

THESIS

LIKE FATHER, WHITE SON:  
EXPLORING THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFER OF WHITENESS AND WHITE  
SUPREMACY WITHIN A WHITE WORKING-CLASS FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIP

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## ABSTRACT

### LIKE FATHER, WHITE SON:

#### EXPLORING THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFER OF WHITENESS AND WHITE SUPREMACY WITHIN A WHITE WORKING-CLASS FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIP

Through the lens of a white working-class son's personal experience, this project examines how a white working-class father participated in the construction of his son's identity as white and white supremacist as a practice of fathering in the United States. This is accomplished through the autoethnographic exploration of personal narrative written by the son on being taught whiteness and white supremacy by his father over the course of his growing-up. This qualitative project employs racial formation theory as an overarching lens to consider white working-class fathering as a racial project. Emergent themes from this research include A (white) Man's Home is his Castle; Teaching the White Desire to Dominate; and Privileging and insulating white male relationship. Through this project's findings, the researcher hopes to suggest new ways for intervening in the unconscious and usually private reproduction of whiteness and white supremacy for white working-class males in the U.S.

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## DEDICATION

For my father, without whom neither this work nor I would exist and for being brave enough to let me tell our truth. For my mother, who loved and loves me by relentlessly keeping the door open for who I might be. For my sister, who made me a role model and then became mine. Lastly, for my mentor and friend May Fu, who set my poetry free, who introduced my head to my heart and showed me how to live a just and meaningful life.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It is time to move beyond the illusion that hate violence and extremism is merely a criminal crisis in America. It is also a political crisis. It has to be engaged politically. Just as there was a national movement against racial segregation in the 1960s, there now needs to be a national movement against hate violence in America. (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020)

On May 25th, 2020, George Floyd, a Black man, was killed by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin after being arrested for purchasing cigarettes with an allegedly counterfeit 20-dollar bill (Hill et al., 2020). Derek Chauvin was helped in killing George Floyd by officers Thomas Lane, J. Alexander Kueng and Tou Thao. Over the course of the next five nights, a five-mile stretch which included a Minneapolis Police Precinct was destroyed by Minneapolis residents responding to this most recent instance of racialized police violence (Stockman, 2020). In solidarity, Minneapolis' demand for justice and an end to state sanctioned racist police violence was echoed nationally and internationally with further protest and rioting (O'Keefe, 2020).

On May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Donald Trump, addressing governors throughout the country who he considered “weak” in their failure to suppress public unrest in their states, said the following:

Washington was under very good control, but we're going to have it under much more control . . . We're going to pull in thousands of people. . . We're going to clamp down very, very strong. . . You're making a mistake because you're making yourselves look like fools . . . You have to dominate, if you don't dominate you're wasting your time. They're going to run over you. You're going to look like a bunch of jerks. You have to dominate. . . [the violence] is coming from the radical left — you know it, everybody knows it — but it's also looters, and it's people that figure they can get free stuff by running into stores and running out with television sets. I saw it — a kid has a lot of stuff, he puts it in the back of a brand new car and drives off. You have every one of these guys on tape. Why aren't you prosecuting them? Now, the harder you are, the tougher you are, the less likely you're going to be hit. . . It's happened numerous times. And the only time it's successful is when you're weak. And most of you are weak. I will say this, what's going on in Los Angeles — I have a friend lives in Los Angeles — they say all the storefronts are gone . . . They're all broken and gone. The merchandise is gone. It's a shame. It didn't look as bad

to me — maybe it was the sunshine, I don't know. But in Los Angeles, the storefronts are gone. Philadelphia's a mess. What happened there is horrible. . . If you're weak and don't dominate your streets, they're going to stay with you until you finally do it. . . And you don't want it. Philadelphia, you'd better toughen up. Because what's going on in Philadelphia, like New York, is terrible. It's terrible. You'd better toughen — they'll never leave. I know you want to say, 'Oh, let's not call up the Guard, let's call up 200 people.' You've got a big National Guard out there that's ready to come in and fight like hell. I tell ya, the best, what they did in Minneapolis was incredible. . . We're shocked that you're not using the greatest resource . . . you've got to arrest these people. You've got to arrest these people — and you've got to charge them. . . And you can't do this deal where they get one week in jail. These are terrorists, these are terrorists, they're looking to do bad things to our country. They're Antifa and they're radical left. . . When they have bricks — you know they come armed with bricks. And they have bricks and rocks, big rocks, and they have other big things, and they throw them. You know, you're allowed to fight back, folks. You don't have to have a brick hit you in the face, and you don't do anything about it. You are allowed to fight back . . . if a brick is thrown at somebody, and it hits them, or maybe if it doesn't hit them, you're very tough, strong, powerful people are allowed to fight back against that guy. And very strongly and powerfully. (O'Keefe, 2020)

Donald Trump was technically addressing governors throughout the United States when he spoke the above words. However, it's naïve to believe that white supremacist, white nationalist, sexist and heterosexist Trump supporters who have been emboldened to violence by his rhetoric in the past won't hear his message loud and clear.

On November 21, 2016, two weeks after the election of Republican Candidate Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States, CNN published an article citing a statistic from the Southern Poverty Law Center stating they had documented over 700 cases of hate crimes in the days between November 8<sup>th</sup> and November 16<sup>th</sup> (Yan et al., 2016). Some of these cases include the following: the words “go home” being scratched into a Puerto Rican family’s vehicle in Massachusetts; a Muslim American Uber driver originally from Morocco being verbally assaulted by a passenger who told him, “Trump is president asshole, so you can kiss your visa goodbye, scumbag. They'll deport you soon, don't worry, you fucking terrorist”; Nazi-esque vandalism such as swastikas and the phrases “Make America White Again,” “Black Lives



Doesn't Matter And Neither Does Your Vote," "Heil Trump," and, "Whites Only," being spray painted across the walls of high schools, churches, Muslim prayer centers and in parks across the U.S.; a woman being threatened by a man in Michigan with a lighter who told her he would set her on fire if she didn't remove her hijab; a Muslim student being assaulted and robbed of her vehicle in San Diego; a Black doll being hung from a rod in New York; a series of anti-Semitic attacks on Jews in New York City and a transgender woman's car being spray-painted with swastikas and the words, "Fag Die HeShe," in Denver. Since 2016, the numbers of hate and white supremacist groups have increased as have the number of hate crimes in the U.S. (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020b).

This came as a shock to the liberal and progressive social circles I had become a part of during and after my undergraduate and graduate study in Ethnic Studies at Colorado State University. It seemed to be especially shocking because the election of Donald Trump followed the historical election and reelection of Barack Obama, the first Black and African-American President of the United States, a phenomenon so many liberals and progressives in the mainstream had taken as a signifier that deeply held beliefs about the supremacy of whiteness and inferiority of other racial groups lingered only in the hearts and minds of those aged and dying born 'back then, when things were different.'

### **Statement of the Issue**

The Southern Poverty Law Center is a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate in their quest to find justice for the most vulnerable of people living within the U.S. In March 2020 they released their annual report on, *The Year in Hate and Extremism 2019*. Now in the third year of the Trump presidency there has been a 55% increase in white nationalist hate groups since 2017 and a 43% increase in anti-LGBTQ hate groups in 2019 alone. It's important

to focus on the increasing numbers of white supremacy groups, the members who join them and the leaders who run them. However, in this thesis I am interested in focusing on how racism expressed specifically via white working-class males becomes institutionalized in our society, our communities, and deployed via our families. The issues of white supremacy are often framed in the mainstream media on the micro and meso levels where the rites of passage for white working-class males are obscured within family structures and framed as dysfunctional families or deranged individuals. I argue white supremacy is naturalized as a rite of passage for white working-class boys and what transpires between white fathers and their white sons isn't simply a family issue but a framework for deployment of gender, race and homophobic based violence that is normalized and then silenced in young men when in fact white supremacy is supported as it is taken up in families and permeates all aspects of society; the impacts experienced by everyone within the U.S. The father and son relationship is central as a site for the production of dominance in which racialized and gendered identities are reproduced and embedded within white supremacy discourse.

### **Positioning Myself in the Research**

I am a white 34-year-old heterosexual first-generation male college professional who was raised working-class. Today I work as a director of programs for youth in a non-profit organization and have been in various positions where I actively take up social justice agendas to promote equity and equality. I consider myself to be a white antiracist professional and community member. However, I was not raised to become one. How I was raised and thus came into my own racial, gender, and class identity will strike some as entirely normal and natural. For others, that process will be quite frightening. Some will see their own selves, families, fathers, and childhoods reflected in this project, while others will simply label my story diagnostic of

emotional and physical child abuse at the hands of an unstable and pathological father. I argue it is much more nuanced and complex than either of these perspectives. In a way, I argue that both of these perspectives apply but only if applied simultaneously.

I want to share in thorough and honest detail how I was taught to measure and position myself in relationship to other white men, my classmates, white women, and to practice domination of others in the world I was raised. My goal is to provide some understanding of that phenomena to the extent that I am able, but additionally and possibly more significantly, I aim to give scholars in Ethnic Studies who have previously not had access to the intimate inner-workings of white working-class father-son relationships as places and processes of the intergenerational transmission of white supremacy. I want to give this and these stories as objects of reflection and analysis to others so that they may apply their own deconstructive, theoretical, and experiential lenses to the task of increasing our capacity to undermine, resist, and intervene in white supremacy at levels and within spaces where we have struggled.

I, like many white working-class boys, experienced becoming socially, politically, and psychologically a white working-class man under the tutelage of my white working-class father as a painful baptism. However, this is relevant only to the extent that it informs the above-mentioned task. I neither intend nor desire to construct a position of victimhood for myself from which I am not accountable to challenging white supremacy in myself and the world. Furthermore, I neither intend nor desire to publicly reveal difficult truths in order to self-flagellate and absolve myself of my responsibilities as a heterosexual white cisgender man who has been unfairly privileged under white supremacist heteropatriarchal capitalism in the U.S. I intend and desire to participate in the elimination of white supremacy and its corresponding

structures and institutions by offering and revealing something of value in narrative form that is often kept private, silenced, made invisible, normalized, and naturalized.

I have traveled quite an ideological and ontological distance to arrive at the place where I am compelled and able to share what I share in this project. To be clear, I am mentally and emotionally OK now. I no longer feel the sort of pain and rage that is captured and expressed in this project. The narrative of my healing and transformation that picks up where the narratives in this project ends is something I plan to write. It is not captured here because it is not the focus of this project. I only mention it to establish that it has occurred. I experience adequate peace, joy, and love in my life now, mostly through the relationships I've cultivated while working against white supremacist heteropatriarchy in solidarity with those it targets for oppression, exploitation, and annihilation. But as indicated, it was not always so.

I attended elementary, middle, and high school with a young man of color whose real name I will not share but who I will call 'Jeremy.' Jeremy began bullying me in elementary school on the playground, basketball court, and soccer field. In middle school, he did the same and also took my lunch on occasion. Other students often joined in the bullying after identifying me as an easy target. For years I made no significant attempt to defend myself because I was afraid of Jeremy. However, I fantasized regularly about killing Jeremy. I had a folding knife with about a three-inch blade that looked as if it were made out of a deer antler that I tucked in my sock and took to school sometimes in order to stab Jeremy if he happened to attack me on a day I was feeling hopeless, afraid, and angry enough to spend the rest of my life in jail.

That day never came. One day while he was throwing a basketball at me, I noticed he was wearing the same clothes that he had worn the previous day. Instead of pulling my knife out and trying to stab Jeremy, I got the idea to exploit what I had noticed by extrapolating his

unwashed clothes towards every racist stereotype I could muster in front of other students. I accused Jeremy of and assaulted Jeremy for being poor, ugly, stupid, lazy, fatherless, and born of a crack-addicted mother. He began to cry, and the other students began to laugh at him. He walked off and never bullied me again. That day I actualized one of my first lessons about how to wield white racist masculinity, that to master my own victimization it would include mastery over victimizing racialized others. I was 13 years old.

Shocking. “Shocking” is the word I hear most among my liberal and progressive friends and colleagues to describe their reaction to what seems to them like a resurgence in white supremacist thinking in the U.S. beginning with the election of Donald Trump and continuing healthily onward through the possible reelection of Donald Trump in 2020. Many of them say they don’t believe it. Liberals claim they can’t believe it. It makes no sense to them. How could the country slip so seamlessly out of a post-racial consciousness and back into the 1950s, or perhaps the 1930s, after so much progress has been made in ending racism, sexism and homophobia in the U.S.?

I attended high school with a young white woman whose real name I will not share here but who I will call ‘Jessica.’ By the time I was a sophomore in high school I had become very adept at exploiting students’ insecurities in order to assert my psychological dominance because I could. I was particularly motivated to do so since I was still small and unable to physically dominate most male students. One day, while standing in a group during passing period, Jessica made a relatively insignificant joke about my being “short” in front of the other students in the circle. Of course, the other students laughed and joined along in exploiting this insecurity of mine, as many of us experience in the high school milieu. I was humiliated and furious but remained silent in the moment as I knew I was outnumbered. I was 15 years old.

Jessica was known for being quiet and shy and was beginning to make new friends amongst one of the groups who I had begun to think of as my “friends.” In 2002, I waited for an opportunity to approach Jessica when she was alone that afternoon and very sincerely attempted to convince her that her new friends didn’t really like her, that they were nice to her to her face because they felt sorry for her, and, in reality, harbored a secret desire for her to kill herself (which they shared with me because I was one of their ‘real’ friends”). I then did my best to encourage her to kill herself for the sake of everyone. She did not kill herself but did withdraw from the group and avoided me for several years. I was 16 years old.

Crazy. “Crazy” is the word I hear most among my liberal and progressive friends and colleagues to describe the most recently famous lone gunman who has just opened fire at a church or school. Alongside the resurgence of white supremacist hate crimes and surge in membership of white supremacist online chatrooms and clubs has been a steady rise in the rate of acts of mass violence committed disproportionately by white men. Until recently, the mainstream discourse framed this phenomenon predominantly as a gun-control issue or mental health crisis in the U.S. It was as if all of a sudden “psychos” and “nut-jobs” began crawling out of the woodwork and carrying out nonsensical acts of terror and violence. Senseless violence. “Senseless violence” is the phrase one of my closest friends and colleagues used to describe the rise in acts of mass violence and domestic terrorism perpetrated by working-class white men. People also said this of the Holocaust yet as Bauman points out, “We suspect (even if we refuse to admit it) that the Holocaust could merely have uncovered another face of the same modern society whose other, more familiar face we so admire. And that the two faces are perfectly comfortably attached to the same body” (Bauman, 2000, p. 7).

In the fourth grade, I began fantasizing about killing myself, several of my peers, or both. I was 9 years old. In the eighth grade, I found the combination to my father's gun safe in one of my mother's dresser drawers and used it to access his guns and knives. I pulled out handguns mostly because I was strong enough to hold them up and could practice concealing them under my clothes in order to bring them to school. I imagined my enemies before me and slashed at them with knives, fired at them with the unloaded guns. I was 13 years old.

