

DISSERTATION

USING PHENOMENOLOGY AND CRITICAL WHITENESS TO UNDERSTAND THE  
EXPERIENCES OF WHITE COLLEGE-STUDENT SOCIAL-JUSTICE ALLIES AND THEIR  
INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH ANTI-INCLUSIVE FAMILY AND  
FRIENDS

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## ABSTRACT

### USING PHENOMENOLOGY AND CRITICAL WHITENESS TO UNDERSTAND THE EXPERIENCES OF WHITE COLLEGE-STUDENT SOCIAL-JUSTICE ALLIES AND THEIR INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH ANTI-INCLUSIVE FAMILY AND FRIENDS

This qualitative dissertation explored the research question, “How do white college-student social-justice allies describe their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends?” The data were collected from 12 white college-student social-justice allies at a predominantly white institution in the western part of the United States with a student population over 30,000. The study exposed several important findings, organized under four themes, including: More Concern than Promise (the participants regularly experienced anti-inclusive interactions), Identities Beyond Being White are Significant (the unique role marginalized identities played in interactions and relationships), Voices and Silence (the participants regularly using and *not* using their voices in the face of anti-inclusion), and Strained, Changed, and Governed (the changes in relationships the participants experienced).

Through this study, we are reminded about the complex phenomenon of whiteness and the many ways that white supremacy happens, even among well-intentioned white allies. Using critical whiteness as a theoretical framework, the findings exposed several tenets of white supremacy (minimization of racism, invisibility of whiteness, white action and complacency, white privilege, and rules of whiteness) manifested through the participants’ interactions and relationships.

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## CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Incidents of racism, discrimination, and violence against marginalized students are commonplace on our college campuses. For example, amid racial unrest in Charlottesville, a white nationalist rally was held at the University of Virginia in opposition to the removal of a statue for the Confederate general, Robert E. Lee, a figure many associate with the United States' slaveholding history. The rally was described as a, "cowardly parade of hatred, bigotry, racism, and intolerance" by the Governor, who declared a state of emergency amid the protests (Spencer & Stolberg, 2011, para. 5). On another campus, after a series of hate and bias incidents, Syracuse University students staged a sit-in at the campus center in opposition to the institution's leadership's handling of the situations. For nearly two weeks, the institution was publicly criticized in the media over the campus racial climate, which included numerous incidents of racial slurs and Black students reporting being attacked (Randle, 2019). Unfortunately, these are not isolated incidents or institutions. Any Google search for *campus race-related incidents* will result in many other examples.

The Association for the Study of Higher Education's (ASHE) Higher Education Report (2015) confirmed U.S. colleges are environments with individual incidents of racism, and also institutional and systematic discrimination. This creates environments in which students of color face hostility, experience prejudicial treatment and stereotyping, feel invisible, have their voices silenced, and are segregated from the broader college community. Minoritized students, and many other underrepresented students, face hostile environments. Students of color consistently find campus climates to be less accepting, less welcoming, and more racist than their white classmates experience them to be (Cabrera, Franklin, & Watson, 2017; Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Students of color also encounter discrimination and harassment more frequently than white students (Johnson et al., 2014; McFarland, 2014; Rankin & Reason, 2005).

Bauman (2018) reviewed hate crime statistics from a myriad of sources, all of which supported a rise in these incidents: the U.S. Department of Education reported a 25% increase in campus hate crimes between 2015-2016. Additionally, Bauer-Wolf (2019) reported campus police forces informed the Federal Bureau of Investigations of 280 hate crimes in 2017, an increase from 257 in 2016 and 194 in 2015. Regardless of whether campus hate crimes occur more frequently, or that they happen at the same rates but with more attention, there is a problem. These hateful environments have been part of higher education since its inception (Wilder, 2013), and it is reasonable to question why there has not been more positive change through such a long history. Answers can be found through the nature of white supremacy.

White supremacy, at its foundation, is the racist belief that white people are superior to people of other races; however, it is more complex than this. While examples can be found throughout history and the world, white supremacy as a concept was popularized in the United States before and after the American Civil War (Wikipedia, n.d.). It represents a political ideology that asserts the domination of white people through social, political, historical, and institutional control. Others categorize white supremacy as the many systems in which white people enjoy privilege over other ethnic groups, at the individual, group, and structural levels (Wikipedia, n.d.).

White supremacy is often only seen by white people as extreme acts of racism, for example, people committing hate crimes or attending at a white nationalist rally, instead of the everyday ways white people participate in systemic racism (DiAngelo, 2018; Tochluk, 2008). DiAngelo (2018) offered a more robust definition of white supremacy:



For sociologists and those involved in current racial justice movements, however, White supremacy is a descriptive and useful term to capture the all-encompassing centrality and assumed superiority of people defined and perceived as White and the practices based on this assumption. White supremacy in this context does not refer to individual White people and their individual intentions or actions but to an overarching political, economic, and social system of domination. (p. 28)

For students of color on college campuses, one way in which white supremacy manifests itself is as a dominance of white identity, as highlighted by Harper and Hurtado (2007):

White interests were thought to be privileged over others, which many racial/ethnic minorities viewed as inconsistent with institutional claims of inclusiveness. These perceptions are perhaps best illustrated in this quote from a sophomore student:

‘Everything is so White. The concerts: White musicians. The activities: catered to White culture. The football games: a ton of drunk White folks. All the books we read in class: White authors and viewpoints. Students on my left, right, in front and in back of me in my classes: White, White, White, White....’ (p. 18)

White supremacy as a concept is complex, and manifests and maintains itself in a number of ways. DiAngelo (2011) offered it is, “dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on myriad levels” (p. 56). White supremacy includes a broad spectrum of concepts including everyday ways that whiteness becomes centered in the world, as demonstrated by the quote above, and active violence, as demonstrated by the hate-crime statistics referenced earlier. Dismantling white supremacy is a goal of critical whiteness. Critical whiteness serves as the theoretical framework for this dissertation.

## Theoretical Framework

Critical whiteness is a field of inquiry focused on white culture and identity. The study of what it means to be white is not new; scholars including W. E. B. DuBois (1920) and James Baldwin (1965) engaged in this topic. Critical whiteness draws origins from critical race theory (CRT), although some criticize that connection. Critical race theory aims to prioritize people of color in the challenge of white supremacy and decentering of whiteness. Critical whiteness ultimately centers whiteness, which is counter to the aim of CRT. Critical whiteness concentrates attention towards the question of how white Americans understand their racial identities and cultures, and the privileges that go along with those identities and cultures. Critical whiteness examines the ways that history, law, and culture have contributed to the construction of whiteness, racism, and white supremacy (Aronson & Ashlee, 2018; Hartmann et al., 2009). It is a broad field of inquiry with several key concepts. Nayak (2007) stated:

...whiteness is the rubric through which many of our ideas of citizenship and human rights are written and offers three assumptions: 1) whiteness is a modern invention that has changed over time and place, 2) whiteness is a social norm that includes an index of unspoken privileges, and 3) whiteness can be deconstructed for the betterment of humanity. (p. 738)

Harris (1993) pioneered the concept of whiteness as property. A law professor and legal scholar, Harris exposed the close connection between white racial identity and property ownership, which is upheld through American law. With the legal end of slavery and the end of active conquest over Native Americans, wealthy white men needed a way to maintain power (at the prospect of the poor coming together, including both white and Black people). It is during this period we saw the emergence of a social construction around the white racial identity.

Superiority could no longer be marked by freedom or wealth alone; being white became the new power structure in the hierarchy of people. White people were granted access through laws around property, including land and homes, and the right to exclude others from property. The concept of whiteness as property also includes legal entitlements and other privileges that were reserved for white people only. This concept is a legacy we see today, both with racism (for example, who has access to certain spaces), economic disparities between racial groups, and in the way white people are prioritized and feel entitled to most spaces.

