, neither tool can foster a full understanding. Further, my children’s use of metaphor and analogy was both made possible and limited by the home curriculum that provided them partial historical and relational information regarding current political events (see Table 5.6) and a home and church context that supported creativity and (somewhat limited) freedom to discuss race. In other words, my own white fragility created a limit on the depth of interactions in which my children could engage, “a displacement of the concept of the ‘more capable peer’” (Leonardo & Manning, 2015, p. 12). In the following section, I explore some of these same dimensions

in the ways in which my children utilized the cultural tools of political protest to further understand race.

Table 5.6 *Home and Church Curriculum on Current Political Events*

Home and Church Curriculum on Current Political Events
2.14.2016 We discussed the Black Lives Matter sign being stolen from our church.
7.28.2016 We discussed American government and the unkept promise of equality while the Democratic National Convention played on television.
11.28.2016 The children went with us to vote in the presidential election.
12.30.16 Swastikas and racial slurs were painted on the Downtown Branch of the Kansas City Public Library. Each of us made symbols of love and brought them to the children's department at the library.
1.20.2017 My husband and I attended a local protest of Donald Trump's inauguration. The children stayed with their grandparents. We told them where we had been.
2.18.2017 My family attended the To Immigrants with Love Open House Letter Writing event at the Kansas City Public Library.
3.12.2017 I talked to my son about the meaning of an "all houses matter" comic strip posted at church in regard to the Black Lives Matter movement.
3.14.2017 At dinner my son brought up the proposed Southern border wall and the Muslim travel ban. We discussed the differences between the two.
7.28.2017 We discussed police killing of People of Color after the children heard talk about tear gas on the radio.
8.17.2017 My son asked what had happened, so I discussed the Charlottesville protest and violence with him.
12.05.2017 We discussed the Supreme Court case around the wedding cake for a gay couple and the question of refusing service based on free speech. Family members including my son took different perspectives and ended with different opinions in the discussion.
5.25.2018 Our son told us he had been kneeling for the Pledge of Allegiance since we had read an article about Colin Kaepernick in Time for Kids.
6.14.2018 My husband took our children to a protest against the detainment of children at the border.

6.19.2018 Our family participated in a political action at the foot of the courthouse steps in collaboration with the Poor People's Campaign and our minister.

9.14.2018 My family viewed and discussed the Colin Kaepernick Nike ad together.

11.4.2018 At church my children participated in shared writing of a letter to members of a local synagogue after an attack at Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

12.23.2018 At church my children participated in shared writing of a letter to children separated from their families and detained at the border.

3.24.2018 My family participated in a "March for Our Lives" protest for gun safety.

Designing and Implementing Political Actions

While traditional curricula such as multicultural children's literature (used as curricula as I initially began my study) presented race as physical difference, ethnicity, and an aspect of identity; the national political context provided a curriculum that presented race as a divisive political construct. My children learned about national politics from many sources including peers at school, articles in Time for Kids provided at home, a comic strip posted at church, online advertising campaigns, and their parents. When my husband and I learned that our children had heard of current political events or introduced current events to them ourselves, we actively sought to mediate their understanding of the events. In other words, we sought to promote political literacy in our children. Grounded in critical literacy, "political literacies are the ways in which individuals and groups are empowered to read, respond to, and engage with the political world around them" (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2017, p. 93).

During this time of tumultuous political debate and outright racism (Dubrofsky, 2018; Strom & Martin, 2017) and in this multiracial neighborhood within a hyper-segregated city

(Gotham, 2002), I have found that my children were very much aware of several current events and affected by the larger political climate. Although my family took up several national political issues including gun violence, the Poor People's Campaign, and immigration (see Table 5.6), each of my children's political actions outlined here address police brutality against People of Color. This historically-situated topic was expressed in contemporary American culture in ways visible to my children through the Black Lives Matter movement, protests of the National Anthem at National Football League (NFL) games, and the Colin Kaepernick Nike Ad.

Not only did the curriculum of national politics frame race as political, it also framed race and racism as a divisive issue. In contrast to most multicultural children's literature that presented racism as abhorrent, over and over national politics presented racism as a topic that could be debated. Examples of race-laden debates in the popular culture include: Black Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter, Protesting National Anthem vs. Respecting the U.S. flag, and Building a Wall vs. Immigration Reform. Again, my husband and I heavily mediated my children's understanding of these topics. While we typically attempted to present our children with both sides of a topic, we made it clear to them which side we stood on. This often meant that the other side of the argument was not fully articulated to my children. For example, when my son asked about a comic in which a character asserted, "All houses matter." I explained to him, "Some people don't like the Black Lives Matter slogan. They say all lives matter...And that's true. All lives do matter, but it is Black people who are getting shot...you don't need to say that all houses matter, you need to talk about the house that is on fire." Here I asserted my stance clearly, but I did not fully articulate the All Lives Matter perspective by explaining the pro-police stance.

Kuby (2013) asserts those who attempt to teach critical literacy must ask, “Do we just want children to agree with what *we* think is critical and just?” (p. 44). She worries, “The teacher’s role in critical pedagogy could also be viewed as dogmatic” (p. 44). The positionality of the teacher and the parent must be taken into consideration, and it must be acknowledged that teachers and parents are in positions of great power and influence over children. We powerful adults must consider that the ultimate goal of *critical consciousness* (Freire, 1970) is to gain skill in *reading the word and reading the world* (Freire, 1985), learning “how not to separate the text and the context” (Freire, 1985, p. 20). We must also recognize “there are no such things as neutral teaching practices” (Vasquez, 2013, p. ix), even carrying out traditional teaching models or parenting through color evasiveness is an endorsement of the status quo. Freire (1985) asserts, “Students have the right to know what our political dream is. They are free to accept it, reject it, or modify it” (p. 18). It is our responsibility as teachers and parents to give students the tools to do such agentive critical work. Here is where I must ask myself if I have supported my children in considering opinions carefully and forming their own judgment even when the opinion they are considering is my own. There are times I have been more successful at this (forming their own conceptions of God, challenging Walk Like an Egyptian, a text that I held dear) and times when I was less successful. Indeed my own emotional and politicized discourse around current events was reflective of the larger cultural discourse and no doubt affected my children’s ability to examine these events and debates in a nuanced manner. However, I like to think my discourse had a somewhat consistent and coherent antiracist logic, “making visible the perspectives from which [I] do what [I] do” (Vasquez, 2014, p. 3) and modeling

the antiracist curricular goal of “the moral imperative to reveal, disrupt, and actively challenge racism” (Escayg et al., 2017, p. 17).

In addition to firmly taking a side in political debates, my husband and I also engaged in anti-Trump discourse. My husband and I attended a protest of Trump’s inauguration and I named President Trump as the champion for a border wall. In addition to talking to our children directly about Trump, they also overheard anti-Trump talk among the two of us. For example, our family conversation around kneeling for the national anthem on May 25, 2018 was prompted when our children overheard my husband say, “Did you hear what the president said yesterday?” The anti-Trump discourse my husband and I engaged in aligned with the national culture, and our children were exposed to this kind of talk in multiple settings. I recall a soccer practice in which children on my son’s predominantly Latinx team suggested kicking the ball as if it were President Trump, and a gathering of extended family members in which someone expressed hatred toward the president.