I've remained relatively quiet in my social and professional circles about my thoughts on the aforementioned explosion of "senseless violence," the burgeoning number of "crazy" people, "nut-jobs" and "psychos" out there engaging in mass shootings and other forms of domestic terror, the recent uptick in instances of hate crime, and the growing group membership of white supremacist and nationalist clubs during and following the election of Donald Trump. I've remained relatively unsurprised about the growing "shocking" forms of racism and sexism that seem so difficult for those in my social and professional circles to comprehend since it has been more than 50 years since the Civil Rights Movement. And, I've grown more and more morally conflicted as I've remained relatively quiet, as I've withheld my own past behavior, true thoughts and feelings regarding the broader multilayers of structural subordination and power and how it implicates millions of white men particularly my grandfather, my father and me.

I am now known to the people in my life as a strong and steadfast anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-heterosexist ally, someone who practices their progressive politics in both their work and in their personal life, someone active in their community working to secure meaningful and liberatory education and adequate and secure housing for those who've been denied it under race and class oppression, who commits their time and labor to social justice and working to transform the culture of domination so firmly rooted in the U.S. But this has not always been

true. The truth is, I am not shocked nor surprised by the violence we're seeing. To me, the violence is not senseless because it maps onto the logics of elimination theorized in settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006) and the three pillars of white supremacy (Smith, 2016). The violence is appalling, but it follows a logic of white supremacy (Ferber, 1998) that promotes dominance and those are feelings that I'm familiar with. It follows a logic of superiority (Drouin-Gagné, 2019; DuBois, 1920) and starts with ideas of entitlement I acquired from my father and that he acquired from his father over the course of growing up that gets deployed via the rite of passage into whiteness that I experienced throughout my childhood, adolescent and adulthood.

It is 66 degrees in my home right now and I am sweating. The thought of sharing what I have just written above scares me. I wonder if it will cost me social and professional relationships that are now integral to my identity and everyday life. I fear it may put my career at risk or be used against me down the road in some hypothetical custody hearing. I worry I'll be excluded from liberal and progressive social circles, events and activities I enjoy and feel safe in. But what I fear more is that what we'll collectively *catastrophically* underestimate the extent to which this recent phenomenon of violence emerges from cultural normativity as a hallmark of whiteness and white supremacy embedded deeply within the socio-political structure in the U.S.

Friends I still have from childhood perceive my family and myself to be "normal". Few would consider the lessons my father taught me as a growing boy to be anything other than normal. We have never been lumped in with the "pathological" or "crazy" people, "nut-jobs" or "psychos." But, I as a boy entertained the thought, a desire, a fantasy to kill classmates who offended me, like Jeremy. I wanted Jessica and so many others to die, so that my own pain would end. Overwhelmingly, I blamed women and people of color for my suffering and feelings of inadequacy. I did not open fire on my classmates, but I must entertain the possibility that I



could have. I did not grow to join a white supremacist or white nationalist hate group, but I might have were it not for a series of interventions that are for capturing and analyzing in another project. I don't believe my father intended to raise me towards a capability of white supremacist violence, and I don't believe he understood his father to have raised him towards it either. Nevertheless, this is the radicalized indoctrination we both received, a framework where father to son deploys a white supremacist ideology for violence. And, I think it has ended up this way for countless white boys past and present, maybe to varying degrees for most. And I understand the experiences I am describing seem raw and more shocking as I describe white supremacy indoctrination for working-class fathers and sons in urban landscapes. However, working-class stereotypes have a distinct way of obscuring and rationalizing how whiteness and white supremacy is deployed by the more educated and wealthier white fathers and their sons. Just look to the NY times this week, or social media to consider the behaviors, policies, tweets, comments exhibited unapologetically by our current president, Donald Trump. And so, I feel responsible for exploring *how* it happens right under the noses of everyone, *how* white fathers raise their sons towards white supremacy without seeming to know that's what they're doing and furthermore for not taking responsibility for their implication in white supremacist violence. By making visible what occurred in my own family I seek to provide a theoretical mapping of the racialized, gendered and homophobic practices that occurred within this father/son relationship and to provide a pathway that leads out of this violence.

My hope is that if we can understand so called "normative" practices for fathering in white families through a lens that reveals the dangerous problematics and potential of increasingly violent outcomes that we can begin to imagine new ways of intervening in white supremacist violence by intervening in the production of white supremacists by their fathers. I

set out to do this research beginning with the question: How do white working-class fathers transmit whiteness and white supremacy to their sons?

To answer this question, this project is broken up into four primary chapters: (1) Literature Review; (2) Methodology Chapter; (3) Findings Chapter; and (4) Discussion Chapter. Following this introduction, this project examines academic literature on topics relevant to the emergence and theoretical framing of this project. The topics considered and discussed include racial formation/racialization, construction of whiteness, and white working-class masculinity. Next, Chapter Three begins with a general framework discussing theoretical elements of autoethnography as a methodology, and then explores particular strategies utilized in this project. Also, Chapter Three explains how the strategies are used in reference to the data collection of this project. Then, a characterization of the analytical approach to the data is offered, concluding with a discussion of the limitations of strategies, data, and analysis. Chapter Four presents the findings of this project. It presents both the data and the analysis of the data into themes and is organized in two sections. The first section is strictly data and includes five autoethnographic personal narratives written by the author, researcher, and white son of a white working-class father. Following the five personal narratives, the second section of Chapter Four provides the data analysis of this project's data via themes found to be emergent in the self-reflexive analysis and coding of the personal narratives as data. Finally, Chapter Five situates the findings within a discussion of the theoretical framework and literature reviewed for this project and recommends future research along with potential strategies for making use of the knowledge produced in this project to intervene in white supremacy now.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines academic literature on topics relevant to the emergence and theoretical framing of this project. The theoretical framework considered and centered in this project is racial formation/racialization and includes other topics such as; construction of whiteness, and white working-class masculinity. These topics are organized as subsections of this chapter and outline both seminal and current literature to shape the context and significance of this project.

### **Racial Formation/Racialization**

This project employs racial formation theory as a theoretical lens for exploring dynamics within a white working-class father-son relationship. Therefore, it is necessary to overview racial formation both in its original conceptualization and through its relevant adaptations and transformations. As the purpose of this section is primarily to establish a theoretical framework for this project, it centers on the emergence and development of racial formation theory and does not delve deeply into the vast scope of literature that employs racial formation theory.

This section begins with a summary of racial formation theory as originally articulated within the field of Ethnic Studies by sociologists Omi and Winant (1986). Then, this section captures a pivotal shift in the application of racial formation theory initiated by the emergence of a field of intersectionality. Finally, this section summarizes a more contemporary re-articulation of racial formation theory and clarifies its utility for this project.

Racial formation, also referred to as racialization, is a concept and theory first articulated by Omi and Winant (1986) in their seminal text, *Racial Formation in the United States*. Omi and Winant's theory of racial formation challenged the historically determined, now scientifically

disproven, but still widely held (in mainstream society) belief that race is biologically real – that human beings are born with inherent pre-determined and fixed essential qualities of superiority and inferiority as members of one of the “naturally” distinct racial groups. Omi and Winant argue that, though superficial (phenotypic) similarities and differences can be observed in the human body, superficial similarities and differences only become significant through a process of racial formation, which they define as “the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings” ( p. 61). In other words, Omi and Winant posit that race is neither biologically predetermined nor fixed, rather race is constructed and fluid, in a constant state of formation, re-formation, and transformation.

Omi and Winant (1986) elaborate on their theory of racial formation by identifying the discursive spectrum in which racial formation occurs. They state that “the racial order is organized and enforced by the continuity and reciprocity between micro-level and macro-level social relations” (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 67). At the micro-level, Omi and Winant refer to “the ways in which we understand ourselves and interact with others, the structuring of our practical activity in work and family, as citizens and as thinkers” (p. 67). At the macro-level, Omi and Winant refer to collective social structures such as businesses, mass media and government along with dominant ideologies that include commonly held stereotypical and archetypal beliefs about the meaning of race, which they term the “racial common sense” (p. 106). That is, in the original articulation of the theory of racial formation, racial delineation and meaning are constantly, internally and externally, socially and politically constructed via both individual interaction and interaction with/in collective social structures in relationship with dominant cultural beliefs associated with phenotypic traits (skin color, hair texture, etc.).

In an effort to develop our collective understanding of race as social and political construct and as individual and collective process, Omi and Winant (1986) called on researchers and scholars throughout academia to apply racial formation theory by adopting their theoretical notion of a “racial formation perspective” in the analysis of “racial projects” needed to explain "an autonomous field of social conflict, political organizations, and cultural/ideological meaning" (p. 48). Their call was answered by researchers and scholars across many fields which advanced our collective understanding of race and racism in important ways.

Researchers and scholars continued to use racial formation theory to develop a more nuanced understanding of race and racism in the U.S., racial formation theory encountered problems revealing shortcomings in Omi and Winant’s original articulation. Most notably, the development of a field of intersectionality catalyzed in the 80s by feminists of color Moraga, Anzaldua, Hill Collins, Smith, hooks, and Lourde among others expanded theoretical articulations of race in addition to other identities and social locations. Crenshaw specifically concretized the importance of analyzing racial projects through a multidimensional lens (Crenshaw, 1989).

In her groundbreaking article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” Crenshaw (1989) “. . . contrast[s] the multidimensionality of Black women's experience with the single-axis analysis [on the basis of race *or* sex] that distorts these experiences” in order to argue that “. . . this single-axis framework erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination” (pp. 139-140). In other words, Crenshaw outlines the ways race and sex fundamentally intertwine experientially, ideologically, and institutionally and that failing to analytically deal with them as

such erases racial experience and distorts understandings of race and racism along with sex and sexism. Furthermore, Crenshaw (1991) in *Mapping the Margins* develops intersectionality theory to include both structural and political intersectionality. Here she provides a way to make visible structural intersectionality in which intersecting systems form multilayers of subordination that limit the most marginalized of women access to resources and in political intersectionality she seeks to uncover intragroup differences within marginalized communities when people hold multiple intragroup political differences and are then marked by belonging to multiple marginalized groups.

Though Crenshaw (1989) originally focused her analysis at the intersection of race and gender, she along with additional researchers, scholars, writers, and thinkers expanded intersectionality as a theory and method to include ethnicity, social class, sexuality, ability, spiritual practice, nationhood, citizenship status and other forms of social and political identity, all of which work to locate individuals in what Hill Collins (2009) terms the “matrix of domination”. Furthermore, works written prior to Crenshaw’s coining of the term “intersectionality” which took an intersectional analytical disposition, but had previously been rejected as legitimate scholarship by the white academy, were incorporated under the umbrella of intersectionality as well (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). Intersectionality is considered multidimensional as it serves as theory, paradigm, framework, method, a perspective and a lens for analysis (Hulko, 2009). Mostly, intersectionality is used by women and scholars of color to center and analyze marginalized gender and racial identity. However, Carbado (2013) points out the importance of thinking intersectionally about maleness and whiteness by identifying the pitfalls of not doing so in *Colorblind Intersectionality*. Carbado (2013) states:

. . . it is erroneous to conceptualize intersectionality as a theory whose exclusive focus is the intersection of race (read: nonwhite) and gender (read: nonmale).

Moreover, there are significant costs to doing so. Framing intersectionality as only about women of color gives masculinity, whiteness, and maleness an intersectional pass. That, in turn, leaves colorblind intersectionality and gender-blind intersectionality unnamed and uninterrogated, further naturalizing white male heterosexuality as the normative baseline against which the rest of us are intersectionally differentiated. (p. 841)

Heeding the call for a more complex approach to theorizing social identity and politics, Omi and Winant (1994) complicate their theory of racial formation to include an analysis of class and gender in *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*. Before doing so, they re-articulate their theory in such a way that is worth quoting at length:

To summarize the argument so far: the theory of racial formation suggests that society is suffused with racial projects, large and small, to which all are subjected. This racial “subjection” is quintessentially ideological. Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of her own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation. Thus, are we inserted in a comprehensively racialized social structure. Race becomes “common sense”—a way of comprehending, explaining, and acting in the world. (p. 60)

Additionally, Omi and Winant (1994) move to plant their theory of racial formation against the backdrop of racial dictatorship coercively established in the U.S. during colonial conquest and maintained contemporarily through varying degrees of coercion and consent within a realm of racial hegemony. They travel racial formation through religious, scientific and political temporal periods to emphasize its ever-changing nature and argue that any racial project must, because race and racism exist in a transient state, necessarily be historically situated.

Finally, Omi and Winant (1994) account for problematics of their theory revealed by intersectionality by now stating that, “. . . it is crucial to emphasize that race, class, and gender, are not fixed and discrete categories, and that such “regions” are by no means autonomous. They overlap, intersect, and fuse with each other in countless ways” (p.68).

Since their re-articulation of racial formation theory in *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, Omi and Winant along with researchers in fields across academia have continued to practice racial formation theory by deploying a racial formation perspective to the task of capturing within racial projects the elusive understanding required for solving problems of race and racism in the U.S. and globally. However, for the purposes of this project, it is unnecessary to continue tracking the genealogy of racial formation theory as we have an adequate theoretical position from which to depart. To summarize and clarify, this project adopts the theoretical lens of racial formation in:

1. Avoiding both essentialist formulations of race that see race as biologically predetermined and objectively fixed along with formulations of race that see race entirely as a socially and politically constructed illusion to be transcended.
2. Analytically considering the relationship between the racial project explored in this undertaking at the micro-level of individual experience and its interaction with macro-level collective social structures and dominant ideology.
3. Historically situating this project against the backdrop of racial dictatorship and within the realm of racial hegemony.
4. Analyzing this racial project for implications and dynamics of class and gender.

### **Construction of Whiteness**

Because this project focuses specifically on the racial formation of whiteness, it is important to review and emphasize scholarship on whiteness through the lens of racial formation theory, or what is often discussed as the ‘construction of whiteness’ within the field of whiteness studies. Additionally, this section incorporates scholarship on whiteness that precedes but



significantly influences the emergence of a field of ‘whiteness studies.’ Finally, this section includes two notable texts on whiteness from within and related to the field of Ethnic Studies.

This section begins with the incorporation of scholarship on whiteness that precedes the emergence of a field of whiteness studies. Then, Frankenberg’s *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (1993) is reviewed as a critical text that embodies the discourse on the construction of whiteness in the era Omi and Winant developed racial formation theory. Finally, *The Construction of Whiteness: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Race Formation and the Meaning of White Identity* (2016), an anthology recently assembled by scholars within the field of whiteness studies provides us with our most contemporary understanding of the construction of whiteness.

In 1903, Famed historian and intellectual W.E.B. DuBois wrote the widely revered text *The Souls of Black Folk* in which he declared that globally, the greatest problem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be the problem of race and the “color line” (DuBois & Edwards, 2007, p. 3). His text poignantly and painfully captures the experiences of Black people under the colonial boot of white America and reveals the psychological turmoil caused by the double consciousness Black people were forced to engage the racialized world through.