Critical whiteness exposes the ways whiteness functions to uphold white supremacy. Some of the most commonly referenced examples include: white people's tendency to minimize racism (Cabrera, 2014a), the invisibility of whiteness (DiAngelo, 2011; 2018), white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011; 2018), white privilege (McIntosh, 1988), and the avoidance of race-related conversation (Castagno, 2008). White people exist within the white racial frame, a way of coming to understand the world through negative perceptions of people of color and positive understanding of white people, all of which creates a dominant narrative of whiteness as "good" (Cabrera, 2012; DiAngelo, 2018; Feagin, 2010). Critical whiteness is a broad area of inquiry, and using it as a theoretical framework allows for the exposure and dismantling of some of the rules, cultures, and values that uphold white supremacy.

#### Statement of Research Problem and Significance

White people must play a stronger role in being critical of whiteness, and also owning and dismantling white supremacy and the power that system asserts over people of color (Tochluk, 2008). Our work as higher-education staff and faculty often includes trying to engage white college students in social-justice educational opportunities to make our campuses (and the world, hopefully) more just, and to counter the hateful incidents that happen on campuses around

the country. Effectively engaging white college students in social justice requires understanding their experiences within the broader phenomenon of whiteness.

In and of itself, studying white college-student social-justice allies is problematic. This is particularly true when shining a light on white allies who are doing good work, for example, by using their voices to challenge racism. White people often display racial arrogance, asserting their expertise on concepts such as racism without grounded knowledge, along with a willingness to dismiss the informed perspective of a person of color, which can further perpetuate white supremacy (DiAngelo, 2011). This type of research grants space and power to people who have already been granted a disproportionate amount of space and power. There are benefits to using critical whiteness as a theoretical framework, as it acknowledges that even white allies still contribute to and participate in white supremacy, regardless of their intentions.

In studying white college-student social-justice allies, there are many areas a researcher could explore: white racial identity development, ally identity development, the most impactful social-justice experiences, etc. Overall, there is limited research documenting white college-student social-justice allies' experiences. In conducting the literature review in preparation for this dissertation, one area which contained very limited empirical research was the interactions and relationships white college-student social-justice allies had with anti-inclusive friends and families. The limited existing literature suggests there are documented challenges associated with interacting with and maintaining relationships with those who are anti-inclusive (Malott et al., 2015; Smith & Redington, 2010). This limit in research exposes a significant gap in the literature. This dissertation represents the intersection of all the preceding information: (a) the experiences of white college-student social-justice allies, (b) our understanding of the phenomenon of whiteness, and (c) exposing white supremacy through critical whiteness.

## Research Question

The current study addressed the following question: *How do white college-student social-justice allies describe their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends?*

## Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout this study:

- *Anti-Inclusive* – an umbrella term only used to describe a wide range of exclusionary language and beliefs (racist, homophobic, xenophobic, etc.). The use of this term does not imply the goal of social-justice work is or should be inclusion alone. Inclusion alone does not achieve social justice. Inclusion asks, “Is this environment safe for everyone to feel like they belong?” and justice asks, “Whose safety is being sacrificed and minimized to allow others to be comfortable maintaining dehumanizing views?” (Stewart, 2017).
- *College* – used generically to represent both colleges and universities.
- *Critical whiteness* – Examining the ways that history, law, and culture contribute to the construction of whiteness, racism, and white supremacy in the United States (Aronson & Ashlee, 2018, p. 53). Related terms common in the literature include *critical whiteness studies*, *critical whiteness theory*, and *whiteness theory*.
- *Racism* – The subordination of targeted racial groups by the agent racial group through the actions of individuals, cultural norms and values, unequal power distribution, structures, systems, and societal practices (Wijeysinghe et al., 1997, p. 88).
- *Social Justice* – Used as an umbrella term including social justice, diversity, multicultural competence, inclusiveness, and inclusive excellence.
- *Social-Justice Ally* – a student who identifies as an advocate for social justice, whether or not they use the specific ally term.

- *Students of Color* – includes students who identify as a member of a minoritized racial group.
- *Underrepresented* – includes students who identify as a member of a minoritized racial group, and also other marginalized groups (LGBTQIA students, for example).
- *Whiteness* – contains two components: (a) how white people’s customs, cultures, and beliefs are the standard by which all other groups are compared, and (b) how those same customs, cultures, and beliefs create the perception that non-whites are inferior or abnormal (Smithsonian, n.d.).
- *White supremacy* – the all-encompassing centrality and assumed superiority of people defined and perceived as white, and the practices based on this assumption; the overarching political, economic, and social system of domination (DiAngelo, 2018).

#### Summary

Everyone should be concerned about the current campus climate for students of color and other underrepresented groups. The current attention being paid to the many hate and bias incidents continually happening on college campuses should be a call to all people that something needs to change. However, white supremacy will make this change difficult. There are many overt and covert ways that white supremacy is maintained. These systems uphold the domination of white people, minimize the concerns of people of color, and privilege those with power. Engaging white college students in social-justice work, helping them understand their white racial identity, engaging them in critical whiteness, and empowering them to advocate for just policies and laws are some strategies that can bring about change. These strategies, with anti-inclusive family and friends, are an even more powerful approach and warrant significant exploration. Chapter Two further explores critical whiteness, the literature documenting the

development and experiences of white college-student social-justice allies, and the directly related empirical literature surrounding our knowledge of allies' interactions and relationships.

## CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

To frame this question, *How do white college-student social-justice allies describe their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends?*, I narrowed in on five areas of literature: critical whiteness, white racial identity development, ally identity development, meaningful diversity-related academic experiences, and allies' interactions and relationships. The first four areas (critical whiteness, white racial identity development, ally identity development, and meaningful diversity-related academic experiences) provide general context for understanding the phenomenon of white college-student social-justice allies. The empirical literature directly related to the research question is presented in the fifth area (allies' interactions and relationships).

### Critical Whiteness

In learning about the experiences of white college-student social-justice allies as they describe their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends, literature surrounding whiteness was important to examine. Critical whiteness exposes the many tenets of whiteness and white-centric culture that pervade society, including college campuses. A seminal writing by McIntosh (1988) spoke to one of the tenets of whiteness, and popularized the concept of white privilege. White privilege is the unearned advantage that white people gain based on their skin color. These privileges often go unseen and unacknowledged by white people.

McIntosh (1988) described white privilege as elusive and fugitive, and offered:

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned



advantage and conferred dominance by making these subjects taboo. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to me now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that systems of dominance exist. (p. 6)

McIntosh listed 50 privileges spanning a wide range of experiences, including not being followed in a store and not having her authority questioned because of her white skin.

Another example in the literature that looked at whiteness was a study by Picca and Feagin (2007). They conducted research with over 600 white students, studying racial-event diaries the students created. The work highlighted differences in behavior of white people in private (backstage) versus public spaces. In backstage settings, which the authors described as intimate settings with white people only, there is a perception of being free from any political correctness around racial issues. In these spaces, racial jokes are at least tolerated, but, more often, encouraged and accepted as normal behavior. The research revealed large-scale and frequent racist events. Despite the severity and frequency, white people employ a variety of tactics to distance themselves from being seen as racist. Whether that is prefacing a statement by saying, "I'm not racist, but..." or seeing a racist comment as merely an inconsiderate statement by someone who is not racist, or just viewing a racial joke as meaningless, racism in the heads of most white people has become associated with extremism (for example, the KKK), not the everyday ways that white people participate in and contribute to a racist society.