Designing and enacting political actions required my children to think about national politics at the micro level. Each of their actions was designed for and enacted in a specific context and for a specific audience. Each child utilized a cultural-political tool to carry out the action. Janks (2010) calls this *productive power*, “the ability to harness the multiplicity of symbiotic systems across diverse cultural locations to challenge and change existing discourses” (p. 25). This work required an understanding of race as a divisive political construct. In this section, I will describe how each of my children designed and enacted a single political action of their own accord. First I will portray how my son engaged in political protest at his elementary school. Then I will describe my daughter’s creation of a zine for our minister at a local zine conference. Each section will begin with poetic analysis

and conclude with a discussion of the affordances and limitations of the cultural tools they took up for political action around issues of race as well as the ways the curriculum was mediated by my husband and myself.

That's why I'm doing it: My Son's Political Action

Protest as Political Action

**America writes a lyric
you must whisper to say.¹¹⁵**

On September 24, more than 200
National Football League players
protested.

*A protest is when you walk for something
that you want,
or that is right,
or sometimes it's not right,
something you believe in.
Walk for something that you believe in,
said my son.*

They sat, knelt, or raised a fist.

Why?

Some locked arms on the sidelines.
Three teams stayed in the locker room.

Why!

Here's why,
I said and read on:

In 2016,
Colin Kaepernick played for the San Francisco 49ers.
He knelt during the anthem.

¹¹⁵ Left justified, bolded text is from Amanda Gorman's poem, *In This Place (An American Lyric)*

He did it to protest racism and injustice.

**our country
our America,
our American lyric to write-**

The goal of critical pedagogy is learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.¹¹⁶

Tyrants fear the poet.

This fall the protests grew widespread after President Donald Trump spoke at a rally on September 22. He said, "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners when someone disrespects our flag, to say he's fired."

He said that!
shouted my daughter.

Many Americans believe that the protests show disrespect for the United States.
Trump was speaking for them.¹¹⁷

Political literacies are the ways in which individuals and groups are empowered to read, respond to, and engage with the political world around them.¹¹⁸

**There's a poem in this place-
a poem in America
a poet in every American
who rewrites this nation**

At breakfast,
our son mentioned
he had been kneeling at school
during the Pledge of Allegiance.

My husband and I gathered around the kitchen table to debrief.
My husband began.

So, the players were kneeling

¹¹⁶ (Freire, 1970/1995, p. 17)

¹¹⁷ From a 11.12.2017 Poetic Transcription.

¹¹⁸ (Bentley & SoutoManning, 2017, p. 93)

*because they wanted to bring awareness
and change to police brutality
against Black and minority people.*

That's why I'm doing it.

*Okay, and so you're saying that you've been kneeling all year
at school when they do the pledge of allegiance?*

Yes.

And you're the only one?

Yes.

*Like I know the pledge is good,
but I just don't think we should be doing it in a time like this.¹¹⁹*

**Where we write an American lyric
we are just beginning to tell.**

My son took up protest as political action. Protest is a statement of disapproval that pits one side against another, hence a new understanding of race as a divisive political construct. Within the last two years, my husband and I have taken our children to several protests where they have observed signs, marches, singing, and silence used as cultural tools to express political disagreement. After a family reading of a Time for Kids article about National Football League player, Colin Kaepernick, kneeling for the national anthem, my son decided to take up kneeling during a patriotic ritual at school.

His plan for this action included sharing the article with his teacher who he correctly assumed would chose to share it with the class and then kneeling during the pledge of allegiance. He enacted his plan successfully in a setting where he felt safe and supported. When we read the article, he told us, "Mrs. Z said you don't have to do [the pledge of

¹¹⁹ From 5.25.2018 Poetic Transcription.

allegiance]. She, she, she actually did. Like she could be watching the news.” In order to enact this political action, my son had to take stock of the racialized political curriculum, decide where he stood on the issue, and decide if and how to take action considering his social position in different settings. He exhibited “critical literacies that are materially as well as textually practiced... action involving language, body, and place” (Comber et al., 2001, p. 454). His action constituted *race treason* (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996) that denounced whiteness at the group level by “acting against its codes” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 106). Even when considering the safety of the classroom community and his position of power as a white person, my son did take on risk by choosing to take political action. “Depending on degree of deviance, one runs the risk of losing the other individual’s approval, friendship, and company, and the privileges of acceptance whites confer on each other” (Ignatiev &, 1996, p. 263). Fourth and fifth grade can be times of incredible social pressure, and he reported that he was the only student who chose to kneel in his multiracial class. He also demonstrated fear On May 25, 2018 when he learned of the president’s threats of deportation to those NFL players who kneeled for the national anthem asking, “So what if a student kneels?” In this context, my son reportedly kneeled for the pledge for the majority of his fourth and fifth grade school years during which he had the same teacher. Via email on May 25, 2018, Mrs. Z reported,

[Your son] brought the article form [sic] home and told me that after reading it, he was compelled to kneel. We discussed freedom of speech including non verbal [sic] communication. We also discussed the importance of being able to defend and support a stance rather than blindly following others.

Within the context of his multiracial elementary school classroom, he enacted protest as a demonstration of his own identity as an antiracist white person, which involved taking on a manageable amount of risk.

Protest as a cultural tool comes with both affordances and restraints. While protest offered a new and important understanding of race, it also contributed to the notion that racism is a simple matter of good guys and bad guys. This notion was perpetuated through home discourses such as on February 27, 2019 when I told my son, “A lot of People of Color are used to white people being a certain way, like a Trump way.” Here I was implying there are good white people like us and bad white people like Trump. This notion is widely accepted in the larger society, and is being played out in protests as well as anti-Trump discourse, which was on display in my family’s conversations.

Positioning Trump as a villain who must be opposed both makes whiteness visible and frames whiteness as abnormal (Dubrofsky, 2018). By positioning themselves in contrast to this villain, my children developed their identity as antiracist white people. While this political phenomenon was useful, it was not benign. Dubrofsky (2018) points out, “Framing Trump as abnormal, and monstrous (Hitler-like), obscures the way Trump is normative, particularly in his racism” (p. 159). In other words, while Trump the villain helped my children understand race as an oppressive political construct and see themselves as antiracist white people, it also obscured their understanding of themselves as people steeped in whiteness and the United States as a country that operates on systemic racism (Dubrofsky, 2018; Strom & Martin, 2017). This framing of self as good white folk without need for ongoing racial self-interrogation is what Feagin (2010) terms *virtuous whiteness*,

and it serves to “override[] the actual reality of racist performances” (p. 126) in day-to-day life.