Shortly thereafter in 1920, Dubois released a lesser-known autobiographical collection of essays, poems, and litanies titled *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. In this text, he penned a chapter sociologically decades ahead of its time titled, “The Souls of White Folk.” In “The Souls of White Folk,” DuBois (1920) outlines the ways whiteness is made as a “new religion” and as a “false ideal” by Europeans in and for their colonial conquest of the globe (pp. 31–34). He writes, “Slowly but surely white culture is evolving the theory that “darkies” are born beasts of burden for white folk” (DuBois, 1920, p. 41). Furthermore, he articulates the mechanisms

through which whiteness is made in declaring, “The supporting arguments grow and twist themselves in the mouth of merchant, scientist, soldier, traveler, writer and missionary: Darker peoples are dark in mind as well as in body; of dark, uncertain, and imperfect descent; of frailer, cheaper stuff; they are cowards in the face of mausers and maxims; they have no feelings, aspirations, and loves; they are fools, illogical idiots,—“half-devil and half-child” (DuBois, 1920, pp. 41–42).

In discussing whiteness as a “new religion,” “false ideal,” and “theory” developed and distributed “. . . in the mouth of merchant, scientist, soldier, traveler, writer and missionary . . .” DuBois describes whiteness as a social construction before the term emerges and alludes to its construction at both the micro-level of human interaction (merchant, soldier, traveler) and macro-level of collective social structure (scientist, writer, missionary) in ways that align with Omi and Winant’s theory of racial formation.

Additionally, DuBois (1920) observes three important elements of whiteness directly related to this project. He observes that whiteness is constructed as superior, or supreme, to the racialized “other” across the globe, that it manifests in the bodies of white people as a feeling of hatred towards the racialized “other,” and that its most powerful assertion of its own supremacy is via acts of violence, murder, and war. For example, in characterizing the “supporting arguments” of whiteness that hinge on the negative social construction of “darker people” as “imperfect,” “frail,” “cowards, and “fools,” he observes that not only is whiteness socially constructed, but it is constructed as superior or supreme to the “other” races (DuBois, 1920, pp. 42–43). That is, DuBois establishes the relationship between whiteness and white supremacy in describing whiteness *as* white supremacy. Speaking to the emotional expression of whiteness and white supremacy, DuBois (1920) proclaims, “On the pale, white faces . . . I see again and

again. . . a writing of human hatred, a deep and passionate hatred, vast by the very vagueness of its expressions” (p. 32). And finally, DuBois (1920) captures the violence of white supremacy in observing, “We have seen [white people] . . . city after city drunk and furious with ungovernable lust of blood; mad with murder, destroying, killing, and cursing; torturing human victims . . .” (p. 33).

DuBois was not the only intellectual of color to articulate whiteness and white supremacy as social and a political construct in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century prior to the emergence of a field of whiteness studies. He was joined by Black intellectuals such as William Monroe Trotter, Alaine Locke, Kelly Miller and numerous others in formulating theories of race and racism. However, institutional white supremacy within the field of academia largely dismissed and relegated these scholars to the margins of academic discourse until their contributions were called in by scholars in the field of whiteness studies such as David Roediger, Stephani Li, Veronica T. Watson, and others.

For the purposes of this project, it is not necessary to include the vast literature theorizing whiteness and white supremacy as social and political construction, only to give credit where credit is due, largely to Black and scholars of color who have been advancing theories of race and racism, whiteness and white supremacy since the early 1900s. To bridge the origin of theories of whiteness as social and political construct with the contemporary moment, this project reviews Frankenberg’s, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (1993) as it embodies the intersection of Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory and the social construction of whiteness.

The primary goal of Frankenburg’s (1993) text is to understand the ways race shapes white women’s lives viewing “. . . white women’s lives as sites both for the reproduction of

racism and challenges to it” (p. 1). Her project emerges in response to radical women of color feminists’ criticism of second-wave feminism as racist in both its false universalizing of predominantly white women’s experience within structures of gender domination along with its marginalization of women of color’s voices in the feminist movement generally. In an effort to resolve the dilemma of race and racism within mainstream feminism, Frankenberg coins the term “whiteness” to mark the racialization of white people whose racial identity at the time had been largely invisible, “unmarked” and “un-named,” (to themselves, not to people of color), enabling racial abstraction and unconsciousness to manifest as racist thinking and practice (p. 1). In other words, Frankenberg argues that race and racism are not only issues for the racialized “Other” to contend with, but that race and racism are issues that white people as racialized beings must also contend with and in order to do so must examine the ways their own lives and selves are racially formed/racialized or socially and politically constructed as white.

Frankenburg’s (1993) study of the social construction of whiteness begins at the intersection of two theoretical frameworks: feminist theory and racial formation theory. She continues a tradition of feminist scholarship by theorizing from the lived experiences of women. However, she departs from the white feminist tradition of theorizing predominantly white women’s experience via an analysis of gender in which race was made invisible by not only adding but naming and centering the experience and concurrent analysis of race as whiteness. In addition to continuing the feminist tradition of theorizing from women’s experiences, Frankenburg utilizes Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory to analyze for race, specifically whiteness, in her study.

Adhering to the tenets of racial formation theory, Frankenburg (1993) historically situates her project against the backdrop of European/Western imperialism globally and white

supremacist colonialism in the U.S. She traverses the “terrain of whiteness as material, cultural, and subjective location, exploring childhood, interracial relationships, discursive repertoires on race, and constructions of culture and identity” (p. 236). She finds ultimately that “whiteness changes over time and space and is no way a transhistorical essence,” that it is “a complexly constructed product of local, regional, and global relations, past and present.” However, though whiteness changes over time and space, Frankenberg affirms that it is “fundamentally asymmetrical . . .” and that it “. . . signals the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage” (pp. 236-237). She finds that the racial order is normalized and maintained through white experience, and that “attention to the construction of white “experience” is important, both to transform the meaning of whiteness and to transform the relations of race in general” (p. 242).

In the years since Frankenberg’s (1993) publication of *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction on Whiteness*, the research on the social construction of whiteness as racial formation has continued to grow. However, that growth has not been linear and was most prominent in the 1980s (Middleton et al., 2016). More recently, studies on the construction of whiteness have been integrated into other academic fields, becoming more intersectional and interdisciplinary over time. Therefore, a recently released anthology on the construction of whiteness titled, *The Construction of Whiteness: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Race Formation and the Meaning of White Identity* (2016), which captures the more interdisciplinary and intersectional contemporary state of academic understanding on whiteness is reviewed. Within this anthology, some pieces have clearer relevance to this project and so are given emphasis. This section begins with the work of social scientists Hughey (2016) and Bery (2016) who explore the shift from thinking about whiteness as an ideology of power and privilege

towards social invisibility and normality, along with post-slavery processes of the reproduction of white supremacy as white epistemology and ontology. Then, this section moves to Thompson's and Watson's (2016) discussion of whiteness as a form of trauma that affects and informs contemporary white culture. Finally, this section concludes with literary scholar Engles (2016) who explores the trope of white victimhood and the construction of white masculinity as emotionally reactionary before transitioning to the final section of this chapter on working-class white masculinity.

In his article, "Hegemonic Whiteness: From Structure and Agency to Identity Allegiance," Hughey (2016) explores the concept of hegemonic whiteness via an analysis of the Tuskegee Experiments, the use of racial code words, the production of white savior films, and narratives produced by members of both a white nationalist organization and a white anti-racism organization. He finds that "whites possess similar and shared definitions of an ideal white self that functions as an implicit ideal against which one's own worth, behavior, and ultimately one's identity are measured. . . [and that] [t]o successfully pursue this ideal, one must continually engage in inter- and intra-racial boundary work to demarcate both nonwhite "others" and specific "lesser" forms of whiteness" (Hughey, 2016, p. 228). In other words, though manifestations of whiteness vary contextually over time and space and in relation to gender, class, sexuality and other social elements, what remains constant is that a dominating white ideal is always constructed and presented for white people to comply with or strive towards. This white ideal is not usually described explicitly as whiteness but is instead presented as a collection of traits and values deemed moral and superior to 'other' traits and values which are neither directly nor inherently linked but are commonly associated with people of color.

In her article, “Making Whiteness in Reenactments of Slavery,” Bery (2016) investigates modern-day reenactments of slavery that take place mostly at slave plantation museums and revolutionary war museums throughout the southern U.S. as places and processes through which whiteness is made and re-made - or constructed. She finds that, rather than teaching white people about the horrors of slavery and bringing them to account for the “ghosts” of slavery that continue to haunt the present in the form of continued subjugation of Black people through white supremacist violence, reenactments of slavery enable white people to nostalgically delude themselves towards the comfortable belief that the era of chattel slavery in the U.S. was more or less a peaceful era of white benevolence. The amiable relationships depicted in the reenactments give modern-day white people something to practice and yearn for again in the present and future, recapitulating the fundamental co-constitutive relationship between white supremacy and the dehumanization, commodification, criminalization, enslavement, and killing of Black people perpetually forward across time and space. She suggests that one solution and alternative to the ways reenactments of slavery are practiced could be to incorporate critical Black narratives of slavery that make visible the brutality of slavery that white narratives of slavery obscure. This would force white people to reckon with their fundamentally violent origins in the present. No longer able to swallow themselves (ourselves) without the sugar dusting of delusion, the only way forward then leads away from white supremacy, not back into it yet again.

Thompson and Watson (2016) analyze whiteness through the lens of mental health and traumatic experience. Specifically, they consider Laura van Dernoot Lipsky’s 16 symptoms of trauma overexposure in individuals and find that normative white culture shows four symptoms which are particularly revealing: hypervigilance, a sense of persecution, diminished creativity, and dissociation (Thompson & Watson, 2016, pp. 231–237). In identifying expressions of

whiteness as evidence of trauma exposure, Thompson and Watson draw attention to the woundedness of white people, to the woundedness of those who practice or are complicit in racial and white supremacist violence. Ultimately, they believe that in order to intervene in the cycle of racial and white supremacist violence in the U.S. and in the world, white people must take on what they describe as a “white double consciousness,” which they describe in detail and are worth quoting at length:

An antidote for the trauma of whiteness is a critical white double consciousness; it is a spirit of atonement that seeks to acknowledge and recover that which has been lost to whiteness through violence and oppression. Thus, critical white double consciousness is a resistant subjectivity. It is one that demands a fuller, multi-voiced narrative of the past and present, which it then utilizes for honest self-reflection and accountability. It seeks out multiracial, multiethnic interactions as an antidote to the monologues of whiteness and learns the twin disciplines of silence and close listening as antiracist praxis. It commits itself to remaining fully present and vocal *witness* in the face of white lies, denial, and aggression. It retools liability and trauma into assets for coalition building and organizing across race and other socially constructed differences. Critical white double consciousness nurtures the spaces that make the personal and social transformation of whiteness possible. (Thompson & Watson, 2016, p. 249)

In his article, “About Schmidt’s Whiteness: The Emotional Landscapes of WASP Mentality,” Engles (2016) analyzes Louis Begley’s novel, *About Schmidt* (1996), focusing in on the book’s main character, Albert Schmidt, who self-identifies as a male WASP. Specifically, Engles (2016) observes Begley’s narrative portrait of elite white masculinity in crisis in the late twentieth century for its contrast with more common narratives of white masculinity in crisis, that contrast being its “expos[ure] [of] the emotional states commonly inculcated by the construction of whiteness . . . as reactionary, rather than justified” (p. 181). Engles finds Schmidt’s male whiteness, or white masculinity, composed of a perceived entitlement to property ownership in the form of housing, women, and people of color; his ability to demarcate his



superiority racially, ethnically and geographically via world traveling; his stunted emotional and spiritual development; and his repressed shame.

Before moving onto the section on white working-class masculinity, it is important to include two notable scholars who study whiteness within and in relationship to the field of Ethnic Studies. As mentioned, much of the work within the field of whiteness studies has been and has become increasingly interdisciplinary and has been carried out outside of the field of Ethnic Studies. However, because this project emerges from within Ethnic Studies and hopes to contribute something new of value to scholars in Ethnic Studies, Lipsitz's (2006) *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* and Irvin Painter's (2010) *The History of White People* are discussed.

Lipsitz (2006) contributed significantly to our understanding of the relationship between whiteness as identity and whiteness as material advantage and interest. Looking at the unearned benefits white people received in periods of economic restructuring and deindustrialization and within the realms of environmental policy, employment, education, and housing. Lipsitz was able to locate the material value of white skin. That is, he identifies that in the U.S. being born white actually has cash value that is leveraged towards the accumulation of wealth and economic mobility. Conversely, he identifies within these same periods and within those same realms, marginalized racial groups including Black, Latino, Asian American and Native American people are systematically blocked from asset accumulation, employment, education and housing. He discusses how legislation passed in the Civil Rights Movement has been unable to protect marginalized groups contemporarily as whiteness and white supremacy have been recoded and recentered as in U.S. mainstream culture. This means that in order to continue pursuing racial justice in the U.S. we must continue to identify whiteness, white privilege and white supremacy

as they adapt to fly under the radar of civil rights law and racial discourse. One way of doing that is to learn from and center the critiques of whiteness and white supremacy that have long-existed and continue to exist within the art and politics of the radical black tradition.

Irvin Painter (2010) contributes to our contemporary understanding of the racial formation of whiteness beginning in Europe previous to the colonization of the Americas. Painter establishes that for much of European history no concept of race existed. Rather, people were grouped and hierarchized on the basis of ethnicity and social class with the lowest social class being slaves who had become slaves through being conquered. As the idea of race developed in Europe it was mostly used to identify different European races which were deemed superior and inferior more so on the basis of culture than biology. This is important in understanding that race as biological whiteness did not exist until relatively recently and did not become popular until it was made so in the U.S.. Painter establishes that it is within the U.S. that the category of whiteness was enlarged to include previously excluded European ethnic groups via the passing of legislation such as the Naturalization Act of 1790 and movements in politics and science, namely the eugenics movement which pursued the belief the white people are biologically and genetically superior.

### **White Working-Class Masculinity**

As this project looks specifically at how whiteness and white supremacy are intergenerationally transferred from white father to white son within a white working-class family, it is necessary to review seminal and contemporary literature on white working-class masculinity. This subsection includes a review Roediger's (2007) *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* as a seminal text within the field of Whiteness studies that deals with the formation of white working-class male identity and Kimmel's (2013)

text, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the end of an Era* as it exemplifies the contemporary discourse on white working-class masculinity.

Roediger (2007) first published *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* in 1991. This text is often considered to have established the field of whiteness studies which means it might have made sense to include earlier in this literature review. However, it is included here instead because it informs our understanding of how whiteness as a social construct emerged in the U.S. and was fused with economic class to form white workingmen's socio-economic status and identity apart from white elites and poor people of color, particularly Black people owned and exploited under chattel slavery.

Roediger focuses most explicitly on the intersection of race and class and only limitedly discusses sex and gender. However, as his theory develops from an analysis of racial supremacy among laborers at a time when labor was largely segregated on the basis of sex and when women were largely excluded from participating in "men's" work, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* is significantly a text on the formation of white working-class masculinity.

An important question that Roediger is concerned with is why there has never historically been much class solidarity between working-class white and Black people. It seems logical that at some point working-class people would band together against those who oppress and exploit them. The reason he puts forth for the white working class' refusal to join in solidarity with the working class of other racialized groups builds upon W.E.B. DuBois' theory on the 'wages of whiteness' and is described by Roediger as the 'psychological wage of whiteness.' Essentially, Roediger argues that the white working-class, which had previously identified in terms of European ethnicity, found refuge in whiteness from their fears of falling to the bottom of social

hierarchy in the US alongside Black people owned and exploited as slaves, a fear that had been conjured by the white elite to stave off class revolt. In order to continue economically exploiting white workingmen, whiteness became useful as a symbolic wage deemed adequate enough by white workingmen to accept their lot and ‘middle position,’ as Roediger calls it, between the white elite and poor Black people. This means that racial animosity towards Black people fundamentally constitutes white working-class masculinity.