Several authors have addressed the notion of meritocracy. For example, Gusa (2010) spoke to the notion of meritocracy as a marker of white normativity on campus and white people's focus on entitlement and thinking that each person has earned what they have worked for and achieved. This foundational belief alleviates feelings of guilt over things such as white privilege because one falsely believes that people get what they earn and deserve. When white people are

conditioned with this belief, and when their lives are not directly impacted by racism, universalism becomes fact, where white people see their perspective as objective and representative of reality. The reality that this might not be true for all individuals becomes untrue, and, for many white people, unbelievable. Racial arrogance can result where personal success for white people is seen as solely resulting from their personal efforts, ignoring the impact of white privilege (DiAngelo, 2011). Gusa (2010) described this as monoculturalism: the belief that there is one world view and that world view is grounded in the normalcy of white culture. Feagin (2010) similarly described this singular world view through a historical grounding of the concept of the white racial frame, explaining there has been a white-created racial frame in North America that spans class, gender, and age. The frame's centrality in white minds has become the dominant narrative and "frame of reference" on racial matters (p. 60). This white racial frame impacts the way white people understand, engage with, and perpetuate white supremacy.

In a similar study exploring racism and bias, Norton and Sommers (2011) found that most white students were more likely to believe they were victims of reverse racism than Black students to be victims of racism:

Although some have heralded recent political and cultural developments as signaling the arrival of a postracial era in America, several legal and social controversies regarding 'reverse racism' highlight whites' increasing concern about anti-white bias. (p. 215)

The researchers found that decreases in perceived bias against African Americans over the past several decades have resulted in white people perceiving an increase in bias against whites. These changes in whites' perceptions shifted many white people to thinking they experience more bias than African Americans.

The previously discussed studies suggest that white supremacy is often invisible to white people. DiAngelo (2011) suggested a perception of, “whiteness as normal,” and asserted that through segregation (both intentional individual choices and the result of predominantly white campuses and neighborhoods), white people spend most of their time functioning in majority white environments. The absence of diversity becomes synonymous with, “normal,” “good,” and “white” – “good schools,” “good neighborhoods,” and so on. Whites do not hear the experiences of people of color or learn about the racism people of color regularly face, which results in learning that the perceptions within majority white environments are the norm. This norm becomes truth for most white people, which turns the truths of people of color into falsehoods and exaggerations. Further, DiAngelo (2011) references the psychic freedom white people enjoy that comes with the mental ability to not think about race because of having constant racial belonging, which directly contributes to white people’s tendency to minimize racism.

In a critical thought piece, DiAngelo (2011) broadened our understanding of white supremacy by exposure to the concept of white fragility, a concept that reinforces white supremacy. White people in North America are shielded from race-based stress, which results in two outcomes: the expectation of comfort when discussing race-related issues, and a reduced ability to tolerate any stress related to race. Even minimal race-related stressors can result in outbursts of emotion. Sue (2013) and colleagues pulled together data from multiple studies over a five-year period to highlight an aspect of white fragility, which is referred to as the, “...politeness protocol, a ground rule stating that potentially offensive or uncomfortable topics should be (a) avoided, ignored, and silenced or (b) spoken about in a very light, casual, and superficial manner” (p. 666). White fragility suggests that any discussion about whiteness or white privilege should be avoided in favor of less controversial topics.

With constrained conversations and differing perceptions of campus climate between white students and students of color, it is not surprising to see white people's minimization of racism well-documented in the literature. In a qualitative study of 12 white men using semi-structured interviews, Cabrera (2014a) identified that white people often believe claims of racism by students of color are unfounded or exaggerated, and that racism is not systemic and/or institutional. The participants did not associate any power component to racism; in fact, many participants saw it as something white people could be targeted for. The study also identified the white participants as having a strong orientation towards meritocracy, which is the belief that anyone can have whatever they want if they are willing to work hard for it. The reality of being white becomes divorced from the way white people see and experience oppression, which positions white people as not playing a role in racism (Cabrera, Franklin, & Watson, 2017).

Cabrera (2014b) completed a study similar to the Picca and Feagin (2007) study. In the qualitative study conducted at two large (over 40,000 students), Research I institutions, Cabrera conducted interviews with 43 white male participants between 2007 and 2008. The goal of the study was to understand how the views, attitudes, and experiences of white male undergraduate students lead to the marginalization of students of color. Most of the participants existed in racially homogenous environments. Cabrera found that racial joking was common, racial jokes were regularly told in the absence of racial minorities, and these behaviors were rationalized, again, by claiming that racial minorities are too racially sensitive. Beyond racial joking, private-space behavior also included the use of racist language, expressions of anger over pro-diversity-related issues, perpetuation of stereotypes, and most other white ideological behaviors. Participants believed "hard work" by racial minorities was the best approach to equity, believed in "reverse racism," were against affirmative action, and felt all spaces on campus should be

welcoming to them (including cultural resource centers). Cabrera's (2019) work directly connects many of these manifestations of white supremacy with colleges specifically.

There are many more components of whiteness that create white supremacy, including incidents of violence on college campuses as noted in Chapter One (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2015; Bauer-Wolf, 2019; Bauman, 2018). These examples from the literature document the complex nature of white supremacy and how it is deeply engrained in the experiences of white people, both individually and systemically. The literature here also serves as a relevant foundation to later view the findings using the theoretical framework of critical whiteness.

### White Racial Identity Development

The literature about white racial identity development helps one understand the socialization of white people, which furthers our understanding of white supremacy, and also the conditions under which white social-justice allies develop. One of the most widely cited models was continually developed and refined between 1984 and 1995 by Janet Helms. Helms's (1990) model suggested white people progress through six stages (later referred to as statuses) in developing a healthy white racial identity. The earliest status is associated with a white individual adopting the dominant cultural norms, having minimal, if any, interaction with people of color, and being generally unaware of their race and privilege. After increased racial awareness and an examination of how they individually contribute to racism, white people arrive at the last status, where they come to possess a sophisticated awareness of their racial identity, actively work to abandon any racist practices, and develop meaningful cross-racial friendships.

Rowe et al. (1994) proposed the white racial consciousness model, which was a critique of Helms's model because they believed it too narrowly focused on how white people feel about others, without enough understanding of their own white racial identity. Helms's model was also

criticized for being developed upon identity models for people of color, which some felt was inappropriate, because the identities of white people and people of color develop under such different contexts (one privileged and one subjugated). The white racial consciousness model poses another path for how white people move through racial identity development, marking that development into seven stages in two areas: unachieved statuses (which includes a lack of exploration and commitment in regard to personal racial attitudes) and achieved statuses (which range from a focus on individualism and fairness to the development of a positive racial attitude).

An additional model was developed by Sue and Sue in 1990 and pulled information and phases from several other models, with increased emphasis on the importance of engaging in antiracist activity (Sue, 2015; Sue & Sue, 2016). The model categorized white racial identity development into seven phases. All phases are grounded in the premise that racism is an integral part of life in the United States, and that everyone is socialized within a racist context.

A white person in phase one (Naivete) may exhibit a naïve curiosity about race. However, they are largely open and innocent about race and have minimal social understanding of race. Phase two, Conformity, is marked by a white person not seeing themselves as a racial being, with a denial of any racial issues. A person in this phase does not see unequal treatment based on race nor do they question the many messages they receive about the superiority of white people. Phase three, Dissonance, is when a white person becomes aware of existing inconsistencies, for example, believing all people are equal, and beginning to see how some people are treated unequally. The white person in this phase starts to address the discrepancy between their old beliefs and new information they receive and experiences they have. It is common for feelings of guilt to emerge in this phase.