It's too much scars: My Daughter's Political Action

Writing a Zine as Political Action

All four of us attended the Zine Con.
We began by walking the lines of tables
zinesT-shirtsplushiesbuttonscoloringbooks

There were zines about
VeganeatingStoppingwhitesupremacyFeminismLGBTQBodylove

We went to a session on kids making zines
We all made zines in the session
And again in the Scraps KC room next door
We made
flowerpencilcolorfriendsonglyriczines

Then we went to the Civil Disobedience
Tricks, Traps, and Trials session.

Surprise!

Our minister and music theologian were leading the session.
As they spoke, the kids made more zines.

My daughter
Thoughtdrewwroteeraseddrewandwrotesome
with a pencil
next to me.

When she finished
she presented a neatly folded zine about
police brutality against
People of Color
to our minister.

She let me take a picture of it.

Here is what it said:

Don't hurt me

but sometimes cops are good
Just think about the world
 Whatisus Whoisthey Whatisthe world.
Why treat them like animals they're just a different color
and now allot of them are dead.
but we still bless everybody
but we're peaceful

Later she talked to me about the illustrations.
She asked,
 Do you know what that is?
 It is someone kissing the coffin. Cause it's probably her dad
She showed me the picture
of the man and the whip
like a black and white photograph we had seen in a book
 It's too much scars. So it turned all black.
She said
explaining that she had drawn
scaruponscaruponscaruponscaruponscaruponscaruponscaruponscar

My daughter took action in a setting and medium of her choice. My daughter's second and third grade classrooms were not places where she felt empowered to discuss political topics. At times, she wondered aloud if her teacher "voted for Trump." Further, she dislikes being the center of attention and would likely feel very uncomfortable with a singular and public protest like the one my son enacted. My daughter assessed the social and cultural aspects of different contexts, including how race and racism is perceived in those contexts, and decided to take political action around the Black Lives Matter movement on September 8, 2018 with the creation of a zine at Zine Con. A zine, "loosely defined as a self-published magazine" (Stoddart & Kiser, 2013, p. 191) is understood to be "a direct and unfiltered view of an individual's interpretation of and participation in the culture that surrounds him or her" (p. 193). The Zine Con is an annual conference where zine-makers gather to show, swap, and sell their artistic and often political work. The 2018 Zine Con took place on my university's campus, and a former student of mine lead a workshop on zine

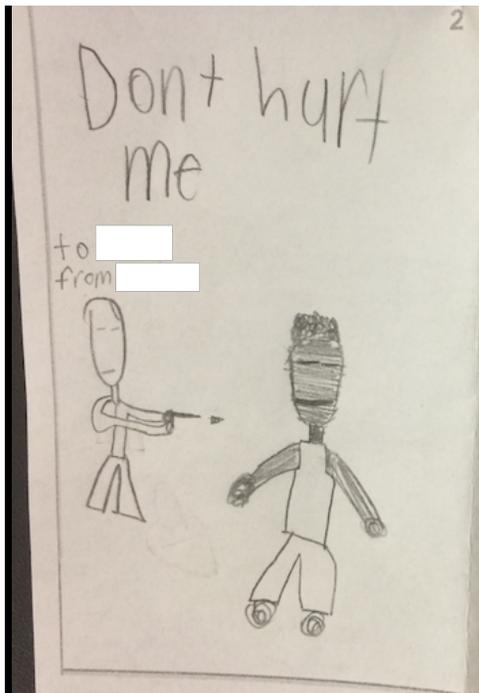
making for children. Before attending our first workshop, we perused booths where people displayed zines used to make political statements on issues such as police brutality, feminism, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (LGBTQ) issues. The first zine my daughter made at the conference was in the child-focused session. She did not take up political issues in this first zine, perhaps because she was just becoming familiar with the genre or perhaps because the context was not one where political action was expected of an eight-year-old child. However, when we entered the Zine Con session on social justice and found our minister to be the session leader, my daughter sat quietly and created a zine about police brutality toward Black people. She selected a receptive audience for her zine, our minister with whom my daughter has a special relationship and knows to be a social justice activist due to her interactions with her at church and at the Poor People's Campaign action on June 18, 2018.

In order to construct the zine, my daughter juxtaposed multiple understandings of race and racism across the eight-page zine. The zine takes on philosophical and educational tones. It seems to serve both as an outlet for her to puzzle through what she has learned about police brutality against Black people and a pamphlet to express her understanding of the topic to others. She writes in questions to the reader, which are most assuredly questions she has asked herself, indicating that she wants the reader to spend some time thinking about this divisive political debate regarding race. The questions she poses are as follows: "What is us? Who is they? What is the world?" (see Figure 5.8, p. 4) and "Why treat them like animals?" (see Figure 5.9, p. 5). The concept that Black people have been treated like animals by white people is one that has puzzled my daughter over many years. In her zine, she included an illustration of a white person shooting a gun at a Black person alongside an illustration of a

man with a scarred back next to a whip, similar to a photograph of an enslaved man we saw in a nonfiction book. This juxtaposition seems to be an examination of the connections between the past and the present; the enslavement of Africans by white people and white police brutality against Black men.

She acknowledged, and perhaps worked through for herself, the divisiveness of the issue by drawing a picture of a white person shooting a gun at a Black person on one page and writing, “But sometimes cops are good,” on another page. This action of creating a zine that contained such contrasts reflects Freire’s (1970) assertion, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72). By creating this zine, she took images from the larger culture and put them together in new ways, exhibiting confusion, an attempt to make sense, and a willful hope. Notably, she demonstrated her understanding of divisive racial politics as an ethical and spiritual matter through poetic language and the creation of the zine for her minister. The following poetic language seems to depict an understanding of the seriousness of the topic while also serving as a medium for her to wrestle with her own confusion around the topic, “Just think about the world. What is us? Who is they? What is the world?” (see Figure 5.8). She uses outright religious language on page five when she writes, “But we still bless everybody” (see Figure 5.9). My daughter’s use of religious language and choice of audience reflect the moral and spiritual imperative “to save the soul of America,” the motto of the 1957 Southern Christian Leadership Conference whose stated goal was racial and socioeconomic equity (King, 1967a, p. 83). She encountered discourses that connect racial equity with religious morals at the National Civil Right Museum, at our church, and in home conversations

The eight-page zine is a cultural tool that allowed my daughter to gather multiple conceptions about race and racism in one text. In the physical and cultural space of the Zine Con and in the presence of our minister, she used the zine format to wrestle with her own questions and present them to a trusted adult. The images and language in the zine echo with memories of the home and church curriculum including photographs from a nonfiction book about the Black experience in America, images of Black children attending a parent's funeral, a discussions about police officers including a family friend, talk about People of Color being treated like animals, and philosophical and religious language used at church.