Kimmel’s (2013) text is explicitly about white masculinity and focuses on working and lower-middle-class white men. Kimmel’s text includes his personal experience; its scope is broader in that it explores white men’s identity as individuals and as members of raced, gendered, and classed communities.

Kimmel’s (2013) text explores white men’s anger through the question, “[w]ith whom are they angry? Why? And why now?” (p. 9). His question addresses white men becoming angry, but we learn that their becoming angry is inextricable from their becoming socially and psychologically white men. Kimmel begins by demonstrating that white men are angrier than ever and introduces his main argument that their anger emerges out of a sense of *aggrieved entitlement*, a concept that was referenced earlier and will be overviewed in-depth shortly. He then discusses the social construction of white men’s anger by exploring mean-spirited media outlets and white supremacist political groups like the Tea Party, Patriots, and Minutemen. Kimmel explores the anger of white boys who commit acts of mass violence in schools, men's rights activists, and fathers’ rights groups. From there, he looks specifically at acts of violence that target women, working-class men who commit suicide by mass murder in the workplace, returns to extreme right-wing groups of angry white men, and concludes with a discussion on how angry white men might positively transform themselves away from racist and sexist

violence and aggression, meaningfully impacting the system of white supremacist hetero-patriarchal capitalism that created it in the first place.

As previously stated, white men becoming angry is inextricable from their becoming socially and psychologically white men. Kimmel (2013) illustrates this clearly by introducing his concept of *aggrieved entitlement*:

“[w]hat links all these different groups—rampage shooters and the Patriots, the minutemen and the vengeful dads, Rush Limbaugh and Joe the Plumber, and Tom Metzger and the neo-Nazi minions—is a single core experience: what I call *aggrieved entitlement*. It is that sense that those benefits to which you believed yourself entitled have been snatched away from you by unseen forces larger and more powerful. You feel yourself to be the heir to a great promise, the American Dream, which has turned into an impossible fantasy for the very people who were *supposed* to inherit it.” (p. 18)

In other words, white men’s understanding of what they deserve does not presently align with their understanding of what they have, and their understanding of what they deserve is attached to their understanding of who they are in terms of race and gender. White men are not angry because they feel that they had power and are losing it, they are angry because they feel like they were supposed to have it and cannot get it because it has been unfairly taken by ‘other’ people (People of Color, immigrants, women, LGBTTQ folks, and other marginalized groups). White men’s sense of aggrieved entitlement is rooted in narratives and beliefs about race and gender identity and how they translate to positions of power, or access to positions of power. It is important to note that white men continue to have disproportionate access to wealth and political power in the present moment (Royster & Steinberg, 2003; St. John et al., 2005); but, to them, this is irrelevant because they continue to *feel* like they do not have fair access to wealth and political power. The result is that white men experience suffering that is transformed into anger

and manifests as violence directed at those they perceive to be stealing or unfairly awarded their access to power.

As this project explores the intersection of heteronormative white working-class masculinity and father-son relationships, Kimmel's (2013) chapter, "Angry White Dads," is of particular interest. Recently a number of "father's rights," groups have formed whose "campaign [is] to help men retain the rights to *be* fathers in the first place following a divorce—maintaining visitation rights or sharing or gaining custody (p. 136). Kimmel's most relevant observations about the father's rights groups is that they are predominantly middle-class white men, are not concerned with developing healthier fathering practices, are characterized by sexism and anti-statism, and almost never mention father-daughter relationships. In other words, one manifestation of white men's sexism is their desire to raise their sons.

In the epilogue of Kimmel's (2013) text, he concludes by providing what he has determined to be the solutions to the problems of white men's anger and violence. After stating that violent angry white men are in the minority of white men and that their outrage seems to be a waning problem as most white men in America are adjusting to unprecedentedly high rates of social equality relatively well, he suggests we liberate angry white men in the U.S. by empowering them to embrace new forms of masculinity that do not centralize the role of a white patriarch. Additionally, he states we need to petition our government to return to social welfare policies reminiscent of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal to alleviate the economic stress on working-class white men that has triggered their outrage.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

. . . we need a form that will allow readers to feel the moral dilemmas, think with our story instead of about it, join actively in the decision points that define an autoethnographic project, and consider how their own lives can be made a story worth telling. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 735)

This project is autoethnographical. The term *autoethnography* was first used academically more than thirty years ago by the visual anthropologist Karl Heider, though David Hayano is typically credited as the originator of the term (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The terminology and methodological strategies associated with autoethnography and included within autoethnography are vast. This chapter begins with a general framework discussing theory associated with autoethnography, and then explores particular strategies or methods utilized in this project. This chapter will explain *how* the strategies or methods are used in reference to the data collection of this project. Then, a characterization of the analytical approach to the data is offered, concluding with a discussion of the limitations of strategies, data, and analysis to arrive at the overall conclusions.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) provide a succinct introduction to the concept of autoethnography:

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (p. 739)

Autoethnography is typically written in the first-person and may take various and multiple forms. Some common forms include, but are not limited to poetry, short stories, personal essays, journals, novels, photographic essays, and social science prose.

Autoethnography is characterized by traits that have not traditionally been accepted, especially

within positivist tradition, as legitimate primarily due to its failure to produce an objective truth (Wall, 2006). That is, autoethnography rejects the idea that knowledge can be formed objectively. Autoethnography upholds that knowledge is always presented (re-presented) via a researcher and/or writer who interprets observations through a unique subjective lens (Wall, 2006).

This subjective lens is shaped in various ways, and in part, this shaping is what this project seeks to more deeply understand. One's lens can be thought of as cultural—a cultural lens that is also raced, classed and gendered. One's lens emerges as a product of one's personal experiences within a socio-cultural environment within and over the course of one's life. For example, two researchers might explore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and produce very different findings based on the geographical location they grew up in, the political affiliations of their parents, whether or not they were combatants during an armed conflict, their religious background, racial and/or ethnic affiliation, gender identity, national identity, social class, language, or emotional attachment to the research. Autoethnographers would not disqualify their findings based on cultural bias or subjectivity but would rather seek to understand these findings further by including and accounting for that bias. In reference to establishing this bias, Crawford (1996) describes autoethnography as, “a self-report of personal experiences” that “becomes autoethnographic because the ethnographer is unavoidably in the ethnography one way or another, manifest in the text, however subtly or obviously” (p. 158). Again, autoethnography connects the personal to the cultural, and emphasizes the connection.

Furthermore, autoethnography is especially useful for this project as it enables the capturing of personal *emotional* experience in ways that other research methods do not. Ellis (2016) argues that though sociologists began giving attention to the presence of emotion in social



experience in the mid 1980s, they were/are largely limited in capturing what those emotions *feel like*. Ellis argues that “. . . sociologists can and should study how private and social experience are fused in felt emotions. Resurrecting introspection (conscious awareness of awareness or self-examination) as a systematic sociological technique will allow sociologists to examine emotion as a product of the individual processing of meaning as well as socially shared cognitions” (p. 97). Autoethnography is an intentional practice of introspection and self-examination and is critical in examining racial experience and meaning privately, socially and within the emotional space that connects private and social spheres, particularly as it relates to instances of trauma which emerge in the research.

### **Methodological Strategies**

A number of methodological strategies are connected to autoethnography. These strategies include systematic sociological introspection, biographical method, personal experience methods, feminist methods, experiential analysis, narrative inquiry, consciousness-raising methods, co-constructed narrative, and interactive interviewing. Autoethnographies vary in their emphasis on research process, culture, and self (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Within, or under the umbrella of, autoethnography, another numerous and varied collection of methodological strategies have been practiced and accepted. For this project, it is not necessary to delve deeply into all of them, so only a discussion of the terms and definitions of strategies utilized in this project is included.

This project relies most heavily on narrative inquiry and reflexive ethnography. Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe narrative inquiry as

Stories that create the effect of reality, showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle, resisting the intrusions of chaos, disconnection, fragmentation, marginalization and incoherence, trying to preserve or restore the

continuity and coherence of life's unity in the face of unexpected blows of fate that call one's meaning and values into question. (p. 744)

Again, the author of such a narrative writes in the first person and makes oneself the object of research. For this project, I author a narrative of myself embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle in the formation of my identity, ideology and practice as a raced, classed, gendered and sexual being. It is not a complete narrative but focuses on relationships, moments and events that have for me been most salient and most significant. And, it is through reflexive ethnography that the narrative takes on meaning beyond myself.

Reflexive ethnography is a practice through which the researcher's experience becomes important most centrally in the way that it provides meaning regarding the culture being studied. Sometimes reflexive ethnography includes only the presentation and analysis of the researcher's own personal experience, while other times the experience of those connected to the researcher are included as well. In this project, the experiences of the researcher through the researcher's lens are offered, though influential members of the researcher's social identity formation are referenced heavily. The culture under study to be illuminated by the researcher's personal experiences is that of straight white (white supremacist) working-class masculinity within the U.S. The research question that guides this study is: How do white working-class fathers transmit whiteness and white supremacy to their sons?

### **Methods and Data**

Qualitative methods using personal narratives will be the primary sources of data for this project. Five personal narratives will appear in the form of autobiographical storytelling highlighting particularly salient and influential moments in the researcher's life with regards to his relationship to his father over time. Essentially, these narratives will describe lessons in

identity formation. They will offer the lessons being taught, along with evidence of these lessons impact on the researcher's psyche.

### **Data Collection**

The five memories included within the scope of this project have been collected from the researcher's past experience through stream-of-consciousness journaling. Stream of consciousness writing, also known as interior monologue, is a practice of writing which depicts the thoughts and feelings of a writer as they pass through her/his mind (Cuddon, 2012). This method of self-inquiry and disclosure seeks to reveal the writer's memory without self-censorship. In other words, when creating an image of oneself for public view it is possible that a writer might want to create a depiction that is pleasing to an audience, to leave out events, thoughts, and emotions which might make the writer vulnerable to judgments and/or criticism. To avoid such a pitfall, this method was used as it is the researcher's memory *as remembered* which impacts the formation of self, and not as a "sugar-coated" version of that memory. The stream of consciousness journaling has been edited for grammatical errors but has not been censored.

### **Human Subjects Protection**

Thesis are made public via publication and the use of autoethnography makes public the personal experiences I chose to expose in ways that create knowledge production for this project. I did so understanding what was potentially at risk for myself and needed to provide my father the opportunity to decide what pieces of our lives together he would consent to share knowing what the risks might be for him as well. And while I chose to investigate my perceptions on how my father raised me within a working-class white supremacist paradigm my father didn't necessarily engage that same commitment. My father ultimately decided that I could share this

story with his consent. This thesis project includes IRB approval from Colorado State University human subjects committee.

### **Limitations**

Responsible research, analysis, and knowledge production necessarily include a discussion of the limitations. This project has four limitations that are important to note as they impact the findings and conclusions. One limitation of this project is a limitation commonly associated with qualitative research generally, which is that knowledge produced qualitatively is not generalizable to large populations; however, it does not seek to be and instead prioritizes processes of social and relational patterns. The second limitation of this project is that all historical accounts of the researcher's life are presented from his viewpoint alone, without any other testimony to corroborate the significant events. Therefore, there is no triangulation of data in this study. Third, the scope of this project is limited in time. In other words, the stories of one's identity formation are ongoing, as are one's personal relationships. So, even as this is being written, data continues to be produced which cannot be included in this project. Finally, though this project takes an intersectional analytical disposition to data and analysis in accordance to racial formation theory, it does not incorporate the full scope of intersectional analysis possible. That is, there are additional intersecting forces at play that this project does not discuss such as religion, citizenship status, ability and more. However, the goal here is not to capture every possible intersecting element, the goal is to capture more elements than is typical and to understand those elements that influence white men's violence most centrally and significantly.

This project is qualitative, meaning it explores social phenomenon through the interpretation of the lived experiences of individuals within a particular context. Specifically, it explores the phenomenon of social identity formation, through the lens of racial formation, of the

researcher within the context of his personal life. As Malterud (2001) points out, “[q]ualitative research is still regarded with skepticism . . . accused of its subjective nature and the absence of facts.” (p. 483). However, the myth of the neutral observer has been recognized for some time, because knowledge is always partial and situated within some limited context and interpreted through the limited lens of the researcher, which was mentioned earlier (Haraway, 1988; Nagel, 1986). In qualitative research, we ask not *if* the knowledge is biased, but *how* the knowledge is biased. In other words, we explore the nuanced ways subjectivity impacts the knowledge produced in order to determine the limitations and subjectivity of its applicability.

The practice of asking and answering this question is known as *reflexivity*. Reflexivity can be described as, “[a]n attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process” (Malterud, 2001, p. 484). Abiding by a reflexive guideline helps us to determine *transferability*, which can be described as, “[t]he range and limitations for application of the study findings, beyond the context in which the study was done” (Malterud, 2001, p. 484). This project does not offer a universal knowledge, but will offer a reflexive, subjective, transferrable knowledge about white and white supremacist identity formation. Further research done by additional researchers will help to expand the body of knowledge on social identity formation, and this researcher encourages such a task.

The researcher shares five memories of events in which his father and other individuals participate or are implicated, however, they are not given the opportunity to share their perspective or recollection of those events. Were their perspectives to be included, the events would be more fully re-presented with varied recollections. However, the researcher’s identity has not formed in relationship to others’ perspective of his lived experience. It is not the

objective determination of events this project seeks to capture, but the impact of the personal experience of those events on the researcher. The inclusion of additional perspectives may provide useful knowledge, or may answer additional questions, but the questions of this project would not be more fully answered by including additional perspectives, which is why they are not included.

This project explores the experiences of the researcher over time, drawing conclusions about his personal identity formation in relationship to his father. The earliest memories come from his childhood and when taken as a whole, this project includes memories that are very recent. Identity formation, like racial formation, is never absolutely complete. It is an ongoing process that this project can only explore up until the present moment in which the project is being completed.

### **Data Analysis**

Stream of consciousness and reflexive techniques to analyze data presented challenges in this project. Using this technique for analysis there were still areas of omission in data analysis that remained invisible to the researcher around gender, class and race. Using aspects of grounded theory two researchers then coded the data instead using qualitative methods to code five narratives. First, researchers used an open coding process as a way to initially code the data (Charmaz, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers then engaged an iterative process to identify what was emergent in the data, from there themes were develop and discussed using a constant comparative method of comparing data with data (Charmaz, 2006). Having two researchers code the data using constant comparative methods, omissions previously overlooked specifically around gender, race and class emerged.