In the next phase of the model, Resistance and Immersion, white people begin to see

racism, question their own racism, and can become frustrated with friends and broader society that do not appear to see the problematic issues. This is the phase where someone seen as a “white liberal” might fit, with an aim to “help” or “protect” minorities. In phase five, Introspection, a white person begins to evaluate what it means to be white and evaluate their own whiteness. This is the phase where the learning turns internal, and a white person begins to confront their own biases and prejudices and accepts responsibility for them.

When a white person begins to see themselves as a racial being, understands they have and are willing to confront their racial biases and fears, and shifts their motivations for doing antiracist work away from helping others towards changing themselves and other white people, it is representative of phase six, Integrative Awareness. This is when one’s non-racist identity emerges. In the final phase, Commitment to Antiracist Action, white people develop an antiracist identity, understand confronting their biases will continue indefinitely and, most importantly, commit to ongoing antiracist action.

Sue and Sue (2015; 2016) grounded their work in history and white supremacy, recognizing the systemic and socialized role that racism and white supremacy plays in the racial identity development of white people. Sue and Sue (2015; 2016) contextualized their phases in the ethnocentricity of American cultural life. This ethnocentricity is more than hearing messages from others about white superiority; instead, it captures the systemic nature in which white supremacy is learned. Their final phase also holds that white people should develop a healthy white racial identity, but also commit to antiracist action, meaning, they must continue to actively fight racism to maintain an antiracist identity.

Each of these models outline the developmental process that white students experience in their transformation into social-justice allies. Regardless of the model used, there are several

common elements that emerge, including several benefits associated with achieving higher statuses. In a quantitative study of 309 undergraduate and graduate students, Gushue et al. (2013) used several questionnaires distributed during class to study the relationship between personal identity development and in-group/out-group identities within sociopsychological contexts. The questionnaires consisted of the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS), People of Color Identity Questionnaire, Differentiation of Self Inventory, and a demographic sheet. The participant pool consisted of approximately half white students and half students of color, 23% men (77% women), 30% undergraduate students (70% graduate), and a mean age of 27. The researchers found for white people, higher statuses equated to an increased awareness of how white privilege and racism operate, and less internal conflict about one's white racial identity. Interestingly, higher statuses were also associated with a more differentiated sense of self (the student was better able to manage stress, be connected and independent in intimate relationships, and use thoughts and feelings when making decisions), increased cognitive flexibility, and lower dependence on societal racial norms.

Related, Siegel and Carter (2014) explored the relationship between emotions and racial identity statuses. This study's sample was 286 undergraduate and graduate students from six different institutions in the northeastern United States. The participants were 82% women and 18% men, with a mean age of 27. Students rated their baseline emotions and then completed the WRIAS. They were then exposed to a vignette with explicit racial information, after which they again rated their baseline emotions and completed the WRIAS. The researchers found higher racial-identity statuses were associated with less post-vignette fear around the explicit racial information.



## Ally Identity Development

Many scholars have studied ally identity development, specifically focusing on white students (Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Edwards, 2006; McKnight, 2015; Reason et al., 2005). In a qualitative study, Broido (2000) explored how six white college student allies identified the experiences that led to them being able and willing to act as allies. The participants were traditional-aged, heterosexual, white students (three men and three women) and the information was gathered through an open-ended interview protocol. The relevant factors included access to information (material that helped them understand the impact and continued existence of oppression, experiences of students of color, benefits of diversity, and other people's perspectives on social-justice issues) and the opportunity to process this information and make meaning from it. Another factor included a feeling of confidence around social-justice-related issues. Finally, all the participants said their involvement was not self-initiated; instead, the participants were pulled into doing social-justice work through employment, mandatory training, or personal invite.

Edwards (2006) developed a conceptual model that benefits our understanding of ally development, specifically, chronicling the underlying motivations for students that self-identify as allies. The model differentiated between different types of allies, and how educators can work to develop allies who have a sustainable passion for social justice. Three types of allies were identified: ally for self-interest, ally for altruism, and ally for social justice. An ally for self-interest seeks to protect those they care about from being hurt. These allies are more likely to support an individual rather than a systemic issue, view a discriminatory event as an exception to a just system, less likely to see their own privilege, and less likely to confront an unjust act. Next, an ally for altruism advocates to deal with their own guilt, aiming to fill a rescuer or hero role.

While they may understand racism at an intellectual level, they may also become defensive when accused of participating in a racist system. Finally, allies for social justice are those who work with people from oppressed groups to collaboratively address inequity, recognize that racism does harm to majority people as well, and recognize that they contribute to inequitable systems.

Munin and Speight (2010) conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews at a religiously-affiliated private institution in the midwestern United States to determine the factors associated with being a diversity ally (an identity determined based on a set criteria and self-identification by the student). The study consisted of 13 college students ranging in age from 18-21, with eight females and five males, one student identifying as gay, 11 white students, one Black student, and one Asian student. They found several common factors among the participants, including extroversion, a desire to lead, empathy, impatience, faith, efforts by the participants' parents to educate them about diversity, distinctive memories of viewing others as an "outsider," and experiences being the "outsider."

Brown and Ostrove (2013) conducted a three-part study, with part one offering unique insight into the perceptions social-justice allies of color hold towards white allies, adding to our knowledge of positive white racial and ally identity development. The researchers used content analysis of qualitative data from 80 participants identifying as allies of color and their perceptions of white allies. They found participants rated white allies (compared to allies of color) significantly less willing to engage in racial issues. Speaking about white allies with whom they felt comfortable, people of color indicated the foundation of those relationships including the ally not noticing or treating the person of color differently because of race/ethnicity. Other findings included feeling connected to and interested in having a respectful/nonjudgmental attitude, proposing possible actions to address a situation,

acknowledging power differentials and understanding their own racial identity, and being knowledgeable about or active in racial/ethnic communities besides their own. Finally, people of color related more significantly to allies who act among their own racial/ethnic group.

Kordesh et al. (2013) used the Psychosocial Costs of Racism to Whites Scale at a large, predominantly white midwestern institution to sort a cohort of 11 white students into two categories: antiracist (n=5) and not-antiracist (n=6). The phrase “not-antiracist” is noteworthy in contrast to using racist, which may have been a conscious or unconscious play on white racial ideology by the researchers. The researchers used focus groups to compare the experiences of each group to understand some of the unique experiences of the students defined as antiracist. One of the focuses of the researchers’ work explored the antiracist students’ experiences with diversity prior to college. They found antiracist students were conscious of a conflict between the prevailing racist attitudes to which they were exposed and their personal experiences with people of color. Antiracists also often had a personal or jarring experience that spurred some realization that the prevailing racist attitudes were problematic. During college, antiracists were not only aware of blatant examples of racism, but also subtle examples of racism and the more nuanced ways that racism manifests itself. With non-antiracist students, fear of people of color commonly manifested itself, whereas with antiracist students, the emotional responses were much broader, including guilt, frustration, embarrassment, and anger. This heightened level of emotional response indicated a more advanced understanding of racism and an increased likelihood of reflecting on racism in relation to one’s own identity.

McKnight (2015) conducted a qualitative assessment of 14 white male social-justice allies who were either enrolled in or recent graduates of four private, highly selective colleges in the northeastern United States. The goal of the research was to better understand the factors that

contributed to their development as social-justice allies. The findings fell into three categories: pre-college factors, college experiences, and the students' meaning-making process.

Commonalities among these allies in their pre-college experiences included either carrying or closely witnessing a friend that carried a marginalized identity. In the students' cases, that could include having a disability, being LGBTQIA, or having a mental-health issue. In their friend's case, that included these noted identities, and also being a person of color. Regardless, this personal exposure to being "othered" started many white social-justice allies on their paths.