*Figure 5.6 My Daughter's Zine Page 1
"Don't hurt me. To: [our minister] From: [my daughter]"*

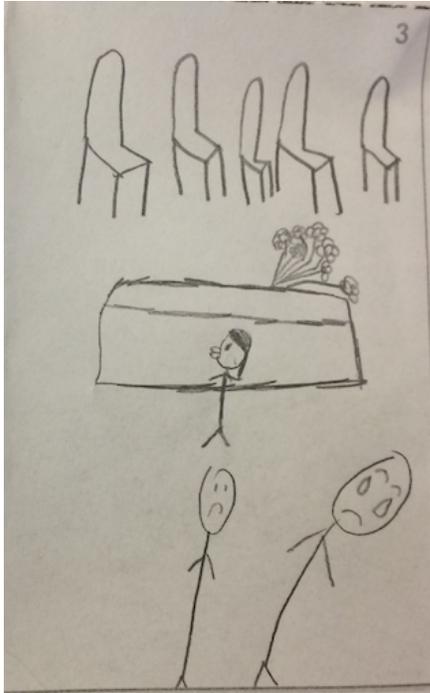


Figure 5.7 My Daughter's Zine Page 2

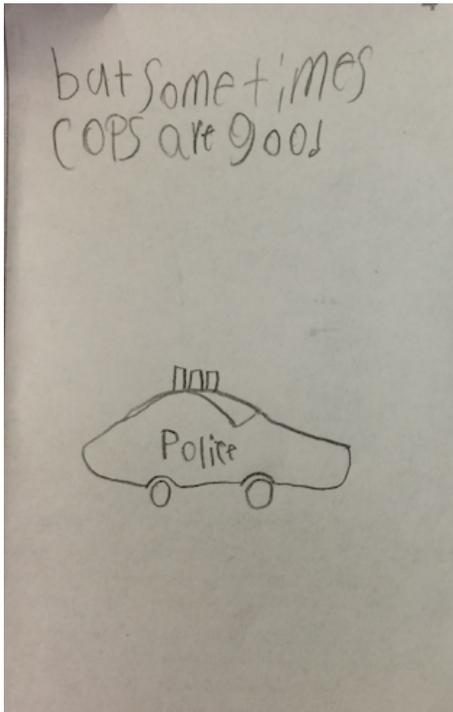


Figure 5.8 My Daughter's Zine Page 3
"But sometimes cops are good."

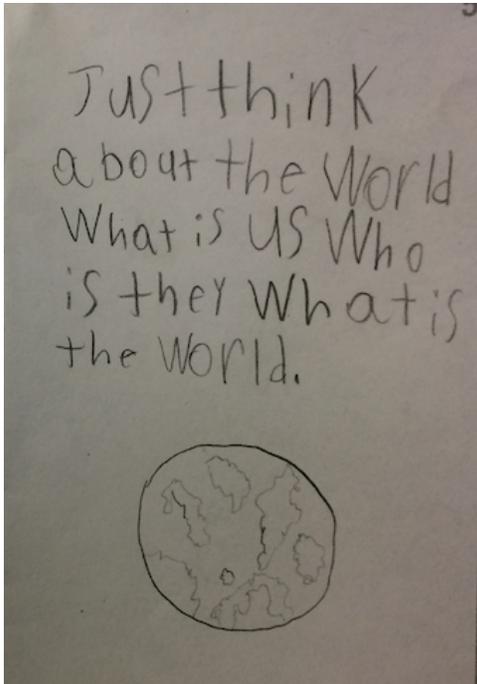


Figure 5.9 My Daughter's Zine Page 4

"Just think about the world. What is us? Who is they? What is the world?"

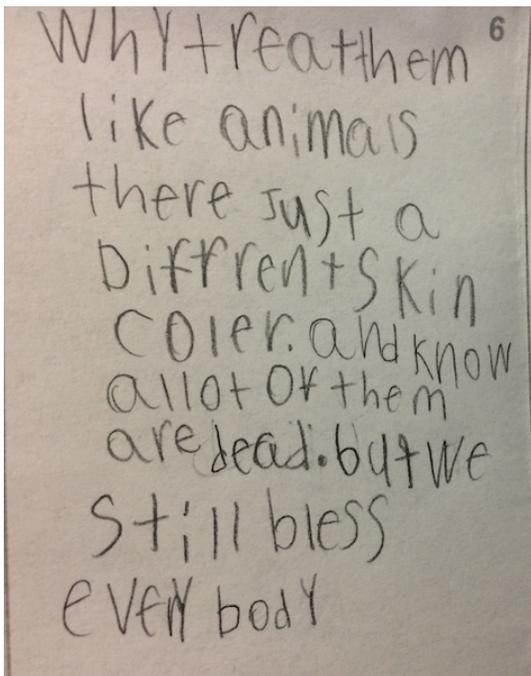


Figure 5.10 My Daughter's Zine Page 5

"Why treat them like animals? They're just a different skin color. And now a lot of them are dead. But we still bless everybody."



Figure 5.11 My Daughter's Zine Page 6

My daughter described this page as follows, "It's too much scars [from whippings]. So [his back] turned all black."

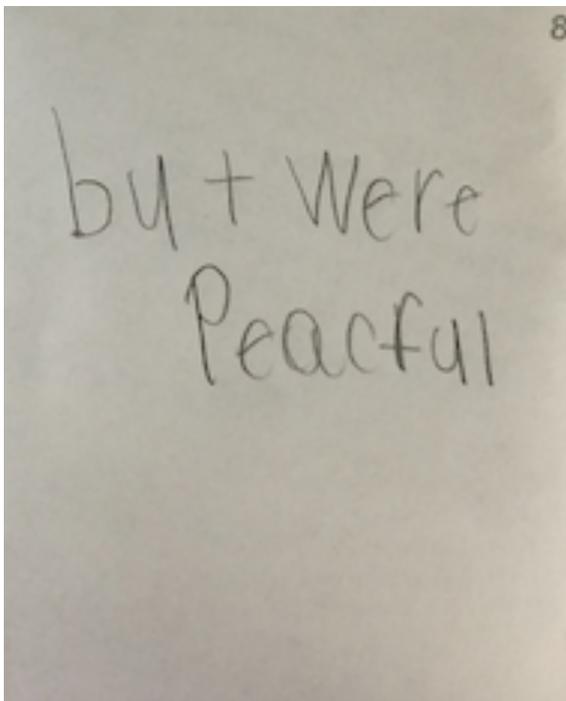


Figure 5.12 My Daughter's Zine Page 7

"But we're peaceful."