This project also uses racial formation theory to analyze autobiographical personal narrative. More specifically, this project provides and explores autobiographical personal narrative that captures the father-son relationship within a white working-class family and considers it as a racial project for constructing whiteness and white supremacy in the body and mind of a growing white boy. This project focuses on the father-son relationship at the micro level of individual experience and daily interaction but does not discount the significance of ongoing related processes at the macro level of collective social structures and institutions or dominant cultural ideology. Furthermore, this project pulls from theory on the construction of whiteness by theorizing from personal experience, considering what is presented as a white (working-class and male) ideal against which the white son in this project is measured and measures himself, making visible the brutality of whiteness and white masculinity that is often left obscured or unacknowledged, and understanding lessons in whiteness and white masculinity as emotionally reactionary and through a lens informed by trauma. Finally, this project emotionally centers anger and honors that more recent scholarship focused directly at the intersection of whiteness, masculinity, and working-class identity by coding for evidence of aggrieved entitlement. The data and analysis constitute the findings for this project and are presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

As practised by Europeans, both genocide and settler colonialism have typically employed the organizing grammar of race. European xenophobic traditions such as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, or Negrophobia are considerably older than race, which, as many have shown, became discursively consolidated fairly late in the eighteenth century. As I have argued, different racial regimes encode and reproduce the unequal relationships into which Europeans coerced the populations concerned. Whatever settlers may say—and they generally have a lot to say—the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element . . . as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event. (Wolfe, 2006, p. 387)

This chapter presents the findings of this project. It presents both the data and the analysis of the data and is organized in two sections. The first section is strictly data and includes five autoethnographic personal narratives as subsections written by the author, researcher and white son of a white working-class father. These narratives were produced via stream of consciousness writing prompted by the research question for this project, which is: how do white working-class fathers transmit whiteness and white supremacy to their sons?

As mentioned in Chapter Three, these narratives have been edited and revised for grammar and coherency but have not been censored in any way. They are simply a representation of events that occurred over the course of the researcher's childhood and in relationship to his father as he remembers them. The narratives are ordered neither intentionally nor strategically. They are included here in their entirety rather than in an appendix in order to offer readers as much insight to the process being studied as possible.

Following the five personal narratives, the second section of this chapter presents the findings of this project via a discussion of themes that emerged in the self-reflexive analysis of the personal narratives as data. The themes are presented as subsections of the analysis section.



## Data

### *Personal Narrative One: My Father's Lawn*

While being raised in a white working-class heteronormative family by my mother and father, my father would often tell me a story. I am not entirely sure of the story's temporal origin, but I know that it was after my father had moved from the farm in Nebraska where he grew up to the city of Aurora, Colorado where I was raised. I am pretty sure that the events of the story took place at the home my father still occupies today (my parents are now divorced). This home is in a predominantly white working-class neighborhood but not an exclusively white working-class neighborhood in Aurora. Maybe 20 to 30 percent of the people living in single-family homes in the neighborhood are people of color and the apartments at the end of the street might be home to closer to 50 percent or more people of color. The story was told to me like this:

Around the time I was born, when I was a young boy in the late 1980s or early 1990s, there was a man living in our working-class neighborhood whose racial and sexual identity I was not informed of, who lived a few houses away and had a dog. Every now and then, that neighbor's dog would either be let out, or get out, of his yard and roam the neighborhood. On one of these occasions the dog shit (my father's word) on our lawn - or more importantly, the dog shit on *my father's lawn*. The dog was sick ("It had worms," my father told me), and because the dog was sick, when it shit on my father's lawn it killed the grass in about a six-inch diameter spot. In response, my father went to our neighbor's house and knocked on the door. When the owner of the dog and house answered, my father told him that our neighbor's dog had shit on my father's lawn and killed the grass in that spot, and that if it ever happened again my father would "kill that fucking dog." After making his threat, my father returned home and prepared for his follow-through. He loaded up an air rifle that shot little metal pellets and kept it where he could

get to it quickly. It's worth pointing out that my dad chose the air rifle out of a very large safe that is full of guns, several capable of more or less exploding the dog.

On that farm in Nebraska where my father grew up, his white working-class father had taught him that killing was a natural part of life, and that there are several occasions for which killing is reasonable and even necessary. Some of these occasions include hunting animals for food, slaughtering animals for food and income, "mercy-killing" animals that are sick, killing to defend oneself, and killing for retribution. My father has expressed that killing both animals and people in self-defense and for retribution is reasonable and sometimes necessary, though I am only aware of his killing animals in self-defense or for retribution. The reasons for hunting, slaughtering, "mercy killing" and to some degree killing in self-defense were self-evident and I understood the purpose of those types of killing. But, to some degree killing in self-defense (what constitutes the self and what constitutes a threat?) and killing for retribution stand out on that list. Luckily, my father articulated regularly (though often vaguely and sometimes in uncertain terms) about those who deserved to die. Some examples include: 'sickos;' 'bastards;' 'terrorists;' 'criminals;' and 'druggies.'

From what I understood, the situations that warranted killing in self-defense and/or for retribution were: defending oneself from someone trying to kill you or in response to someone who has threatened to kill you; defending our family from someone trying to kill any of us or in response to someone who has threatened to kill one of us or someone we love; punishing anyone who hurts or tries to hurt me or my sister; defending what is rightfully ours by keeping others from taking it who are too lazy to put in the work to earn for themselves; punishing sexual predators (especially those who prey on children); and standing up for "what's right." My father has intentionally killed thousands of things for all of the above reasons and knows how to kill

them in particular ways in order to achieve particular outcomes beyond their being dead. My father planned to kill our neighbor's dog in such a way that would send a message beyond the death of the pet.

My father awaited our neighbor's dog's return, and when it eventually did return, my father grabbed his air pellet rifle and gut-shot it. To gut-shoot something is to shoot it in the stomach. My father explained to me that the reason for intentionally shooting something, or someone, in the stomach is to cause them to die a slow and painful death. When the projectile tears through their stomach and intestines, fluids from their digestive tract mix with their blood, and vice-versa, so that they eventually die from slow blood loss and severe bacterial infection. This is why, I learned, my father had chosen the air pellet rifle, because it would not immediately kill the dog, and because it's much quieter than other rifles. My father told me that the reason he gut-shot the neighbor's dog was that he wanted it to suffer its way back to its owner's home to die on the front porch. And that is exactly what it did.

When my father first told me this story, I was very young, no more than 8 or 10 years old. I remember feeling pretty confused about why he had killed the neighbor's dog, aside from the reasons he had stated. At the time, I had a black chow-chow named Pamela. I loved Pamela as a member of my family. The idea of someone killing her for getting out and pooping on their lawn horrified and repulsed me. I also remember feeling embarrassed that the solution of killing the neighbor's dog was so clear to my father and not as clear to me. To me, it didn't seem to qualify based on all of the justified rationale he had given me for killing. We did not slaughter and then sell the dog. We did not eat the dog. The dog was sick but did not seem to be suffering. Neither the neighbor nor the dog had attacked or threatened to attack anyone in the family and from what I understood neither were sexual predators. I gleaned that in some way my father was 'standing

up for what's right' but did not understand what the dog or neighbor had done wrong enough to justify the physically torturous killing of the dog or the emotional torture it would cause his owner. I felt as if I should have innately known that threatening our neighbor and then gut-shooting his dog was the only way to keep that six-inch spot of grass in our lawn green, alive, and well. Though at that time, I did not.

*Personal Narrative Two: So.*

My father spent quite a bit of time out in the garage at our home in Aurora engaged regularly in what he considered various important tasks. One constant weekend task was detailing his Chevrolet Corvette. He owned several Corvettes over the course of my childhood and into my early adulthood and was even a member in a Corvette enthusiasts' club for most of the years he owned Corvettes. So, the particular Corvette he busied himself detailing changed somewhat regularly, but the detailing of Corvettes was constant. He spent many weekends in the garage and driveway meticulously washing and waxing the car's exterior, polishing the wheels and chrome trim, blackening the tires with Armor All, and vacuuming each little bit of dirt or sand that had impossibly made its way into the carpet (probably my fault).

He took the most care with his Corvettes but liked to wash his trucks, snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) as well. He also changed the oil in all of our vehicles for the most part, a task he would sometimes request my assistance in. He'd yell down the stairs at me to come upstairs and help him "change the oil in the \_\_\_\_\_." I would abide as far as I knew how but without him ever thoroughly teaching me what to do or allowing me to learn in a context where I wasn't constantly berated, humiliated and afraid it was tough for me to know how to help other than stand close by and watch while hoping there wasn't something I was 'obviously' supposed to be doing. Eventually, he would point out the 'obvious' thing I was supposed to be

doing, ask me “how many times I gotta fuckin’ tell ya?” and remind me that I was a “dumb shit who needed to learn how to use [my] fucking head.”

Other reasons he’d spend time working in the garage were to load or unload hunting supplies, weapons and/or dead meat in and out of his truck (all very heavy), work on derby car or balsa wood airplane Cub Scout projects that were supposed to be mine to complete but that he would take over because I “didn’t know how to do anything”, or do repairs and maintenance on old guns or his barber equipment (neither of which I knew or wanted to learn anything about). Needless to say, I wasn’t very fond of joining him out in the garage or spending much time there at all.

On one of these occasions my father was working out in the garage and I vividly recall the garage door being open letting the autumn afternoon light fill the front third or so. My father’s red GMC truck was parked on the West side of the garage (in his spot) leaving the East side (my mom’s spot) open. I snuck out quickly to grab a Dr. Pepper from the antique garage fridge and noticed my father rearranging something in the back of his truck. I could hear the rattled clashes of metal objects coming from the rear and his tailgate was open. My father goes shooting a lot and transports various weapons and such to and from his gun club. Yes, my father is a member at a gun club. He has a gun room and safe in his home where he keeps many guns, knives, cases of ammunition, the Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) etc. My father also keeps a lot of ‘emergency’ equipment (army issue sleeping bags, multiple tire irons, waterproof tarps, various tools, spare trailer tires, flashlights, road flares, bandages, jumper cables, extra boots, the list goes on) in the back of his truck and I assumed he was either loading and unloading guns or checking on, rearranging, or adding to his emergency supplies. I hurried back inside before he’d

noticed me and sat down at our kitchen table where I could monitor from a safe distance what was going on through the half-open door between the garage and living room.

As far as I can recall, my father had never been physically abusive towards me before, though the threat of physical abuse seemed to always be there. For example, I remember my father calling me to the top of the stairs when I was in middle school with that familiar tone that promised I was about to be punished. I reluctantly went to meet him at the top of the stairs where he sat with one of our neighbors (a white man). Without telling me what I had done wrong, he told me to go out to the side of the house and get a stick. I went out and grabbed the smallest stick I could find. When I came back with it he told me to go get a bigger stick. I went back and forth dozens of times before I eventually had to arrive back to my father with a 4x4 fence post. I was bawling by that time, spending all those trips anticipating what it was going to be like to be hit with the stick I was carrying. But, when I had finally retrieved the largest piece of wood in our yard, my dad told me to go put it back. It was torturous for sure, but not physically torturous.

I understand this now to be because my grandfather on my father's side was extremely physically abusive, a trait which my father associated with his being an alcoholic. My dad had his own language for it, though. He used to tell me, "now my dad drank a lot and he used to beat and whip us kids if we didn't do exactly what he wanted before he even thought it, let alone told us it." My uncles (my father's brothers) were alcoholics and physically abusive as well. I have memories of my uncles fist-fighting each other during holiday get-togethers, punching and slapping their sons (my cousins) in the face and across the back of the head, and showing up to breakfast at 7:00 a.m. having already drank a case of beer or a liter of hard liquor. My father's two brothers I knew best spent portions of their lives living in a storage unit, or in the back of a truck out in a field somewhere, or sometimes in jail. Anyway, this memory isn't really of them. I

only bring it up because it explains why my father didn't drink more than a beer in one sitting and why up until this point, he had never been *physically* abusive towards me.

As I monitored him through the half-open door, I noticed him discover or realize that I had done something 'wrong.' I heard him angrily mutter and curse to himself before calling me to come out to the garage. I don't recall whether or not I had done something 'wrong,' or if I had forgotten to do something he had told me to do and that this not-following of orders was what I had done 'wrong.' Either way, I was in trouble and I knew it. He had a very particular tone and volume to his voice when he was calling me to learn a lesson, or to receive punishment.

He confronted me about whatever it was, and I responded by saying, "So?" as in, "So, what?" I remember him then repeatedly mimicking the way I had responded to his allegation with his own questioning tone and air of incredulity that I had had the audacity to reply that way. I hated when he did that and it was not the first time. My face immediately flushed with heat at my shame and embarrassment becoming fear and rage. My mind began to buzz, and I began losing my ability to think or focus on what he was saying. I don't remember anything that either he or I said after that. All I remember is being grabbed by the neck, walked back to the darker end of the garage and then being shoved up against our antique refrigerator, the handle digging into my back. I can't remember with much clarity how I felt in that moment, but I assume some sort of fear mixed in with rage. Or, possibly I felt nothing. More than anything I remember feeling almost completely unable to move, like my brain could not communicate with the rest of my body. His other hand came up to meet the first around my neck and squeezed tightly. He was saying something, but I can't remember what it was, all I can recall is the squeezing. I think I instinctively flexed my neck muscles in order to keep my airway open and grabbed onto his forearms. I do remember wishing I could pull his arms down and off of my throat but all I could

do was hold on and gasp for some of the dusty garage air. Eventually he let go, stared at me with a deep spite and hatred in his eyes and then went back to what he was doing in the back of the truck.

I retreated to the inside of the house without saying anything, panicked after what had just happened and feeling entirely powerless. My body was still hot, and my thinking was limited to a sort of constant monotone sound, kind of like the sounds they play when giving hearing tests or right before an emergency broadcast comes on the television. I went down to my room in the basement gritting my teeth so intensely they felt they might crumble in my mouth. I furiously clenched my fists so tightly that my fingernails cut into the palms of my hands, removing some of the flesh from my palms that I had to later dig out from beneath my fingernails. I hurried to my room out of fear that he was going to be behind me shortly with more to say or do. Upon realizing that he had stayed outside for the time being, I swung my fists into the walls of my bedroom a few times imagining that it was his face. The skin of my knuckles was scraped off by the texture of the wall. I wanted to kill him. I wanted to kill him so that I could stop feeling all that fear and rage in my body. I wanted to kill him so that I could feel strong instead of ashamed and afraid. But I couldn't kill him. I wasn't brave or strong enough. I wasn't man enough. He had taught me that.

### *Personal Narrative Three: Sports*

When I first began playing hockey, around the 4th or 5th grade, my father signed up to be one of the coaches of my roller hockey team. I was one of the smaller boys on the team and in the beginning (in the middle, too) I was meek and uncoordinated. I took a lot of breaks and got 'hurt' frequently. I was more apprehensive than the other players at 'getting in there,' or placing myself in harm's way in order to steal the puck. When I would do things like this (demonstrate



meekness, fear, and an unwillingness to sacrifice my body toward our team's victory) my father would respond by yelling at me and urging me angrily to "come on, Brent! Get (the fuck (muttered) in there!" I was often also told to toughen up and "be a little more aggressive, goddamnit!"

The yelling happened during the game but also shortly after. I always received it with my head down on the ride home and usually on the verge of tears. On some occasions I did cry, and then my father would shame and humiliate me for that. I understood what I was supposed to do if I wanted to continue to play and be good at hockey, but that didn't help me feel any more capable of doing it. I regularly considered quitting the sport to escape the context under which I was made to feel so weak and worthless all the time, but another part of me wanted to believe I might actually get good at hockey and finally prove to my father that I wasn't as faulty as he believed. In some ways I wanted to make him proud and achieve his approval and in other ways I wanted to humiliate him for being wrong about me as a form of revenge for all the times he had humiliated me. Also, I had friends on the team, and at that age they didn't care too much about how good I was. We were all more interested in drinking soda and playing video games in the basement of one of our houses after the game and dinner than we were in mulling over our usual loss. Besides, it was easier to be aggressive and capable of violence in video games than it was in real life.