Regarding the students' experiences during college that supported their ally development, recurring themes included witnessing negative campus incidents that targeted a minority group, having social interaction with diverse peers (such as through friends, clubs and organizations, and employment), and encountering intellectual stimuli such as interesting courses, captivating faculty pushing them to think differently, and diverse teams. Finally, McKnight (2015) identified several common themes in the ways these allies defined whiteness and their own identity and experiences. The allies felt most other white men viewed their identity as the normative standard for campus, whereas they defined their own identity as being aware, engaged, and readily owning their privileges. Their motivations for doing ally work included empathy, morality, and having the confidence to do so.

Reason et al. (2005) created a model to develop white racial justice allies. Their findings, similar to McKnight's (2015), included minority experiences as influential in the development of the ally identity. Additionally, their findings included several additional factors that were also related: learning about whiteness, engaging in coursework on race, taking antiracist action, interacting with diverse friends, intentionally living in diverse environments, and having other ally role models.

## Meaningful Diversity-Related Academic Experiences

Much of the literature documenting ally identity development specifically calls attention to college-level academic experiences that aided white allies to better understand social-justice issues. These experiences provided the tools by which students were equipped to navigate and challenge anti-inclusion. Available literature largely supported that there are tangible benefits associated with the various diversity-related academic experiences that are employed on college campuses, with the strongest evidence emerging from qualitative studies (Case, 2007; Denson, 2009). Within this body of research, the most commonly explored experiences included academic courses, intergroup dialogues, and cross-racial interactions.

Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004) used the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, and also a conceptual framework by Astin (1991; 1993), to look at data across six measures that targeted cognitive, psychological, behavioral, and affective development. These measures were selected because they represented the broad goals of a liberal education. Their pool was narrowed from a larger sample of over 200,000 unique students to a final participant pool of 9,703 students from 134 institutions. The researchers found positive relationships between cross-racial interactions and intellectual growth (general knowledge and critical thinking), social development (the ability to get along with people of different races and ability to work cooperatively), and civic development (importance of helping promote racial understanding and importance in participating in community-action programs).

Hurtado (2005) conducted a longitudinal quantitative study with data from a national research survey of first-year students designed to assess the relationship between interaction with diverse peers and students' cognitive, social, and democratic development by the second year of college. Participants took the survey in their first year of college and again at the end of their

second year. The data were generated from 4,403 college students attending nine different public institutions, with widely varied geographic locations, sizes, and student profiles. After controlling for the quality of the interaction, Hurtado (2005) found that substantial interaction with diverse peers was significantly associated with greater attributional complexity, self-confidence in cultural awareness, the development of a pluralistic orientation, believing that conflict enhanced democracy, and a tendency to vote in federal and state elections.

Chang, Denson, et al. (2006) explored whether cross-racial interaction resulted in higher levels of openness to diversity, cognitive development, and self-confidence, and also whether students who attended institutions with higher levels of cross-racial interaction reported higher levels of those same outcomes. Using data collected from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, the final sample consisted of 19,667 participants across 227 institutions (15.9% public and 84.1% private). Regarding racial identity, 88.8% of the pool identified as white, 4.1% as Asian American, 3.3% as Latino/a, 2.3% as African American, and 1.5% as American Indian. There were 37.1% males and 62.9% females. This was a quantitative study that used hierarchical linear modeling. The researchers found students with more frequent cross-racial interactions made larger gains in several places, including their knowledge of and ability to accept different races/cultures, and also their growth in general knowledge, cognitive development (critical-thinking and problem-solving), openness to diversity, and intellectual and social self-confidence.

Other research supported the benefits of cross-racial interactions for white college students. These interactions provide valuable learning experiences for white students, which, ultimately, help make campuses more inclusive for students of color. Saenz et al. (2007) conducted a quantitative longitudinal study with 4,757 participants across nine different institutions to explore the factors that promoted positive interactions across specific racial

groups, including white students. The participants completed a survey at college entry and again at the end of the second year of college. The final pool consisted of 686 Asian Americans, 388 Latinos, 224 African Americans, and 3,082 white students. Using different factor analyses, the researchers found white students reported the lowest levels of positive interactions across race. Conversely, students entering college with higher levels of intergroup anxiety were significantly less likely to report positive interactions across race. Also, the researchers found white students with higher attributional complexity were significantly more likely to report positive interactions with diverse peers. Findings also included white students who study and interact with diverse peers reported higher levels of positive cross-racial interactions in college. Related, while some white students from segregated environments prior to college initially reported lower quality and frequency of interactions with diverse peers, it was eventually able to be changed through studying and interacting with diverse peers.

Academic courses can also help white students learn about white privilege and white racial ideology. Case (2007) conducted a quantitative assessment of student learning at a state university in Kentucky, employing a pretest and posttest with over 140 students in a required diversity course. The participant pool was 89% white, with the remaining 11% identifying as students of color, and an average age of 21.8 years old. The researchers used a Likert scale to assess the student participants' understanding of various topics around racial prejudice. The researchers found white students ended the course with a greater awareness of white privilege and racism and greater support for affirmative action. They also found that white students expressed greater white guilt as a result of the course.

Wright and Tolan (2009) studied an experiential-based multicultural education course at a large urban institution with a diverse pool of 134 students that combined hands-on activities

(adventure courses to promote relationship development), community projects (to broaden students' experiences), and diversity-related academic content. The participant pool had nearly equal numbers of men and women, and was 51% white, 16% Latin American, 12% Asian American, 8% Other (Native American, International Student, and Pacific Islander), 7% African American, and 5% who did not choose a primary identity group. Students wrote a reflective essay at the conclusion of the course, which was analyzed to assess learning. Students had an increased awareness of diversity, reduction in prejudice, higher awareness of others' stories of prejudice, less belief in stereotypes, more nuanced awareness of personal prejudice, greater appreciation for diverse groups, and greater understanding for victims of oppression.

Additional studies further supported the notion that academic courses result in the reduction of white peoples' prejudicial attitudes. In a mixed-methods study of students enrolled in a general psychology course in the northeastern United States, Boatright-Horowitz et al. (2012) explored students' cognitive and emotional reactions to classroom discussions on white privilege. The participant pool consisted of 674 students, with 400 identifying as white, 87 as students of color, and 187 not responding. The researchers studied the responses to an in-class survey on a module about white privilege. The survey contained agreement rating items and open-ended response components. Using manifest content analysis for the qualitative data and principal component analysis for the quantitative data, the researchers found as a student's understanding of white privilege increased, the less likely they were to agree American society is meritocratic.

Storms (2012) conducted a qualitative study of six students enrolled in an experiential social-justice education course, with the focus on assessing the students' perceptions of how the course prepared them for social-action engagement. Of the six students, three were men and



three were women, and two identified as white. The four remaining identified as students of color. This course incorporated the lived experiences of the students grounded in several principles, including content mastery, gaining tools for critical analysis, personal reflection, learning tools for social action, and engaging in multicultural group dynamics. Several associations were found between taking the course and demonstrating increased personal awareness, empathy, confidence around diversity and social justice, and knowledge about tools for social action. Specific things that promoted these developments included finding their voice (feeling empowered to speak up), having an action plan of what to do when witnessing something they want to confront, and receiving feedback ahead of time on that action plan.

Ross (2014) conducted a qualitative study to explore outcomes associated with the intergroup contact of Black and white students enrolled in two sections of a diversity education course at a public university in the southeastern United States. Section one contained 33 students with 91% females (6% males and 3% no response), 38% Black students, and 47% white students. Section two contained 28 students with 100% females, 56% white students, and 36% Black students. Additionally, the researchers identified section two as being a high-conflict environment, while the students in section one encountered much lower conflict. Using observations and notes from the instructor, a demographic survey, a survey to assess the defined measures, and final student reflections, the researchers narrowed in on several findings. There seemed to be more cognitive growth in the high-conflict section. Ninety-two percent of the students in the high-conflict course left feeling that coalition-building was possible, compared to 87% of students in the low-conflict course. Also, regardless of the amount of conflict in the section, both sections of students experienced support for intergroup cooperation.