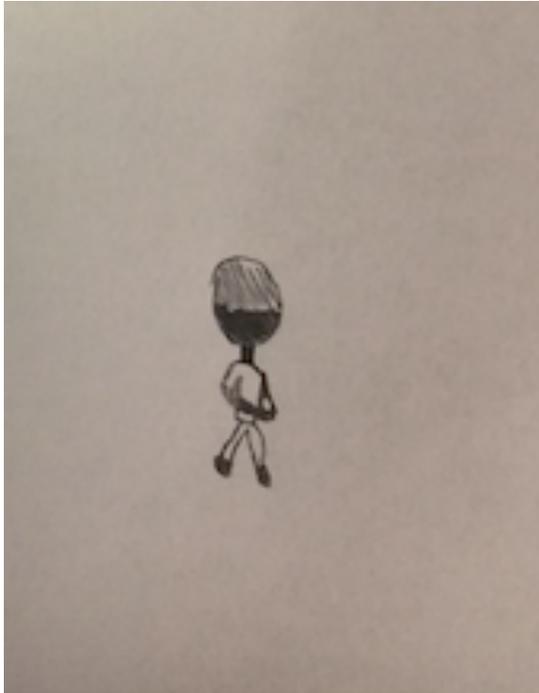


Figure 5.13 My Daughter's Zine Page 8

While political protest is a cultural tool that typically positions one group as good and one group as bad, the eight-page zine format my daughter used allowed for more nuance. Over the eight pages of the zine, she brought together several understandings of the political nature of race. She clearly illustrates an understanding that race is a deadly source of oppression of people of Color by white people in the past and present. She reduces race to skin color to point out the ridiculousness of notions white supremacy with her statement, “Why treat them like animals they’re just another skin color.” In this statement she is once again grappling with the notion that human enslavement was justified by dehumanizing people with dark skin, a notion she found preposterous throughout the study. (Sadly, this sentiment is made startlingly new and blatant in the current political context in which President Donald Trump has repeatedly likened immigrants to animals.) She also appears to be working out how there can be good white police officers and bad white police officers,

which may contribute to her own antiracist white identity development. Finally, her zine employs religious language throughout and was written for her minister. This signals an understanding that racial justice is a moral issue.

Imagining the Practical Possibilities

My children constructed and expressed understandings of race using the cultural tools available to them in their home and community and in particular the ones I was trying to provide them with as I tried to implement an antiracist home curriculum. These efforts contributed to “their distinctive personalities—[as] developed in personal and interpersonal experimentation with the tools provided to them” (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001, p. 20). They utilized language, particularly race labels and dangerous race words, metaphor, analogy, and political action as cultural tools in interactions with others including their parents, friends, religious leaders, and community members. These interactions often embodied critical literacy in that it “involved local action and imagination, interrogation of the ways things are, and design of how things might be otherwise” (Comber et al., 2001, p. 463). Our multiracial neighborhood and public school allowed my family to develop authentic relationships with Black people, which may have deepened my children’s understandings of their own race and the racial identity of people who are important to them. These relationships helped each member of my family “expand their own understanding of self, and to hold inclusive perspectives about others who differ in myriad social aspects or identities” (Carter, 2010, p. 1531). The study was situated in the United States, a nation marked by a history of white supremacy and a culture of color evasiveness (Annamma et al. 2017) and in the Midwest, where race is defined along a Black/white binary that serves to define people of Color who do not identify as Black according to their proximity to Blackness or whiteness, diminishing

their identities. Further, the study takes place during a time of political turmoil steeped in racism. Due to the cultural milieu of this time and context, my children came to understand race as a divisive political construct and a binary (Leonardo, 2013).

These findings are meant to illuminate how two white children learned about race in a particular political, geographical, and historical context in order to connect “the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). Other children learn about race using different cultural tools in interaction with different people and in the context of another time and geographic community; and they are likely to come up with different understandings. This is consistent with the nature of race as it is a social construct that “has been continually renewed over time with updated meanings even as the outdated meanings linger just under the surface” (Park, 2011, p. 389). As chapter 2 demonstrated, research is clear, children who spend time in families and schools where talk about race is avoided will still develop ideas about race, but those conceptions will likely lead to fear (Miller, 2015), pity (Miller, 2015), and ideologies of supremacy (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001) as well as a dysconsciousness (Freire, 1970; King, 1991) that “leaves no room for them to imagine practical possibilities for social change or their role as change agents” (King & Akua, 2012, p. 724).

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS

White children are often socialized in cultural contexts where adults do not talk about race overtly, but messages of fear, pity, and inferiority about People of Color are conveyed clearly through coded language, symbolism, and social norms (Bartoli et al., 2014; Miller, 2015; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Throughout the previous chapters of this dissertation, I have presented the ways in which my own white family attempted to interrogate whiteness and co-construct antiracist curriculum in the context of a multiracial community in a hyper-segregated city. Utilizing a critical sociocultural framework, I found that my children took up cultural tools for thinking such as race words, metaphor, analogy, and political action to understand race. Though my husband and I strove to engage in a mutual process of learning about race and racism, there were many times that we fumbled, stumbled, and fell flat on our faces. I have shared some of those moments as well and will continue to do so in this chapter, so that readers understand both the rich learnings and the pitfalls that occurred throughout the process of learning—both are equally important.

While my study is deeply specific to the members of my family and the contours of our local community, my intent is to help “theorize the complexities, intersections, politics, and nuances of identities as they play out in communicative contexts. . . [and] generate[] pedagogical and scholarly approaches” (Boylorn et al., 2013, p. 19) that can be applied and adapted in new contexts. While the antiracist curriculum we enacted is contextualized, imperfect, and ongoing, implications for antiracist curriculum building can be made. Thus, in this final chapter I outline implications for both home and school curricula and implications for further research.

Implications for Antiracist Home and School Curricula

Over the course of nearly four years, my family attempted to co-construct understandings of race and racism and “transform [our own] white identity from a cul-de-sac formation of endless oppressive histories into a productive, even positive, subjectivity” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 98). I guided this work as an attempt at ParentCrit, or critical race parenting (DePouw, 2018; DePouw & Matias, 2016; Matias, 2016; Nishi, 2018), which seeks to promote racial justice through home curricula. I do this work in recognition that “our own liberation as white people – our own humanity- is inextricably linked to racial justice” (SURJ KC, n.d.). In composing curriculum alongside my family, I utilized my developing understanding of critical race and critical whiteness theories as well as critical literacy and antiracist pedagogies.

In recognition that definitions of racial categories are ever-changing (Alim, 2016b; Leonardo, 2013) and the discourses and texts used to maintain white supremacy are constantly-evolving cultural tools (DePouw & Matias, 2016; Nash & Miller, 2015), I offer curricular guidelines rather than pedagogical strategies (DePouw, 2018). I advocate for an explicitly antiracist curriculum rather than a more general multicultural or anti-bias curriculum in recognition that “addressing issues of race and racism is central to any educational practice aimed at transforming the social order” (Escayg et al., p. 16). In this section I outline the following implications for antiracist curriculum development in homes, schools, and communities: ongoing teacher critical racial literacy development, open discussions of race to support emergent curriculum, critical literacy as a curricular lens, awareness of current political events to promote political literacy, accurate histories, and antiracist curriculum grounded in authentic relationships.