I decided to keep playing and after a few seasons moved on from roller hockey and to ice hockey. Initially, I had the same sorts of problems there, but I wanted to impress my father and my male friends enough that I continued trying to become what it seemed everyone wanted me to be (tough, aggressive, violent, and immune to pain). As I entered high school, gained access to the weightlifting room, and began strength training almost every day, I eventually gained some

size and weight, not much but enough, which allowed me to be more of a force on the rink. By practicing and watching other players in games and on television I learned how to check properly. Checking is when one player hurls their body into an opponent in order to disrupt their play and steal the puck from them. However, there was more to checking than just this. Checking was also a way I could prove that I was a man, that I was more than he thought of me, that I was tough, aggressive, violent and immune to pain. Once I learned how to check, I began to successfully prove my worth. I learned how to throw my weight and position my stance so that I could not only disrupt my opponents' play and steal the puck, but also physically injure, or dominate them as well. After my first few successful checks, I received positive messages from my coaches, teammates, teammates' fathers, and most importantly my own father. The moments were fleeting but for a while after each game I got a big hit, I didn't have to worry about my father mentally and emotionally destroying me. I was told enthusiastically how great it was that I had "knocked the shit out of that bastard" every time I had a really big hit in a game. I interpreted the message clear now, that I could succeed at hockey and in my father's eyes if I could violently physically injure the bodies of my opponents. And, for the first time I began to enjoy hurting other people rather than avoid the risk and conflict of "getting in there."

My subsequent seasons of ice hockey (before I quit hockey to play other sports that my high school offered - wrestling and lacrosse) became less about scoring points and fancy puck work, and more about how many people I could smash up and then take the puck from. When an opponent had the puck, it symbolized his vulnerability to my force because he had the thing that belonged to me, or us (my team). The puck became both a targeting device and a target. Locker room and bench chatter is where I further interpreted messages from boys and men on how to 'be a man.' I learned that those who *were checked* effectively and poor at checking were 'pussies,'

‘bitches,’ and ‘faggots,’ and that those who effectively *checked* were ‘men.’ If I were to be a man, and be successful in this man’s sport, I had to either violently physically dominate these ‘pussies,’ ‘bitches,’ and ‘faggots,’ or be called one (become one).

*Personal Narrative Four: Nini’s Birthday*

On some sort of special occasion, possibly my sister Nini’s birthday when each of us was between 7 to 10 years old, my immediate family went out to a special restaurant that had a petting zoo. Or, it at least had some small animals such as rabbits and birds running around outside and in pens throughout the place. The restaurant was both indoors and outdoors and there were lots of children playing with and petting the animals. It was clear that the restaurant’s niche attraction was the animals. Everything at the restaurant was white including the tablecloths, chairs, outside of the building, fence around the animals’ area, window shutters and people. After we had been seated and had ordered our food, I noticed a man dressed in all black across the restaurant from us. His juxtaposition against the backdrop of the whole place caused him to stand out to me. Or for whatever reason, I noticed him. He was racially white, had middle-length jet-black hair, was wearing tight black jeans, a tight black shirt, what seemed to be designer leather boots, and a leather coat. He was also wearing pale shades of make-up, black eyeliner, lipstick, and an earring.

As we waited for our food, I turned to my father to ask him why the man was dressed up this way. My father answered by informing me that the man was gay. I didn’t know what the term ‘gay’ meant, so I asked my father about that too. He began to say something but stopped as our food arrived. After our food had been laid out in front of us and the wait staff had left the table he began to speak again. He did not directly answer my question but instead told me to hush, and that the man in all black was weird, that people like him sometimes dressed in

women's clothes, that I should stay away from him, and that I needed to hurry up and eat my dinner. I wanted to prod further but was accustomed to what happened if I neglected to hush and was unable to finish my food before my father finished his. If I did not finish eating what I had ordered by the time my father finished heating what he had ordered he would move onto my food and finish what I hadn't in a matter of seconds. So, I hushed and hurried up to eat my food.

However, all throughout dinner, and as we walked through the restaurant to leave, I took every opportunity to glance over in order to get a better look at the man. I was struck and intrigued by his appearance. I continued to picture him in my mind on the car ride home, wondering who he was and why he had looked like he had. I wondered what his voice sounded like and what it would be like to talk and hang out with him. I knew I wanted to know him. I also knew that I was not allowed to ask any further questions and that he and people like him sometimes dressed in women's clothes which was 'weird' and 'gay.' I still didn't know what 'gay' meant, so I just assumed that it meant weird, but then I got confused about whether everything weird was gay and if everything gay was weird, or both. The reason I wondered was because I had liked how the man in all black had looked, so much prettier than everyone and everything so generically dull and white at the restaurant. I'm not sure I had had a sexual attraction towards him, but I did have some sort of attraction to him. I liked that he stood out, that I noticed him and that I had noticed others noticing him too. I was old enough to see that people were whispering about him in a judgmental way. I was also old enough to notice that he knew that. And, I was old enough to notice that he didn't seem to care. At that age, I worried constantly about what people thought of and were saying about me and wished for a moment that I were as brave as him. I imagined what I'd look like dressed like him and liked it.

However, I had also learned that he was ‘weird’ and that the word ‘weird’ was something that no one wanted to be, that this was a common insult at my elementary school, and that being called it was humiliating. I also knew that the man had dressed in ‘women’s clothes,’ which were for women and not men (hence the labeling), and that this was one of the things that made him weird. In being told these things and then hushed I learned that I wasn’t supposed to talk or ask questions about him (gay men), and that I wasn’t supposed to be like him (‘weird’ and dressed in ‘women’s clothes). This saddened me, but my fear encouraged me to follow my father’s direction.

*Personal Narrative Five: Michelle and Makayla*

I remember two of my sister Nini’s friends sitting on our front stoop waiting for their mom to come pick them up. I was sitting at our kitchen table watching T.V. after-school like I often did, a plate of bagel bites or pizza rolls in front of me. From where I sat in our kitchen, I could see the two young sisters through our screen/security door, the one my father’s friend had installed. His name was I will not share but will refer to him as “Jim.” Jim was a huge white man (all my dad’s close friends were white), and he had done a pretty shit job of installing the door (the lock and unlock mechanism was installed backwards or something so it worked the opposite way of most doors). And, I heard often about how it was not even the door my mom had actually wanted. Jim typically did shit work. My dad had hired him to install a shower door in the downstairs bathroom and he installed it upside down and then just left it that way. On another occasion, my father had hired Jim to paint our house and he had over-sprayed so significantly that he painted all the toys and lawn furniture in our neighbor’s yard. My father always hired him anyway because they were friends and my father didn’t trust anyone else who might sub-contract the work out to “an immigrant who didn’t speak any English or know how to do the work right”

which was interesting because we were sure every time that Jim wouldn't do the work right. Anyway, my sister's friends, whose names I will not share but who I will refer to as "Michelle" and "Makayla," sat on our stoop chatting with each other and looking at the grasshoppers that hopped up on to their shoes from the yard every now and then. Michelle and Makayla were Black. I had seen my sister playing with them at school many times, but this was the first time they had been over to our house. They had been playing inside the house, in the hallway and down in front of my sister's room, but now they were sitting on the porch by themselves waiting for their mom to pick them up. My mom was in the kitchen. The garage door went up and then began its journey downward accompanied by the sound of 100 keys jiggling on the other side of the door as my father tried to hold his briefcase and find the right key at the same time. My father swung the door open as swiftly as always, such that if anyone happened to be standing on the other side as it opened, they would surely be bloodied in the face and/or smacked unconscious by it. He took a few steps forward to the main intersection of the house, a place where he could see Michelle and Makayla on the stoop, and my mother and myself in the kitchen (my sister was in her room upset about Michelle and Makayla having to leave). My father paused to look disgustedly at Michelle and Makayla, disgustedly and accusatorily at my mother, and disappointedly at me. I don't think he blamed me for there being two Black girls at our house, he wouldn't have credited me with being smart enough to know there shouldn't be. His disappointed look for me was the typical one, disappointed that I was generally less than he had hoped for, small and weak and watching T.V. and eating pizza rolls instead of doing pushups and pulling weeds or something. Satisfied that he had made his non-verbal point, he stomped past my mom and I and then rumbled down the stairs to the basement to tinker in his gunroom.

Not long after, Michelle and Makayla's mother arrived and the two girls ran down the driveway, got in the car, and then disappeared down the street. After they left, my mom went downstairs. She told me to stay upstairs and to keep my sister upstairs too if she came out of her room. She closed the door on the way down and clearly didn't want us a part of what was about to happen, but from the place in the kitchen where I sat I could hear pretty well what went on down there. I was right at the top of the stairs, the basement door was cheap and hollow, and my father's voice is loud. I couldn't make out all the details, but I learned that there were certainly not to be any more Black girls over to our house playing with my sister. My mom seemed to challenge him on that, but he would not be swayed.

### **Data Analysis**

This section presents the themes emergent from the analysis of the data. The themes are organized as subsections and are: A (white) Man's Home is his Castle; Teaching the White Desire to Dominate; and *Centering the White male Relationship: Omissions of Gender and Race*.  
*A (white) Man's Home is his Castle*

My white working-class father transmitted whiteness and white supremacy to me as his son by demonstrating sovereignty within and over the realm of his home, ruling it as a king would his castle. The form my father's demonstration took was twofold. My father provided demonstration as proof that his white working-class male sovereignty existed along with demonstration as a practical example of how white working-class male sovereignty is established and maintained. The intended audience of the first form of demonstration was potentially anyone under or in relationship to my father's roof. However, the intended audience of the second form of demonstration was exclusively and specifically me. In other words, my father demonstrated to

potentially anyone within or in relationship to his home *that* he was in charge, but he demonstrated to me *how* to be in (take) charge.

One way my father demonstrated his white working-class male sovereignty within the home was by dominating all the members of our family as his chattel, dictating our roles and place under his authority. One of the roles dictated to my mother was to experience domination by obeying his command and enforcing his command while he was away. For example, when my father came home to find Michelle and Makayla (two young Black girls) sitting on our stoop, he “paused to look disgustedly at [them], disgustedly and accusatorily at my mother, and disappointedly at me”. Then, “[s]atisfied that he had made his non-verbal point, he stomped past my mom and I and rumbled down the stairs to the basement to tinker in his gunroom”. My father’s disgust at Michelle and Makayla was for their being Black and in his home. My father’s disgust at my mother was for failing to share his racist belief and his accusation was that she had rejected his domination by disobeying his command in not enforcing his racist home rules regardless of her beliefs. This was shown by their dispute in the basement of which “I couldn’t make out all the details, but [in which] I learned that there were certainly not to be any more Black girls over to our house playing with my sister”. Furthermore, our places within the power structure of the home were demonstrated by my father holding my mother accountable to the violation of his policy and so his sovereignty. We were all beneath our father, but my sister and I were beneath our mother, at least at that time.

Roles dictated to me by my father were both similar and different to those of my mother. What was similar was that I was expected to experience domination by obeying my father’s command. For example, in ‘So,’ my father punished me with emotional and physical chastisement for failing to obey him. He called me to the garage after I had “. . . done something



‘wrong,’ or [after] I had forgotten to do something he had told me to . . .” and when I indicated that I had no intention of respecting either his command or his authority to command (his sovereignty), in responding “so,” he mockingly “mimick[ed]” me and then “. . . grabbed [me] by the neck, walked [me] back to the darker end of the garage . . . shoved [me] up against our antique refrigerator . . . [and put his] hand[s] around my neck and squeezed tightly”. I stepped briefly out of my role and place within the power structure of his home and was brought swiftly back within it, and beneath him, via chastisement.

As mentioned, this was similar to what happened with my mother, however, how my dictated role and place differed from my mother’s, and my sister’s for that matter, was that along with *being dominated* by my father, I was also expected to learn *how to dominate*. For example, in ‘Sports’ when I “. . . demonstrat[ed] meekness, fear, and an unwillingness to sacrifice my body (physically dominate other players) toward our team’s victory. . . my father would respond by yelling at me and urging me angrily to “come on, Brent! Get (the fuck (muttered)) in there!”. My father taught me via chastisement that my being-dominated by other boys my age was unacceptable. But, when I eventually demonstrated a developing proficiency at domination over other boys my age in hockey in “. . . learn[ing] how to throw my weight and position my stance so that I could . . . physical injure, or dominate [others] . . .” I was rewarded with “. . . positive messages from my coaches, teammates, teammates’ fathers, and most importantly my own father”. Through hockey, my father literally coached me on how not to *be dominated* by others but rather to *dominate* others.

Another way my father demonstrated his white working-class male sovereignty was by defending his ‘castle’ from intrusion and/or the threat of intrusion while also identifying who and/or what qualified as an ‘intruder.’ In ‘My Father’s Lawn,’ my father identified our neighbor

as a threat to his sovereignty via intrusion upon my father's home turf. It was the dog that "shit on my father's lawn" but my father held both the dog and our neighbor responsible for that intrusion. To eliminate the threat of intrusion, my father eliminated the immediate intruder (the dog) and implicitly defensibly warned our neighbor of the consequences of any potential future intrusion in the way that my father killed the dog, ". . . in such a way that would send a message beyond the death of the pet". This was a demonstration of my father's sovereignty in that he lethally defended, thereby enforced, his rule over his 'castle,' and it was a demonstration as a lesson for me in that ". . . my father would often tell *me* [emphasis added] [the] story".

'My Father's Lawn', shows the transmission of the idea to me that 'intruders' were those who, they themselves or their property which they were responsible for controlling (dog as property/chattel), crossed over the boundary of my white working-class father's realm of sovereignty (his home; his land) and challenged his rule. So, I learned that one could become an intruder based on their actions. However, my father also taught me that there are those who are inherently intruders, are threats regardless of their actions. For example, in 'Michelle and Makayla', neither Michelle nor Makayla had *acted* in such a way as to threaten my father's white male sovereignty, rather they were considered intruders and an actual threat based on their racial identity, they were responsible for "polluting" both his home, his transmission of whiteness and potentially his legacy. My sister and mother were not simply being scrutinized for allowing Black girls over to "his" house but were also subtly reminded that white daughters by extension should not become involved in any way with Black people, and so Black men: ". . . I learned that there were certainly not to be any more Black girls over to our house playing with my sister". Furthermore, the terms my father used to identify those we must be willing to lethally defend ourselves from—"sickos,' 'bastards,' 'terrorists,' 'criminals,' and 'druggies'" – weren't explicitly

racial but were implicitly racial or denoted some deviation from the white ideal. My father transmitted whiteness and white supremacy to me as his son by demonstrating that the white patriarch in the household is responsible for defending the home from intruders, intruders being those individuals that challenge white male sovereignty and the white ideal via their actions or those who inherently exist as challenges to white male sovereignty via their racial identity.