Intergroup dialogues were also cited as influential in developing multicultural

competence among white students. In a quantitative study spanning nine colleges, Alimo (2012) explored how participation in intergroup dialogues facilitated the development of confidence around social justice and engagement in taking action using a pretest and posttest design. The Multiversity Intergroup Dialogue Research project administered dialogues on different campuses and was used as the data source; the final sample consisted of 1,463 students, which was reduced to 365 white students through stratified random sampling. There were 192 women and 173 men, a mean age of 20.5 years, all different years in school, and a majority second-generation identity. This participant pool represented both students enrolled in the dialogue and students who were placed on a waitlist for future semesters (used as a control group). The researchers used MANCOVA analyses to determine outcome differences between intergroup dialogue participants and the control group. Multivariate analysis indicated participation in the dialogues resulted in increased confidence and frequency of engagement. Under univariate analyses, there were mixed outcomes regarding confidence, with some measures pointing towards lowered confidence, which went against the hypothesis. However, the researchers theorized this perhaps demonstrated that taking action precedes confidence in doing so. In other words, it is through taking action that people build their confidence.

#### Allies' Interactions and Relationships

At the onset of this journey, I assumed there would be literature that chronicled the interactions and relationships between white college-student social-justice allies and anti-inclusive family and friends. As noted previously, there was not. There was very limited literature that explored those relationships and that represents a significant gap in our ability to effectively empower and support white college-student social-justice allies. However, the literature that did exist offered valuable insight into the ways social-justice allies interact with

others, and also the relationships they have with others. This also represented the literature most closely related to the research question.

When referring to interactions, this most often includes the experiences of allies as they challenge others. Watt (2007) developed the privileged identity exploration model, which, through a qualitative study of nine graduate student participants, identified eight defensive modes that white people display when engaged in difficult discussions around social justice. Watt (2007) found some people deny their privilege, some deflect away from their own privilege towards a systemic issue over which they can claim no control, and others intellectualize the issue instead of owning the personal aspects of privilege. Additionally, some participants rely on a religious or personal principle to avoid exploration, others display affection for a marginalized group instead of exploring one's own socialization, some are benevolent and focus on how their individual acts of goodness are enough to avoid further exploration, and, finally, some participants minimize the magnitude of the issue.

Sue, Rivera, et al. (2010) offered insight into strategies for effectively facilitating difficult dialogues around social justice. The researchers conducted a qualitative study of 14 white counseling psychology graduate students, aiming to identify strategies for more effectively facilitating difficult classroom discussions. Twelve participants identified as women, two as men, ten identified as European American, one as Jewish American, and one as Greek American. Using focus groups as the interview tool, they found instructors could more effectively engage students in these discussions when they validated the feelings of the students and allowed space to explore those feelings. Similarly, conversations were deemed most effective when the instructors were open about their own learning and owned any of their personal biases and feelings. Finally, many negative discussions were tied to a lack of action on the part of the

instructor where a discriminatory statement or microaggression happened and it went unaddressed. It was important for instructors to do something, even if the response was less than perfect.

Ashburn-Nardo et al. (2008) applied their confronting prejudiced responses (CPR) model to a variety of organizational contexts to identify factors that predict someone's likelihood for confronting discrimination that they see or experience. The researchers proposed that while the act of confrontation itself has negative connotations because of its association with conflict, in fact, confrontation can be productive and result in changing an anti-inclusive person's behavior. Ashburn-Nardo et al. (2008) defined five hurdles people face when confronting discrimination: knowing whether something is discriminatory, deciding whether something is bad enough to warrant intervention, taking responsibility for confronting discrimination, knowing how to confront discrimination, and actually taking action. While not direct empirical research, this model has important implications, including better teaching allies to detect discrimination, understanding the gravity of the impacts of discrimination, feeling responsibility for confronting discrimination, and teaching people how to do it. The model also suggested it is important to help allies learn to challenge others while also reducing the risks associated with challenging (being disliked, seen as a complainer, or losing a friend), which is very relevant when considering white college-student social-justice allies and their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends.

Sue, Alsaidi, et al. (2019) offered a, "new strategic framework developed for addressing microaggressions that moves beyond coping and survival to concrete action steps and dialogues that targets, allies, and bystanders can perform (microinterventions)" (p. 128). Sue et. al. (2019) reviewed existing common reactions and interventions deployed by those reacting to a

microaggression (retreating, remaining passive, striking back, validating and supporting the target, and so on) and grouped all those reactions into four major strategic goals: (a) making the invisible visible, (b) disarming the microaggression, (c) educating the perpetrator, and (d) seeking external reinforcement or support.

Making the invisible visible is a strategy that includes calling attention to the issue, such as pointing out the problematic assumptions that are part of a perpetrator's statement or defending one's self (in the case of a target) by challenging a perpetrator's statement. Disarming the microaggression is similar to shutting down the interaction by making it clear you disagree, or telling someone you expect to receive respect and will not tolerate those types of statements or behaviors. Educating the perpetrator goes beyond making the invisible visible, and includes taking additional time to point out the problem with something someone said, how it is grounded in a stereotype or other problematic assumption, and encouraging the speaker to think differently. Finally, seeking external reinforcement or support could include using a friend or colleague in the challenge of a perpetrator, speaking to the supervisor of a perpetrator, and also putting a plan in place for self-care and support from culturally competent counselors, friends, and colleagues. This literature is valuable as it offers tactics to respond to microaggressions.

Smith and Redington (2010) interviewed a diverse (age, education level, and geographic location) range of 18 white adults who self-identified as antiracists about their participation in a range of activities supporting that self-identification, including organizing activities, filling leadership roles in relevant organizations, and speaking out in everyday situations against discrimination. Through their work, the researchers identified several strategies white antiracists used for reaching out to other white people. An initial finding was white antiracists just had to speak up and find ways to overcome any hesitation, which takes a conscious commitment.

Additionally, those with privileged identities must have the confidence to challenge problematic behavior because they can easily sit silent in the face of discrimination. Additionally, they found white antiracists also varied their intervention with other white people based on the perpetrator's level of knowledge, finding ways to be respectful but also challenge, remain patient, and capitalize on teachable moments. The antiracists also attempted to connect other white people to antiracist allies and organizations for support, motivation, and community, and also encouraged participation in race-related trainings.

In looking at the relationships allies hold, again, there is limited literature. Most relevant, Morey et al. (2012) conducted a quantitative analysis assessing a person's relationship type with others as strong (parents, friends) vs. weak (stranger or casual acquaintance), against a willingness to engage in political discussions. Using a national volunteer sample, the researchers surveyed 2,381 individuals from a diverse pool. There were several findings, including people were more likely to share a political affiliation with someone with whom they have a close relationship, and were more likely to engage in political discussions with those with whom they share a strong relationship. They also found participants were more likely to express disagreement with those with whom they share a close relationship. This is important because there are likely parallels to my research question, as political discussions may include issues related to social justice. If students are more likely to express disagreement with those with whom they share a strong personal relationship, there are implications for confronting anti-inclusive beliefs at home.

Regarding social-justice interactions specifically, another finding within Smith and Redington's (2010) study was that white allies experienced interpersonal conflict in many of their relationships as a result of their antiracist activity. These conflicted relationships were not

only with general acquaintances, but also included significant fallout with family and friends. Malott et al. (2015) had similar findings, including struggles to make and maintain relationships and being alienated by others. They conducted a qualitative study to learn how white antiracists defined their racial identities and related lifestyle choices. Ten individuals participated in the study, split equally between men and women, and ranging in age from 25-69. Participants were spread throughout the United States. Two additional findings related to lifestyle choices added new context to the experiences of white allies, including struggles to make lifestyle decisions that honor antiracist beliefs and struggles to make and maintain relationships with other white people. The preceding section of research is the material most closely related to my research question. It is helpful for laying a foundation for this dissertation.