Ongoing Teacher/Parent Critical Racial Literacy Development

In recognition that the teacher/parent is the curriculum planner (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 13), when constructing antiracist curriculum, the person acting as teacher must invest in ongoing critical racial literacy development. Critical racial literacy is the ability of “parents and educators to recognize, refute, critique, and synthesize the structure of race in daily living, moving toward actions, curricula, communication, and restructuring of oppressive structures that allow us to realize equity” (Nash et al., 2018, p. 5). Critical racial literacy is achieved through deep and ongoing work including “writing and discussing racial memoirs” (Nash et al., 2018, p. 7), having honest conversations about race (Michael, 2015; Singleton, 2014), examining the Eurocratic practices that dominate public and educational spaces and *re-membering* an Afrocentric worldview (King & Swartz, 2016), and “stand up for social justice when everyone is standing and when no one else is” (Nishi, 2018, p. 21)

My experience as a white parent included work to “simultaneously check and dismantle [my own] whiteness and raise [my] children to combat whiteness in the world and in themselves” (Nishi, 2018, p. 7). For me, this meant reading literature on critical race theory, critical whiteness studies, and critical literacy. I am not recommending that every parent and teacher who wishes to enact antiracist curriculum conduct full literature reviews, but I do recommend joining groups who read and discuss literature written from this perspective. Community groups that have supported my own critical racial literacy include: The Urban League’s cross-racial discussion group, the local chapter of Standing up for Racial Justice (SURJ), The Poor People’s Campaign, and my church’s white supremacy teach-in committee. I take seriously Michael’s (2015) assertion that, “Talking about race is a skill that should be developed outside the classroom, not practiced on students” (Michael,

2015, p. 84), and have found that participation in groups formed to do work around race supported the antiracist home curriculum. However, I also understand antiracist curriculum to be incredibly complicated and urgently needed. While it is important to be informed, we “can’t wait for a complete set of instructions” (Thomas, 2016, p. 6) on antiracist pedagogy. My own development as an antiracist curriculum planner is evident throughout this study. My development can be seen when the following two curricular enactments around dangerous race words are compared. On June 21, 2016 my husband stumbled over defining the word racist and I responded clumsily.

My Husband: Well to be racist means you’re mean to someone who is different from you. You are mean to someone because they are different. Not even mean, you treat them different-
Myself: You think about them differently.

In this example, my husband and I avoid talking about race and in the process Other People of Color. In contrast, after two more years of building critical racial literacy, on October 22, 2018 I composed antiracist curriculum around the N Word using critical multicultural children’s literature and more nuanced discourse around race words. I said the following to my son after we read *The N Bomb* by Latham and Waters (2018).

Some, some people, a lot of rappers take that word, and they wanna take that mean power away from it. And so what they do to take the power away from it, is they start using it. And instead of it being an /r/ at the end, it’s an /u/ at the end. Right? How he said, “But it had an *a* at the end, not an *-er*.” That’s what he said, right? You know what I’m talking about? (My son nods.) And um, and so they change it into this friendly word.

Open Discussions of Race to Support Emergent Curriculum

Not only do teachers and parents need to develop their critical racial literacy skills to improve their ability to plan and enact curriculum, we must also create spaces where children

feel comfortable bringing up topics of race. Antiracist curriculum should be emergent curriculum, because “discussing issues of power and privilege . . . should be done in a way that makes the information relevant to children” (Boutte et al., 2011, p. 338). In the face of color evasiveness as a pervasive white discourse norm, a home or classroom culture that supports open discussion of race is vital to carrying out an emergent antiracist curriculum.

Throughout the study, I sought to normalize talk about race by bringing up racial topics myself, leaning in to topics my children brought up, pointing out racial dynamics in everyday texts, and sharing my own experiences as a raced person. I brought up race through readings of critical multicultural children’s literature that fore fronted race and racism and that were authored by members of the racial/ethnic group being portrayed such as *Chocolate Me* and *Mixed Me* by Taye Diggs, and *Bessie Smith and the Night Riders* by Sue Stauffacher. I leaned in to discussions of race my children initiated such as on September 30, 2015 when my five-year-old daughter initiated the following exchange.

My Daughter: Annie is Black.
Myself: Annie’s Black? Why are you thinking about Annie?
My Daughter: We watched a movie of it.
Myself: And she switched parents?
My Daughter: No I mean, she is black.
Myself: What does that mean?
My Daughter: Wait, she is brown.
Myself: Yeah. Her skin is brown.
My Daughter: Mmhmm. Her whole body is.
Myself: Her body?
My Daughter: Well, all of her skin is brown. Not all of her body.
Myself: What part of her body are you thinking of?
My Daughter: Finger- (shyly) Fingers not brown.
Myself: What color do you think her fingers are?
My Daughter: White. Kind of.
Myself: You mean like the skin on her palms is a lighter color.
My Daughter: Mmhmm.

While I did not examine the social construct of race in this exchange, which would have supported my young daughter's critical racial literacy and which she may have indeed been seeking to understand with her use of the words Black and brown, I did engage in talk about skin color, a topic that many white parents shut down (Bartoli et al., 2016; Pahlke et al., 2012). I understand exchanges like this to support the deeper antiracist curriculum we engaged in later. Along with encouraging talk around racialized topics my children brought up, I also pointed out race in everyday texts including the Colin Kaepernick Nike ad and the movie *Son of God*, further normalizing talk about race. Finally, I shared my own experiences as white person seeking an antiracist white identify with my children in order to create an open culture of race talk. For example, on September 15, 2018, I talked to my children about my trepidations around wearing a Black Lives Matter shirt as a white person and on February 27, 2019 I shared that, "when I went to the conference last weekend, some people were like *why are you talking about this stuff when you're white.*" In these exchanges, I demonstrated a willingness to make myself vulnerable as a white person engaging in racial discourse knowing that I would not always *do it right*, and that I might sometimes be perceived unfavorably. I believe these moves to normalize race talk supported a culture of learning about race that made antiracist pedagogy possible. It was in this context that my children asked questions such as, "Is that racist?" and "Are you glad you're white?"

While I actively sought to create a home culture that welcomed conversations about race, there were times that my response to my children's prompts limited our conversations. At these times, my own white fragility, in particular fear that my children or I would be perceived as racist, and a lack of belief in the complexity of my children's understandings of race inhibited my capacity to enact antiracist curriculum. Pacini-Kethcabaw and Berikoff

(2008) posit, “Engaging in listening means examining and challenging our own perspectives on children’s subjectivities, questioning our biases and assumptions about children’s understanding of racialization, and interrogating the history of racisms” (p. 263). In particular, when my children made analogies between modern day events and slavery, my first response was to shut down their talk assuming it was inappropriate and incorrect and feeling embarrassed and worried that they might share their ideas with someone other than me. This initial reaction limited both their thinking and my own. However, antiracist curriculum-making is long-term work and the damage I did in those instances was not catastrophic.

Critical Literacy as a Curricular Lens

Along with cultivating an openness to talking about race, I infused our conversations with a critical literacy lens. The critical literacy framework offers tools and habits of mind for analyzing and transforming texts and discourses that perpetuate white supremacy. I understand critical literacy to be both the ability to deconstruct and reconstruct texts with a critical sociocultural understanding. The goal is to “create[] a learning environment in which stereotypical constructions are challenged through not only providing alternate images, but also thoughtfully discussing with children the origins of these symbols and the reasons for their creation” (Escayg et al., 2017, p. 16) and “at the same time combining and recombining these resources so as to create possibilities for transformation and reconstruction” (Janks, 2010, p. 25). My husband and I modeled these skills through conversations and actions such as in August and September of 2018 when neighbors hung a confederate flag in their window. We talked to our children about the confederate flag as a contested symbol that some understand to mean Southern heritage and freedom from government control and others

understand to be a symbol of racial oppression and hatred. I also responded by creating a new text: a heart flag, which I hung in our window.