Finally, my father demonstrated his white working-class male sovereignty within the home by enacting his own law within the home. That is, within the boundaries of my father's property, my father acted as though, and experienced that he was, exempt from following federal, state and local laws. My father felt that as long as he was in *his house*, in his 'castle', he was entitled to do anything he liked, including kill. For example, in 'My Father's Lawn' my father kills our neighbor's dog which was not physically threatening him, which is illegal. My father could have easily stalked the dog and killed it anywhere he liked. But, he didn't. He waited for it to come onto his property before killing it. He abided by the federal, state, and local law outside of his 'castle,' but not within it. This is true in 'So.' as well. The entire narrative takes place on my father's property but it is interesting that he "... walked [me] back to the darker end of the garage . . ." to carry out his act that would have legally been considered child abuse, and so illegal. The narrative begins on his property, but on the visible exterior of the property where I imagine he knew someone might see, demonstrating that he knows what he was doing was either illegal or immoral. So, he walked me further into the private center of his home to 'lay down the (his) law.' My father never laid a hand on me beyond the bounds of his property.

## *Teaching the White Desire to Dominate*

My white working-class father transmitted whiteness and white supremacy to me by scaring, shaming, and humiliating me into his likeness. Beyond demonstrating domination within the home, he embedded the value of domination deep within my psyche by making me feel worthless, powerless, and afraid while providing only one way out of those feelings: to make others feel worthless, powerless, and afraid. In this way, he worked to ensure that I would carry on his legacy of white male domination even after I inevitably left his household and became free from his direct influence. Fathers desire their sons to carry on their legacy. My white working-class father uses trauma as the vehicle to ensure transmission of his legacy—that his son carries on the reputation of white heterosexual manhood, that he taught his son how to defend the “castle”, his property against all others who pose a threat via domination.

Not only did I come to conceptually understand that I ‘should’ be dominating via his stories and example, I actually developed a *desire* to dominate. This desire was seemingly the only way out of the awful psychic pain that fear, shame, and humiliation caused. In essence, my desire to dominate was a way to physically, mentally and emotionally survive that mental anguish. Thus, my white working-class father traumatized me into associating domination with safety/survival and ultimately success. My father, and eventually myself, associated domination with our own personal survival and prowess as a demonstration of white masculinity; however, my father also associated domination with the survival of his white male legacy as carried on by my adoption of the same practice.

My father’s lessons in domination often induced feelings of fear, shame, and humiliation. The strategies he used to induce those feelings varied from physical violence or psychological terror to intense verbal and emotional abuse or subtle indications of wrongness or badness. In

‘So.’, several of these strategies are revealed. For example, my punishment for failing to obey my father and submit to his authority in our garage led me to fear that I might die via his physical violence. I do not explicitly state that I felt I might die, because I am unable to remember. However, what I describe doing and feeling are commonly associated with traumatic events and responses related to the fear of death and the body’s mechanisms for preventing death (Bezo & Maggi, 2015). After my father “. . . grabbed [me] by the neck . . . and then. . . shoved [me] up against our antique refrigerator. . . I remember feeling almost completely unable to move, like my brain could not communicate with the rest of my body”. Furthermore, “[h]e was saying something, but I can’t remember what it was, all I can recall was the squeezing”. Both intermittent memory loss and ‘freeze’ response in the body are associated with physically traumatic events (Classen et al., 1993).

Even though my father was very rarely physically violent towards me, he often used the threat of physical violence to psychologically terrorize me. This is also revealed in ‘So.’:

. . . the threat of physical abuse seemed to always be there. For example, I remember my father calling me to the top of the stairs when I was in middle school with that familiar tone that promised I was about to be punished. I reluctantly went to meet him at the top of the stairs where he sat with one of our neighbors (a white man). Without telling me what I had done wrong, he told me to go out to the side of the house to get a stick. I went out and grabbed the smallest stick I could find. When I came back with it he told me to go get a bigger stick. I went back and forth dozens of times before I eventually had to arrive back to my father with a 4x4 fence post. I was bawling by that time, spending all those trips anticipating what it was going to be like to be hit with the stick I was carrying.

Though my father did nothing to my body to indicate to me that I was going to die, and so should fear dying, he still made me to believe that he was going to hit me with that 4x4 fence post. It might not be rational or logical to believe that my father, who at that point had never physically

abused me, was going to kill me with a 4x4 fence post. But loss of rational and logical cognition (forms of executive function) are also commonly associated with traumatic events.

My father was intent on teaching me that everyone in his home must obey the patriarch and this implicated me in particular if I too was to ascend to such a position. To this end, psychological terrorizing via threat of physical abuse were verbal and emotional insults that induced feelings of shame and humiliation. In “So.” I talked about how I struggled to learn how to help with changing the oil in our vehicles “. . . without [my father] ever thoroughly teaching me what to do or allowing me to learn in a context where I wasn’t constantly berated, humiliated and afraid . . .”. In “Sports” I wrote about how when I demonstrated meekness and fear “. . . my father would respond by yelling at me and urging me angrily to “come on, Brent! Get (the fuck (muttered)) in there!” and that “[t]he yelling happened during the game but also shortly after. I always received it with my head down on the ride home and usually on the verge of tears. My public performance in a game was a direct reflection on what and how he taught me to man up and exhibit white masculine traits. “On some occasions I did cry, and then my father would shame and humiliate me for that”. In this way, my father induced shame and humiliation, the fear that I was not good enough, to emotionally dominate me into learning how legacies are transmitted via trauma.

As a final form of domination through the act of shaming, my father regularly and subtly indicated that something I was doing or interested in was wrong or bad, ridiculous or unspeakable. This comes up in both “Nini’s Birthday” and in “Michelle and Makayla.” In “Nini’s Birthday,” I drew my father’s attention to that which had drawn my attention:

After we had been seated and had ordered our food, I noticed a man dressed in all black across the restaurant from us. His juxtaposition against the backdrop of the whole place caused him to stand out to me. Or for whatever reason, I noticed him. He was racially white, had middle-length jet-black hair, was wearing tight black

jeans, a tight black shirt, what seemed to be designer leather boots, and a leather coat. He was also wearing pale shades of make-up, black eyeliner, lipstick, and an earring.

As we waited for our food, I turned to my father to ask him why the man was dressed up this way. My father answered by informing me that the man was gay. I didn't know what the term 'gay' meant, so I asked my father about that too. He began to say something but stopped as our food arrived. After our food had been laid out in front of us and the wait staff had left the table he began to speak again. He did not directly answer my question but instead told me to hush, and that the man in all black was weird, that people like him sometimes dressed in women's clothes, that I should stay away from him, and that I needed to hurry up and eat my dinner. I wanted to prod further but was accustomed to what happened if I neglected to hush. . .

By shutting down my inquiry in front of others and in hushing me generally, my father established a boundary and the importance of white heterosexuality and the development of my white sexuality by making me feel that the interest I had taken was wrong and that I should feel bad about it—that it was shameful and that I should feel ashamed. He was proficient at shutting down or interrupting any behavior that contradicted his intent on transmitting his legacy and he accomplished this same feeling with a simple look like when he came home to find Michelle and Makayla sitting on our front stoop.

In each of these instances my white working-class father shaped the course of the transmission of his legacy through a domination process seeking to induce feelings of fear, shame, and humiliation to instill in me (and others) the individual lessons that what I was doing or how I was being was a problem. I learned this lesson well, that if I wasn't in control of people or situations around me like my father was—if I wasn't establishing ridged boundaries of power, practicing white heterosexuality, protecting my property via inclusion/exclusion—I was in danger of dying, feeling like I wanted to die, or feeling like I should die.

I hated my father for the things he did to me and the ways he made me feel. However, my desire to desperately be free from those feelings was even more pressing. Unfortunately, the power dynamic my father created and drew me into contained multiple dichotomies that set up binary thinking: powerful vs. powerless, valuable vs. worthless, secure and confident vs. afraid and humiliated, and proud vs. ashamed. To master this power dynamic, I learned only two positions existed: dominator vs. dominated—perpetrator of violence vs. victim of violence. Though theoretically I might have considered accepting my lot as the inferior, evading further admonishment by submitting to my father’s domination, my father would not allow it. As was previously discussed, my father demonstrated to everyone and anyone *that* he was in charge, but demonstrated and then taught me *how* to be in charge. My mother, sister, and anyone my father intended to dominate could avoid punishment by simply submitting. However, I could not. I not only had to submit to my father, accept his sovereignty and right to dominate me, but I was also required to demonstrate to my father that I could get others (‘others emphasized as feminine and/or an inferior masculine which included women, men of color, and queer/ed men) to submit to me, and that I could be dominating like him and therefore able to carry on his legacy. Furthermore, the strategies used to induce fear, shame, and humiliation within me didn’t cease until I dominated like he did. That would be the day my fear and shame subsided.

The easing or ceasing of my father’s strategies and my realization that I had the power to ease and cease his strategies via domination of others is discussed in ‘Sports’:

After my first few successful checks, I received positive messages from my coaches, teammates, teammates’ fathers, and most importantly, my own father. The moments were fleeting but for a while after each game



I got a big hit, I didn't have to worry about my father mentally and emotionally destroying me.

Here, I began to associate dominating others via physical trauma with freedom from (safety from) fear, shame, and humiliation. Furthermore, through this process of being punished with domination by my father and protected from that by dominating others, the desire to dominate moved gradually out of the realm of my father's expectation of me and into the realm of my own desire and mastery of dominating others.

This is evident most clearly in the narratives shared in the introduction of this project. In these narratives, which were composed via the same process as the rest of the personal narratives in this project, I demonstrate a desire that had become all my own and was activated by defending against my feelings of fear, shame, and humiliation that had become so familiar to and associated with my survival in regard to my relationship with my father. For example, when Jeremy invoked in me the feelings of fear, shame, and humiliation that my father had, I "fantasized regularly about killing Jeremy." Killing Jeremy or planning to kill Jeremy by taking my knife to school ". . . tucked in my sock . . . in order to stab Jeremy . . ." was neither the only nor the most likely response to resolve my feelings. I could have told an adult, or asked to talk to Jeremy privately and conveyed my feelings to him. I could have even once asked him to stop. Instead, I neither considered nor attempted any of those things; rather, I wanted to kill him and prepared to do so.

#### *Privileging and Insulating white male Relationship*

My white working-class father transmitted whiteness and white supremacy to me as his son by centering the identity of, and relationship between, white men which worked to naturalize the supremacy of whiteness and maleness in my mind. This functioned to position the father/son relationship as the most prized and privileged while also diminishing the visibility and humanity

of the ‘other,’ most notably women and people of color. The outcome of my learning to decenter and dehumanize the ‘other’ is that I became unable to empathize with the ‘other.’ And, without empathy for the ‘other,’ I was able to imagine, prepare for and engage in narcissistic violence against the ‘other,’ establishing myself on course to reproduce white patriarchy in my own eventual ‘castle.’

My father centered the identity of, and relationship between, white men by establishing a veil of invisibility and silence beyond the bounds of our father/son white male relationship. For example, the invisibility of women is evident in the personal narrative for this project via absence and omission. The personal narrative includes little to no information about the thoughts, experiences or feelings of my mother or sister. In fact, in all of the narrative data included in this project, I only mention my mother and sister four times, and several narratives make no mention of them at all. It’s not that they weren’t present during or in relationship to what went on between me and my father, it’s that neither me nor my father were very concerned with them or what they thought, felt, and experienced—they existed only peripherally to us and our white male relationship. The only other women mentioned in the personal narrative beyond my mother and sister are Michelle, Makayla and their mother. But, they are not mentioned with any sort of depth. Certainly, they had thoughts and feelings on being put out on the stoop and then never allowed back to our home. But, there is no mention of that, my narrative presents them as mere objects left out on and then picked up from the stoop. Conversely, in addition to me and my father, 12 individual white men are mentioned in the personal narrative, most of whom are white male family members. Clearly, not only were white men and white male relationships centered and prioritized during my growing-up years, they remained centered and prioritized for me as I produced data for this project.

Furthermore, the extent to which racial ‘others’ are mentioned within the personal narrative limits their role to mere objects that reinforce and reify the justification of white male supremacy. For example, no people of color are given full consideration as people or are even mentioned beyond threats to the rights and entitlement of white men. They are dehumanized and abstracted as “‘sickos,’ ‘bastards,’ ‘terrorists,’ ‘criminals,’ and ‘druggies.’”.

Finally, it is clear throughout the narrative data that I am aware of and abide by a code of silence regarding the inner-workings of the white working-class father son relationship in that I do not go to anyone for help or comfort, not even my mother when I experience or witnessed violence between white men, particularly white fathers and sons. For example, I never spoke up or sought help in attempt to intervene in the violence I witnessed enacted against my cousins by my uncles, nor did I seek help or tell anyone about what went on between me and my father. It was more feasible for me to prepare to kill others in order to curb my emotional suffering than to tell someone what was happening, it was more feasible for me to wound others than to heal.

This silence between and distancing (subordinating) of social identity outside of whiteness and maleness created a relational rift that prevented me from empathizing with others. That is, in any narrative of conflict or pain, mine and my father’s pain were the only emotional experiences that mattered, were the only emotional experiences that were even considered. Definitely, what neither my father, nor eventually I, considered was how our actions hurt others. Everything was always about how we felt, how we wanted to feel, and what we had to do to others in order to feel that way. The impact on ‘others’ was trivial. As previously mentioned, how my mother and sister felt was trivial. How Michelle, Makayla and their mother felt was trivial. How our neighbor felt about his dog dying was trivial. How the hockey players I “smash[ed] up” felt was trivial. How Jeremy felt when I said all of those awful racist hurtful

things to him was trivial. I considered his life to be trivial. How Jessica felt when I encouraged her suicide was trivial. I considered her life to be trivial. The suffering of others mattered, but only inasmuch as it could be caused by my father and I to relieve our own.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The findings of this research illustrate how the white working-class father-son relationship functions as a racial project that, without intervention, ensures the perpetual production and re-production of white supremacist patriarchy at the micro-level of individual experience and interaction within white working-class families and homes. White working-class fathers create within the private realm of the home a power structure that imitates and reinforces white colonial racial and patriarchal dictatorship at the macro-level. This power structure is defined by a straight white man who unilaterally makes and enforces laws that establish race, gender, and sexual hierarchy as a way of asserting, naturalizing, and instilling white heterosexual and male domination to all members of the household, but especially towards the son who is eventually held responsible and entitled to carry on the legacy of white supremacist patriarchy in the father's stead.

The traumatic nature of the father's rule ensures that though the son despises his father for the way he is made to feel, he will nevertheless adopt the father's racist, sexist, and homophobic ideology and practice. The son does so in order to escape feelings of fear, shame, and humiliation. Furthermore, the father makes the son associate domination with physical, psychological, and emotional survival from those who act or are inherently positioned against him on the basis of race. Additionally, the centering, privileging, and insulating of white men and their relationships to each other creates a relational rift that disables the son from considering women, people of color, and Queer folks as fully human. This dehumanization ensures that nothing—not empathy, morality, or help from others—will prevent the white son from engaging in the subtle day-to-day and/or extremist and/or mass white supremacist, patriarchal, and

homophobic violence necessary for maintaining the colonial, white supremacist, patriarchal, and heterosexist social order at-large.