### Summary

The five areas discussed in this chapter, including critical whiteness, appropriately ground this research study. Higher-education faculty and staff need to understand the socialization that promotes white supremacy and marks the experience of being white on a college campus (and the United States, generally). Concepts such as the white racial frame, the minimization of racism, white fragility, white privilege, and the invisibility of whiteness mark a white person's experience, including the experience of white college-student social-justice allies.

Higher-education faculty and staff members' understanding of the experiences white college students have on college campuses that develop multicultural competence deepens our understanding of ways that are effective in educating students generally, and the development of white social-justice allies specifically. Having positive cross-racial interactions, having the opportunity to critically reflect as part of an academic course, holding a marginalized identity (for example, being gay), or having a good friend from an underrepresented background mark

some of the inputs associated with white college students becoming social-justice allies.

Finally, and most directly illuminating the research question, there is a limited body of knowledge that explores interactions and relationships between social-justice allies and family and friends. The existing literature chronicles some experiences associated with taking action (representing an interaction) as a white ally, the defensive modes that allies experience, and tactics an ally can use when intervening. The research exploring relationships with people from home tells us that when participants shared a close connection with someone, they were more likely to share a political affiliation, engage in political discussions, and express disagreement. These findings likely parallel social-justice-related discussions. Other research indicates that white social-justice allies experience challenges in their relationships, highlighting a cost associated with the ally identity. However, much of the work focuses on one's current community or environment. There is still a gap in the literature. A better understanding of how white college-student social-justice allies describe their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends is an area of scholarship that needs further exploration.



## CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

### Research Design and Rationale

Understanding how white college-student social-justice allies describe their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends is best done through inquiry grounded in qualitative, interpretivist, and phenomenological research principles. Merriam (2002) asserted the key to understanding qualitative research is understanding that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world. To conduct research under an interpretivist and qualitative approach, Merriam (2002) suggested the researcher must learn how individuals experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for them. Through participants' interpretations of their experiences, this study answered the research question, *How do white college-student social-justice allies describe their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends?* This study provides practitioners and researchers a better understanding of the experiences of the participants, which can be leveraged in practice to promote equity, dismantle white supremacy, and support social-justice allies.

Regarding my epistemological assumptions, through doctoral coursework and the examination of both positivist and post-positivist methodologists, I identify with the assertions of an interpretivist framework. My sense is that an objective truth and universal reality, both broadly and within higher education, does not exist. Truth and reality are constructed by the researcher and participants' experiences, understanding, assumptions, and beliefs. Guba (1990) offered, “[t]here are always a large number of theories that can, in principle, ‘explain’ a given body of ‘facts.’ Thus no unequivocal explanation is ever possible” (p. 25).

It is impossible for the researcher to separate one's self from their biases and

positionality, so all knowledge created is a reflection of the relationship between the researcher and the research (Guba, 1990). Jones et al. (2014) described reality as being constructed through local human interaction, where truth is found in the construction of learning between the researcher and participants. Because objectivity is impossible, the researcher represents multiple voices and values the individual participants' perspectives. Schwandt (1990) described the notion of complementarity: meaningful data analysis results from the inquirer participating in the inquiry, allowing for discovery and interpretation.

It is these principles, rich data, meaningful cases, and embracing the interaction between the researcher and participants, that frames the basis for qualitative and interpretivist research. Merriam (2002) offered:

...qualitative researchers conducting a basic interpretive study would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences. (p. 38)

In other words, white college-student social-justice allies' experiences are not neutral, objective, or quantifiable. Using the participants' interpretation of their experiences to generate meaningful data provides the best answer to the research question.

Next, a paradigm is a set of interconnected assumptions or beliefs that represent the researcher's worldview (Jones et al., 2014). Guba (1990) described a paradigm as, "...a basic set of beliefs that guide action, whether of everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry" (p. 17). Phenomenology emerged as the best paradigm to frame this research question. Jones et al. (2014) stated, "The primary focus of phenomenology is the essence of a particular phenomenon or lived experience," and "...always anchored in the

*lifeworld* of the individual and the meaning making associated with being-in-the-world” (p. 88).

Vagle (2018) reaffirmed phenomenology is not about making generalizations, quantifying data, or making a definitive finding. The methodology is not about precise and objective measures. Instead, the goal in research under a phenomenological paradigm is to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. The research is about critically looking at something (the phenomenon) we see and experience every day, often without critically examining. Vagle (2018) explained how phenomena are the ways we find ourselves in relation to the world in our daily lives; phenomenology means better understanding ourselves by being in relation with others. The phenomenon under study in this research was the concept of whiteness. White college-student social-justice allies described their experience with interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends, the way they made sense of these interactions and relationships with others, and the meaning they derived from those interactions and relationships.

Ahmed (2007) supported the classification of whiteness as a phenomenological issue, a question of how whiteness is lived, and how whiteness is “real” (p. 150):

A phenomenology of whiteness helps us to notice institutional habits; it brings what is behind, what does not get seen as the background to social action, to the surface in a certain way. It does not teach us how to change those habits and that is partly the point. In not being promising, in refusing to promise anything, such an approach to whiteness can allow us to keep open the force of the critique. It is by showing how we are stuck, by attending to what is habitual and routine in ‘the what’ of the world, that we can keep open the possibility of habit changes, without using that possibility to displace our attention to the present, and without simply wishing for new tricks. (p. 165)

Ahmed's quote reminds us whiteness indeed exists. It is also complex and often invisible, without ready explanations or facts. It is a phenomenon. Kivel (2002) said, "Whiteness is a many-faceted phenomenon, slowly and constantly shifting its emphasis, but all the time maintaining a racial hierarchy and protecting the power that accrues to White people" (p. 23). Studying the experiences of white college-student social-justice allies and their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends increases our understanding of the phenomenon. Combined with the theoretical framework of critical whiteness, the research also further illuminates significant ways white supremacy is realized.

### Researcher Positionality

Most researchers stress the importance of recognizing their personal identities, how participants perceive those personal identities, and how those identities both frame their view of the world and the interpretation of the data. It is a way of owning the relationship between the researcher, the participations, and the topic (Jones et al., 2014). Glesne (2011) described this as, "[c]larification of researcher bias – reflection upon your own subjectivity and how you will use and monitor it in your research" (p. 49). Jones et al. (2014) described this as the ability to understand what the researcher brings to the process, including their background knowledge and social identities, and the identities and backgrounds they share with the research participants.

My positionality is impossible to separate from my work. I have an agenda centered on working to engage white people in challenging the many "–isms" that make life terrible for others, and ultimately harm us all. This agenda came from my personal story and background, which I believe in reflecting on and disclosing. It was not until much later in life when I started to intentionally engage in social-justice work that I came to understand the influence my identity had on my journey. Similar to others, my story is complex, and learning happened in many

unexpected ways. I share some of that story through my relationship with my mother and great aunt, although there were many people and places that influenced me.

I grew up in a single-parent household. My mother worked as a secretary at the University of Chicago Hospital. I grew up in a relatively stable environment: my mother owned a home, I never went hungry, and I had a supportive extended family, all things many people do not have. In a single-parent household where my mother worked full-time, I also came to see differences that existed between my family and some others. For example, the amount of time my mother could devote to me was limited, the amount of money we had was very tight, and my mother faced many additional challenges as a single parent. I learned not all people have it easy, not all people have money, and things do not always go easy or according to plan.