My children demonstrated critical literacy throughout the study by analyzing, utilizing, and sometimes transforming texts as cultural tools to construct understanding and convey meaning. Their changing conceptions of God is one powerful example of reconstruction. Examples of deconstruction of texts include their readings of the HyVee Water ad on August 28, 2018 and the Colin Kaepernick Nike ad on September 14, 2018. When reading each of these ads, they pointed out that the texts were advertisements designed to convince people to spend money.

Awareness of Current Political Events to Promote Political Literacy

Recognizing “power and politics [are] embedded in racial discourse in the U.S.” (Beneke & Cheatham, 2019, p. 124), I assert it is impossible to implement antiracist pedagogy without a political literacy stance. Bentley and Souto Manning (2017) explain *political literacies* allow young children to read and effectively engage in the political world around them with a “commitment to transformation, to problematization, and to expansive meaning-making processes embedded in power-laden contexts” (p. 93). The political literacies curriculum is emergent; it “generates from, is centered on, and grows out of the interests, questions, and ideas of the children” (p. 93). While some may be surprised to learn that children are aware of the larger political world, my children brought up politicized current events throughout the three years and seven months of data collection. On January 20, 2017, my son said he had heard about President Trump building a wall and asked what it was. On August 17, 2017, after the Charlottesville protest at which Heather Heyer was killed by a neo-Nazi, my son said he had heard that someone got ran over by a car and wanted to

know how it happened. On July 28, 2017 my daughter said, “I know one bad thing. Police shot a Brown man for no reason and it made you cry.”

Noddings and Brooks (2016) posit *teaching controversial issues* is essential if “[o]ur object is to prepare students for active life in a participatory democracy” (p. 2). Further, Frantz Bentley and Souto Manning (2017) assert, “[N]ot acknowledging the role of the political world in the lives of the children was an abdication of responsibility on my part as a teacher. I was ignoring the realities I knew them to be facing” (p. 100). Through this study, I found that adding politicized current events to the curriculum resulted in deeper understandings of race and racism as social constructions associated with intersectional issues of power and political debate. These conceptions would be impossible if I would have shushed my children’s comments and questions about current events, believing they weren’t old enough to understand.

Accurate Histories

Corporate learning materials and popular media “legitimiza[] the accounts of powerful groups (e.g. white, upper class, male, abled) as the knowledge worth knowing” (King & Swartz, 2016, p. 66). At the same time, “voices of others are either omitted or misrepresented as a way of *mastering* or bringing them under control so that they can be marginally included without challenging the hegemony of standard school knowledge” (King & Swartz, 2016, p. 66). These texts perpetuate an uncritical habit of mind in teachers and students, allowing them to accept the status quo and leave dominant cultural narratives that perpetuate white supremacist thinking unquestioned. In the elementary and early childhood years in the United States, these master scripts typically center on three topics: Westward expansion of European colonizers and the effect on Indigenous Peoples, American chattel

slavery, and the Civil Rights Movement. Rather than an acknowledgement of the atrocities committed during these times and the lasting and racialized impact on our society, these events have been packaged as *national fables* (Theoharris, 2018). There is a need for historic events to be “told through the voices and actions of those who were present yet typically excluded in standard instructional materials” (King & Swartz, 2016, p. 45) moving these voices from “objects of the narrative” (p. 67) to subjects. Antiracist education requires “a more sober account of racial injustice in the United States, this history demands our political imagination and action” (Theoharris, 2018, p. 211).

My family participated in discourses of pity (Miller, 2015) and demonstrated misunderstandings as a result of miseducation around the African continent and the history of American enslavement of Africans. I attempted to supplement this education, (see Table 5.2.), but even though some of the curriculum I presented may have been effective, some of it was not, and clearly more work needs to be done. I offer the recommendations in Table 6.1 for my own family in the hope that they will also be helpful to others.

Table 6.1 *Recommendations for Accurate History Curriculum*

Recommendations for Accurate History Curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Mark American holidays such as Thanksgiving, Columbus Day, and Martin Luther King Day by reading/viewing texts that depict accurate history from multiple perspectives.○ Seek out texts that center the voices of people who have been missing, marginalized, or misrepresented in traditional texts (e.g. Indigenous people, people from the African diaspora, Latinx people, refugees, etc.).○ As a curriculum planner, learn more about the history of the United States by reading, watching documentaries, and attending events.○ Read texts critically with children asking:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Whose point of view is being shared and whose voices are left out?○ How might this story be different if told by _____?○ How does this history affect people today?

Antiracist Curriculum Grounded in Authentic Relationships

The antiracist curriculum is a life-long education grounded in authentic relationships. My family’s friendships with People of Color humanized the curriculum and lead us to resist essentializing race. For example, having two close friends who identify as Black helped my son understand that some Black families are comfortable with the use of the N Word as a colloquial term and some are not. If he were to only get this information from me or from a book, he might conclude that people who use the N word have certain characteristics, especially since the word is considered to be so dangerous at school and at home. Indeed, “ongoing authentic relationships with people of colour has a strong impact on how White families think and talk about race and racism” (Bartoli et al., 2016, p. 130).

While numerous studies tout the benefits of cross-racial friendships (Bartoli et al., 2016; Carter, 2010; Kromidas, 2014; Pahlke et al., 2012; Pollock, 2004, Van Ausdale &

Feagin, 2011), it is important to recognize “ the forces that would have [white people] be friends with, be neighbors with, send [their] children to school with, and work primarily with White people” (Michael, 2015, p. 13). In the face of these sociocultural forces, adults, as curriculum planners, must actively seek out opportunities to develop authentic cross racial relationships for themselves and the children they parent/teach. See Table 6.2 for suggestions.

Table 6.2 *Developing Cross-Racial Relationships*

Developing Authentic Cross-Racial Relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Spend time in public spaces such as libraries and parks, and be ready to chat with the people you meet there.○ Enroll children in racially diverse activities, perhaps even in a different neighborhood if necessary.○ Reach out to people you connect with in the community. My family developed cross-racial friendships by arranging play dates and inviting families over for dinner as we got to know them better. My husband also makes new friends by recruiting players to his softball team.○ When choosing schools, seek out racial diversity.○ Join inter-racial discussion groups organized by libraries, religious organizations, or social justice organizations, and seek to know the people who attend on a personal level.○ Frequent businesses owned by People of Color and look for activities advertised there, but be aware when events are designed to be affinity spaces for People of Color.○ Remember that authentic relationships take time.○ Do not rely on People of Color to be experts on their race/ethnicity or racism in general. Become a member of a racial discussion group and do your own reading to learn about those topics.○ Be open-minded as you get to know people, remembering you likely operate on a Eurocratic logic.