Racial formation theory was critical in this study as it enabled the researcher to view his being raised by his father as a racial project that gave meaning to and constructed whiteness and white supremacy both within him and society at large—between him and society at-large. It enabled him to consider the organization of everyday experiences within his life and family in relationship to larger social structures and institutions of white supremacy. Furthermore, it enabled him to situate racial meaning and discursive practice within the historical context of settler colonialism, racial dictatorship, and racial hegemony, connecting his very intimate experience to history and national identity.

Largely, the findings in this project confirm the research from the literature reviewed. Viewing the white working-class father-son relationship as a racial project through the lens of Omi and Winant's theory of racial formation, this project confirms that race is neither biologically predetermined nor objectively fixed; rather, that race is constructed via tensions and conflict within white-working-class households and within white working-class father-son relationships. Furthermore, lessons taught and learned at the micro-level of individual experience and interaction reinforced dominant ideology and cultural beliefs held and practiced at the macro-level of social structure and institution. For example, the relationship created by the father between his son, the members of my family, women, people of color, and Queer folks mirrors the relationship between Donald Trump, the members of his family, women, people of color, and Queer folks within the U.S. Furthermore, the lessons learned by the son at the micro-level echo the cultural beliefs articulated in the introduction chapter of this project. This project also finds settler colonialism and a logic of racial superiority deeply interwoven throughout

narrative data. Though it was never expressed as such—race (the supremacy of whiteness) was normalized, naturalized, and integrated into the son’s racial common-sense, leading him to be complicit in racial hegemony. Finally, this project found that lessons in whiteness and white supremacy never occurred without the integral relationship to maleness and heterosexuality—that gender and sexuality co-constitute white supremacy and the most supreme forms of whiteness.

Sadly, this project finds those theories on race and racism, whiteness and white supremacy articulated more than a century ago by Black and other intellectuals of color to hold firm. Without a complete and comprehensive intervention in whiteness and white supremacy at every stage and level, it reproduces itself, including within the white working-class father-son relationship. It is then reasonable to think that not only was the problem of race and the “color line” the greatest problem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as DuBois warned, but it remains and will remain one of our greatest problems in the 21<sup>st</sup> century without intervention (DuBois & Edwards, 2007, p. 3). Those three important elements of whiteness identified by Dubois in 1920: it’s construction as supreme, it’s manifestation in the bodies of white people as a feeling of hatred towards the racialized “other,” and its most powerful assertion of its own supremacy being acts of violence all emerge from the data and findings of this project.

This project aligned with Frankenburg’s (1993) finding that individual white lives are sites of the cultural reproduction of racism and challenges to it, though this project found that challenging to be largely uninfluential within the scope of the study. Furthermore, this project confirmed Frankenburg’s assertion that whiteness and white supremacy persist when they go “unmarked” and “un-named” (to white people, not to people of color), enabling racial abstraction and unconsciousness to manifest as racist thinking and practice (p. 1). Neither the white father

nor white son in this project were aware of their adoption or pursuit of white supremacy until the son began to develop a racial consciousness in college. Additionally, this project confirms Frankenburg's finding that whiteness is "fundamentally asymmetrical . . ." and that it ". . . signals the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (pp. 236-237). Though both the white father and white son felt subordinated or at risk of subordination at times, they never left their location at the center and top of race, gender, and sexual hierarchy. This project responds to Frankenburg's finding that the racial order is normalized and maintained through white experience, and that "attention to the construction of white "experience" is important, both to transform the meaning of whiteness and to transform the relations of race in general" (p. 242).

This project also confirmed Hughey's (2016) finding on hegemonic whiteness that "whites possess similar and shared definitions of an ideal white self that functions as an implicit ideal against which one's own worth, behavior, and ultimately one's identity are measured. . . [and that] [t]o successfully pursue this ideal, one must continually engage in inter- and intra-racial boundary work to demarcate both nonwhite "others" and specific "lesser" forms of whiteness" (p. 228). In this study, the white father presented his son with a white ideal against which he was compared and eventually came to compare himself to that was possessive, dominating, self-centered, unempathetic, racist, sexist, and homophobic. Furthermore, in accordance with Hughey's findings, the white ideal was constructed both positively and negatively in relationship to racial code words that presented as mere qualities and character traits. Also, this project finds that the white father was able to accept white supremacy himself and transmit white supremacy to his son by engaging in historical delusion such as that referenced by Bery (2016) in her article, "Making Whiteness in Reenactments of Slavery." In



believing that his right to rule emerged from his rightful ownership of the land he lived on, the white father engaged in historical amnesia, forgetting that the land he lived on was forcefully and violently stolen from Indigenous people in the colonial conquest of the Americas. Were he forced to confront that history, his ideology of white entitlement and earned possession would come into deep and potentially irreconcilable conflict.

Significantly, the findings in this project align with Thompson and Watson's (2016) analysis of whiteness through the lens of trauma which found normative white culture to be traumatized (p. 231–237). This project found both the white father and the white son to have experienced racialized trauma and to have engaged in racist traumatization. Thompson and Watson speak to the white traumatic wound of engaging in or being complicit in white racist violence. However, this project found there to be a relationship between white racialized violence as trauma (violent trauma enacted as an expression of whiteness even if enacted against another white person) and white racist trauma (violent trauma enacted by white people against people of color as a form of racism), which is: White sons learn to do white racist trauma to people of color by experiencing white racialized trauma at the hands of their fathers.

The findings from this project also confirm most of Engles' (2016) findings that male whiteness, or white masculinity, is composed of: a perceived entitlement to property ownership in the form of housing, women, and people of color; stunted emotional and spiritual development; and unaddressed repressed shame. The only finding of Engles' not confirmed by this project is the demarcation of racial, ethnic, and geographic superiority through world travel. It is likely that this is a class difference in whiteness and white masculinity in that the white father and son in this project did not have significant financial access to world-travel like the character Schmidt in Louis Begley's novel, *About Schmidt*.

This project both aligns with and departs from Kimmel's (2013) findings and articulation of the theory of aggrieved entitlement. Kimmel's (2013) text explores white men's anger through the question, "[w]ith whom are they angry? Why? And why now?" (p. 9). This project found both the white father and the white son to have developed and held anger towards people of color, women, and Queer folks undergirded by a fear of losing the sovereignty or access to sovereignty afforded them as heterosexual white men. For the son, anger does emerge within him as he attempts to move into positions of power he is taught are entitled to him as long as he is willing and able to 'earn' them. However, that anger manifests for the father more so in order to 'protect' those entitlements he finds himself to already have secured (the data historically precedes Kimmel's research). What remains constant, whether or not the entitlements have been or are yet to be secured, is that any perceived loss or risk of losing them is connected psychologically for white men to survive. Then those white men will immediately identify the threat and target those who embody challenging or 'lesser' forms of whiteness, or people of color. Significantly, this project confirms Kimmel's finding that what has changed in this era of white men's resurfacing of overt violence against the 'Other' is not white men, but white men's level of alarm. In other words, it is not that white men have again become white supremacist, sexist, and homophobic. It is that white men's white supremacy, sexism, and homophobia has been ceaseless but dormant (relatively speaking) until spun up more recently into overt and public violence in the Trump era.

Kimmel found there to be some relationship between white men's fear and anger and their desire to raise their white sons. This project contributes to that finding's explanation in revealing the factor of legacy. That is, this project found that the reason white fathers are so

intent on keeping custody of and raising their sons is to retain access to securing their individual and collective legacy of white supremacist hetero patriarchy through their sons.

In the epilogue of Kimmel's (2013) text, he concludes by providing what he has determined to be the solutions to the problems of white men's anger and violence. After stating that violent angry white men are in the minority of white men and that their outrage seems to be a waning problem—as most white men in America are adjusting to unprecedentedly high rates of social equality relatively well—he suggests the liberation of angry white men in the U.S. by empowering them to embrace new forms of masculinity that do not centralize the role of a white patriarch. Additionally, he states a need to petition our government to return to social welfare policies reminiscent of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal to alleviate the economic stress on working-class white men that has triggered their outrage.

The findings of this project conflict with key suggestions from Kimmel for intervening in the ongoing social problem of white supremacist heteropatriarchy. Though the findings in this project do suggest that offering white men access to alternative forms of masculinity that de-center the role of the patriarch could be beneficial, it struggles to make sense of how de-centering the role of the white patriarch is feasible when, significantly, the role of the white patriarch is to strive narcissistically towards the center and top of relationships and power hierarchy. Furthermore, this project cannot suggest that a return to social welfare policy can solve the problem of white supremacist hetero-patriarchy and white supremacist hetero-patriarchal violence. Without intervention in the intergenerational transfer of the ideology and practices, violence is only curbed as white men's distress is reduced by economic appeasement. De-activating white men's violence by affording more of them more access to material wealth (as was done by the New Deal) not only temporarily calms them until they become afraid again

when the global economy shifts, but actually provides them with what they want and feel is entitled to them: disproportionate access to power through possession. Obviously, giving more white men more economic power cannot solve the problem of white supremacy and white men's violence; it simply shifts their violence more so to the interior of the castle once they can again afford one.

In intersectionality theory Crenshaw discusses the importance of centering the most marginalized as a way to make visible the most marginalized of people and to make visible multilayered systems of subordination that further that marginalization. In coding the data for this project, I was unable to see omissions around gender, class and race because of the way I continually recentered white men much like my father. I was able to clearly identify what my father had done but I was unable to see my own complicity and adherence to white supremacy. After all, I have worked hard to see myself as an anti-racist, anti-sexist activist. Intersectionality theory and the contributions of women of color enabled me to finally make visible the impacts of white supremacy in this father son relationship had on women, queer folks and people of color.

### **Implications**

This project set out to reveal what is often kept private in white working-class heteronormative families to provide a theoretical mapping of the racialized, gendered, and homophobic practices that occur within white working-class father/son relationships in order to further understand the dynamic and process of the intergenerational transfer of whiteness and white supremacy in hopes of identifying a pathway that leads out of this violence. In relationship to the findings of this project, this project suggests the following ways of intervening in white supremacy and white supremacist violence perpetrated by white men: the development and implementation of race-conscious, historically-contextualized, anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-

heterosexist trauma-informed fathering educational programs that target white working-class fathers; widespread institutional provision of counseling and mental health services integrated into the regular school day of K-12 education for healing racialized and racist trauma; anti-racist healthy masculinity coaching for boys; and the adoption and further development of Thompson and Watson's (2016) 'white double consciousness' by white people, particularly white men.

### **Implications at the Micro-Level of white Supremacy**

This project examines the micro level of relationships within the family between the father and son as an intimate yet realistic examination of white supremacy and racism. It is here that I uncover these dynamics and only through this process that I was unable to pull back the curtain and expose my own unacknowledged and implicated role in this racial project. This Ethnic Studies research provided an epistemological and theoretical framework to critically employ self-reflectivity using narrative data to reveal a very old and embedded process of white supremacy and its transmission through the father-son relationship. However, addressing or interrupting this project is quite another challenge. Educational institutions have gradually been adopting the language and values of equity, diversity, and inclusion for decades, but, as the introduction of this project shows, this has only worked to push white supremacist ideology and practice marginally below the surface of white communities. This may be because equity, diversity, and inclusion work does not address white supremacy in each location it resides, and does not address it at potentially the most significant location it resides: within white people. Throughout the course of this project, I have met and discussed the contents of this projects along with numerous other events in my childhood with my father through the lens of race, gender, class, and sexuality. For the most part, the only times I've been able to steer the conversation towards any meaningful critical self-reflection is when drawing attention to the

things that were done by my grandfather to my father. My father is unable to see the problematics of his actions, but he is able to identify the wounds given to him by his father during his own childhood. This leads me to believe that an intervention in whiteness and white supremacy cannot completely happen without addressing the wounds it causes white men and the wounds white men cause in response. Upon reading this project, it will be easy to write my father or our family off as uneducated, shitty, crass, white working-class fools. Instead, I urge readers to consider that what I've done here is to outline the particular ways white supremacy is transferred in white working-class families in the U.S. with the full knowledge that these rituals must exist in middle and upper-class families as well in order for white supremacy to be as healthy as it is and for Donald Trump to receive the support that he does across class lines. White supremacy does not result from the stupidity and cultural ignorance of white people. Though it may appear to, it is embedded much deeper and more firmly than that.

### **Implications at the Macro-Level of white Supremacy**

“All is fair in love and war” is an apt expression that informs how structures of white supremacy are held in place. Liberals are struggling with the fact that it does not seem to matter what Trump is accused of: he is able to lie, cheat, and steal, yet still maintains a dedicated and loyal voter base (Lee, 2017). Trump even confirmed this himself at a campaign rally in Iowa, stating "I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters" (Diamond, 2016). Trump has become an icon for the legitimacy and continuity of white male supremacy. As long as Trump continues to “win,” to appear to ensure the survival and legacy of white supremacist heteropatriarchy by any means possible, and to maintain that he is in fact the “king of his castle”, he will continue to culturally align with white families and white men. This

gives him the right to assert his will and domination towards the reification of race, gender, sexual, and class hierarchy in the U.S., and increasingly, the world.

### **Unique Contribution and Future Research**

This project takes as intimate a look as is possible at the inner-workings of the intergenerational transmission of whiteness and white supremacy from white heterosexual working-class father to white son. It reveals what is kept hidden by veils of silence and complicity within and around white families and white father-son relationships. The researcher risks everything dear to him—his longstanding relationships and support network, his career, his immediate and extended family relationships, potential custody of children in the future, his role in community organizing, and generally everything that gives his life joy and meaning—in order to expose the traumatic etching of white supremacist patriarchy into the souls of white boys, into their mental and emotional constitution, where it becomes unreachable by even their own reason and morality.

To reiterate what was set out in the introduction of this project, the taking of these risks is not meant to indicate anything about my own courage or morality that obscures the problematic ways I've been complicit and active in carrying white supremacy forward, however conscious or unconscious. I do not mean to disassociate myself from white supremacy, I mean to intervene in white supremacy which means continuing to reveal and intervene in it within my own self in new ways as I become and am made aware of its operation within my psyche and manifestation in my practice, as occurred in the third finding of this project. Additionally, I hope to provide an example for other white researchers and scholars who have important information to share but may be caught behind a wall of fear and shame which has prevented them from sharing similar to the ways I have been.

The project draws attention to those white male rituals which have been hidden, overlooked, or disregarded as normative cultural practice in white families and makes the perpetuity of whiteness and white supremacy vulnerable to intervention in a new and critical way. Therefore, the researcher encourages further research in the following areas to further develop this opportunity for understanding and intervening in white supremacy: expand this project to include both narrative data and analysis on how the author changed course from his trajectory on the path of achieving white supremacist patriarchal legacy for his father and society at-large towards committing his life towards career work as a Director of Programs for youth in a non-profit organization committed to social justice; bolster the narrative data on the intimate inner-workings of transmission of whiteness and white supremacy from fathers to sons in white families by looking as intimately at additional white father-son relationships over time; and incorporate the perspectives of all witnesses and actors within the white family i.e. white fathers, mothers, daughters, and other siblings implicated in the intergenerational transmission of whiteness and white supremacy.

Again, my hope is that previously hidden narratives of how whiteness and white supremacy are transmitted become increasingly visible and so available to scholars in Ethnic Studies who haven't yet and wouldn't otherwise have access. My hope is that these narratives become tools that can be leveraged in ways that people and scholars of color see fit.



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