Implications for Further Research

Along with implications for developing and implementing antiracist curriculum my study also points to implications for further research. The current body of literature on white racial socialization is somewhat small and quite limited in terms of methodology. I advocate for future studies of white racial socialization that employ long term ethnographic methodologies conducted by participant researchers. In addition, I encourage critical ethnographers to employ poetic juxtaposition in their analysis and presentation as a means to ethically and evocatively conduct research from a critical perspective.

Long Term Ethnographies Conducted by Participant Researchers

This study speaks to the power of long-term ethnographies conducted by participant researchers. The findings drawn from this study would be impossible to obtain in a short-term study or lab setting. This study demonstrates the sophistication of children's thinking including their ability to construct metaphor and analogy and carry out political action around complicated and abstract concepts. It would be impossible to come to these conclusions using a developmental theoretical framework or an experimental design. The critical sociocultural framework makes it so that "children's thoughts, feelings, and discussions can be seen within the context of a long history of socially constructed ideas that contribute to the injustices of racialization and marginalization" (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008, p. 263).

While this study demonstrates the ways in which my children took up cultural tools including context-specific discourses in this place and time, it is clear that other children will construct understandings of race that are particular to their contexts. Few studies "focus on young children's construction of understanding about race [and]. . . more attention is needed

on the ways younger children can likewise challenge racist practices” (Miller 2015, p. 139). Thus, further critical ethnographic studies of the ways in which children come to understand race are needed.

Poetic Juxtaposition as a Tool for Critical Ethnography

In this study, I employed a poetic inquiry strategy I call poetic juxtaposition. Like all poetic inquiry, poetic juxtaposition embodies analysis and presentation (Prendergast et al., 2009). In particular, poetic juxtaposition does this through the careful positioning of participant voices, field notes, memos, and text excerpts in order to both make meaning and share meaning. The poetic inquiry approach that I implement combines poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997) and poetic literature review (Prendergast, 2006) and adds found poetry from popular texts. I posit that this technique is especially appropriate for critical ethnography and autoethnography work that seeks to use “personal experience as a means of unpacking the larger cultural context wherein personal experience lies” (Potter, 2015, p. 1435). Poetic juxtaposition both illuminates my own experience and the voices of artists who articulate the subtleties of culture through music and literature. Most importantly, voices of critical scholars decenter the white voice and ground the data in critical theory. Poetic juxtaposition is an attempt to make visible the sociocultural ways in which the researcher makes sense of the world and the hegemonic norms that direct behavior and thinking, reflecting the theoretical framework of critical ethnographic work (Madison, 2012; Rogoff, 2003). The intent of poetic juxtaposition is to display the texts and data that have influenced researcher understanding alongside each other so that larger themes become apparent to the reader. This reflects Cahnmann-Taylor’s (2009) assertion that “we cannot separate the form of writing from the content of our research” (p. 16). I encourage other researchers to take up this

methodology to further develop techniques that “enhance our presentation of recorded data, building on previous transcription conventions to best represent the authenticity and dimensionality of an observed interaction” (Cahnman-Taylor, 2003, p. 18).

Hope is Braveness and Kindness

Through this critical autoethnographic study, I set out to explore the ways my own two white children constructed and expressed understandings of race through antiracist home curriculum we created together in the context of our multiracial Midwestern community. This work has been transformative for my family, and we hope that sharing our experiences will help other families and teachers enact antiracist curriculum in their settings. Through this work I have come to see my children as agentic and creative people actively developing their own antiracist white identities. While the antiracist curriculum we constructed is imperfect and ongoing, it contributes to the literature on antiracist pedagogy due to its emergent curriculum approach and long-term methodology. Standing in contrast to the literature on color evasiveness in the white home, this study may serve as a resource for white parents and teachers who wish to “think and plan within a context of reality rather than idealism” (Bell, 1992, p. 308). The dissertation is entitled *Is that racist?* and chapter 1 began with a story of trepidation around race talk. However, the journey of implementing antiracist home curriculum has also been one of courage and hope, one where my husband and I feel like we are doing something to combat the whiteness we come up against everyday. For this reason, I end with a poem of hope.

I know this rose will open.¹²⁰

We will make a way out of no way.¹²¹

We hold these truths to be self-evident.

We have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny.¹²²

Because hope is braveness

and kindness.¹²³

Because my daughter gives speeches

and speeches help people¹²⁴

Because my son doesn't think we should be doing the pledge

in a time like this¹²⁵

Because my husband said yes and I said yes.¹²⁶

I know this rose will open.

¹²⁰ From the Unitarian Universalist hymn *I Know This Rose Will Open*.

¹²¹ An African American expression used by our minister.

¹²² From Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech.

¹²³ From 10.22.2017 Poetic Memo.

¹²⁴ From 4.17.2017 Poetic Memo.

¹²⁵ From 5.25.2018 Poetic Transcription.

¹²⁶ From 6.19.2018 Poetic Memo.

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VITA

Rhianna Thomas has lived in Missouri her entire life and has been shaped by its natural beauty and social dynamics. Spending her early childhood in a low-income single parent home, Rhianna learned the value of hard work, education, and helping others from her mother. She first experienced classroom teaching in middle school when she began volunteering in a first grade summer school classroom. Rhianna decided to pursue elementary education at Avila University in Kansas City. During her baccalaureate studies, Rhianna taught at an early childhood center where she learned essential facets of early childhood education through professional development networks and mentorship. Upon completing her undergraduate degree and obtaining Missouri teacher certification, Rhianna set out to teach in low-income communities in order to work with children she perceived to have similar experiences to her own. Teaching first grade in the Kansas City context, Rhianna observed racial disparities in income and education. After her first year teaching first grade, she pursued a Masters degree in early childhood education at the University of Missouri Kansas City. The social justice mission of the university and critical perspectives of many faculty members affected her profoundly. Upon completion of her Masters degree, Rhianna had her first child and returned to the early childhood center where she had worked during her baccalaureate program.

In her new position as education coordinator and toddler teacher, Rhianna was tasked with designing the new infant toddler program at the center and facilitating staff professional development. In this role, Rhianna experienced child development, family collaboration, and teacher education in deep and meaningful ways. During this time, she gave birth to her second child. Both Rhianna's children attended the early childhood center with her until their

entrance into elementary school. During this time, Rhianna transitioned from teaching toddlers to teaching three to five year olds and began pursuing her doctorate degree in education.

During her doctoral education, Rhianna was hired as a research assistant and Instructor of Early Childhood Education. She supported program work to align the school's social justice mission with state and national accreditation requirements and taught child guidance and literacy courses in the program. Currently, Rhianna has been hired as Assistant Professor in the School of Teacher Preparation, Administration, and Leadership at New Mexico State University. She will work in the early childhood program teaching and researching critical pedagogy in early childhood education settings. Her family is preparing for a new adventure in this new cultural and geographic location.