I owe my mother gratitude for exposing me to people different from us. I did not grow up in a homogeneously white community, which I now recognize as a wonderful benefit my mother afforded me. During my mom's time at the University of Chicago, I have lots of memories of accompanying her to work and getting the opportunity to see the variety of people, cultures, museums, and restaurants that a large city has to offer. My mother also had a few diverse friends throughout the years. I was certainly exposed to stereotypes and racism in my family; however, unlike the experiences of many other white people, I am grateful to have had personal experience with people of color to counter some of those stereotypes.

I was also fortunate to attend a diverse high school, with mostly white and African American students. Again, it was not a multiracial community (particularly as I reflect on the systems in place that produced racial separation, such as the honors program); however, it did allow me to develop meaningful friendships with people of color. While attending the University of Illinois at Chicago for college (which, at the time, was the fifth most diverse campus in the

country), I found myself with a racially diverse friend group. The benefit to these friendships was the opportunity to hear the stories of people of color and learn how they are treated differently, and their willingness to challenge me when saying something racist or not understanding the role my white privilege played. A graduate school program provided the academic grounding to name the systems and institutions behind racism that perpetuate inequity throughout our society.

Another influential person in my story is my great aunt, now 92 years old. She is a Dominican Sister. The only nuns I know are Dominican Sisters, so I cannot speak meaningfully of other denominations; however, they are an incredible group of women who are feminists, antiracists, activists, and educators. My aunt holds multiple degrees and was a teacher, principal, guidance counselor, TRIO program director, and director of a social-service organization for the blind. She participated in the civil-rights movement, taught school in the segregated south, protested the School of the Americas, led anti-racism workshops, and played an active role in politics. I am fortunate to have in my family someone who fights racism, engaged me in discussions about the ethics surrounding the death penalty, and reminded me to call local politicians to either support or challenge pending legislation. Through her, I learned the world is not socially just, and that inequality is not natural and is, in fact, a complex system designed to subjugate others, usually the poor and people of color. These influences have shaped my positionality.

Our personal identities, including the target and agent identities within, are inseparable from our lives, including the way we lead. It is particularly important for leaders who identify as white—like myself—to examine their self-identity, including the many ways whiteness influences their experience. A white leader who has not interrogated whiteness can perpetuate

many of the oppressive systems that exclude underrepresented students, staff, and faculty in higher education. As I have learned more and more about my white racial identity, I have come to understand that it has impacted all areas of my life. At birth, I was immediately privileged to have the world orient in tangible ways to my benefit as a result of my being white. My mother had access to great healthcare. Teachers assumed I was smart and held me to those expectations. Any poor decisions I made were seen as one-time mistakes, something to be forgiven and forgotten. I have always had role models that look like me in positions of power (teachers, doctors, managers, business owners), and those same role models have opened doors for me and taught me how to navigate the world to ensure my success. I can test drive any car at any price point and never be questioned about my ability to afford the vehicle. My experience has been that I am welcomed into all physical spaces, and I never have to think about whether I will be safe. The list of privileges I receive as a white person or ways my whiteness impacts my interaction with the world are near endless.

As I chart my growth around understanding whiteness, my white racial identity, and social justice generally, I am committed to doing better. That includes continuing to learn, owning my mistakes, doing the work for my own liberation as opposed to doing it for recognition, and working hard to counter the strong societal forces that I and my white children encounter daily. I now identify as a social-justice ally. I also identify as a white, upper-middle-class, well-educated male. Regarding privileged identities, I have most. I also strongly identify with the Democratic political party. Through the relationships and experiences I have disclosed, I have come to better understand white privilege and racism, and how I benefit from one and contribute to the other. While my goal is to fight inequity and racism, I acknowledge those things are deeply engrained in myself.

## Methods

The following section outlines the steps and processes followed during this research study, including participant and site selection, data collection, data analysis, maintaining trustworthiness, and the limitations and delimitations of the study.

### **Participants and Site**

Choosing a research site was an important decision. I used an institution in the western part of the United States with a student population over 30,000. This institution emerged as an appropriate choice for several reasons. The campus is a predominantly white institution, with many of the students from surrounding homogeneously white communities. The campus has a large student body with a diverse student population, and many opportunities for students to engage in social-justice-related activities. Additional benefits to using this institution included easier access to in-person interviews with students, and easier access to the colleague networks that generated participants who met the criteria.

Regarding participants, qualitative research uses non-probability sampling to deliberately select participants who reflect features or characteristics within the sampled population (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This means a researcher cannot sample for convenience; it must be intentional. Jones et al. (2014) confirmed the importance of participant selection:

...sampling criteria refer to those variables, characteristics, qualities, experiences, and demographics most directly linked to the purpose of the study...certain characteristics must be present in the sample that are most likely going to elicit insight and great depth of understanding about the phenomenon of interest. (p. 111)

My goal was to find participants best able to answer the research question.

To identify initial participants, I reached out to a network of professionals for



recommendations (Appendix A). This network included professionals who were directly engaged in social-justice-related work, or who were engaged in other work but do so with demonstrated commitment to and experience with social justice. This identification method resulted in an adequate number of prospective participants. I actively monitored the recommendations to minimize the number of participants pulled from the same friend group, student organization, or work environment. After receiving the recommendation, I reached out directly to the prospective participants by email (Appendix B). Care was given to monitor the demographic identification of participants, when possible, such as gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or other identities to ensure that appropriate conclusions were being made and other explanations or variables were being considered. Attention was also paid to any patterns of prospective participants who declined the invitation to be involved in the research. No discernable patterns emerged. Aside from prospective participants who never responded to my invitation to participate in the study, only three prospective participants declined. Each of those three prospective participants cited the time commitment as their reason for declining the invitation.

Identifying white college-student social-justice allies well-positioned to describe their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends required additional definition. Participants were all college students beyond at least their fourth semester who identified their racial classification as white. The rationale for having white students is apparent, while choosing participants who had completed at least four semesters of college is less obvious. This allowed each participant to have sufficient time to engage in different diversity-related experiences (such as cross-racial interactions, academic courses, intergroup dialogues), moving them along in their social-justice ally development.

Additionally, all participants had a basic theoretical understanding of the concepts of racism (including systems), power, and privilege, and had participated in experiences such as social-justice-related workshops, classes, trainings, and diverse groups of friends. As a result of their experiences, participants described having a different set of values regarding social justice than many family and friends. The above parameters, such as being in at least their fourth semester of college and having participated in different diversity-related experiences, were assessed through a screening interview protocol (Appendix C).

There were several procedures put in place and followed. At the onset of our first meeting, I ensured participants knew their participation was voluntary, could cease at any time, and that withdrawal would not result in any negative consequences. I also explained there were no tangible benefits associated with participation in the study. My role was clear as a doctoral student conducting research, separate and distinct from any other roles I held. Similarly, I fully reviewed the informed consent (Appendix D) in easy-to-understand language, answered any of the participant's questions, and talked through any of the participant's concerns. The initial meeting was also a time to review how their privacy would be protected and the data would remain confidential. I also explained how and where the data (both written and recorded material) would be collected, stored, and safeguarded.

Regarding ethics, Guba (1990) noted that it is important to maintain ethical standards and be highly sensitive about the participants. Researchers must do everything possible to ensure participants are treated respectfully and that no harm is done. Marshall and Rossman (2011) described this as:

Respect for persons captures the notion that we do not use the people who participate in our studies as a means to an end (often our own) and that we do respect their privacy,

their anonymity, and their right to participate – or not – which is freely consented to. (p. 47)

Believing the researcher cannot remove one's personal association with the research, and knowing a relationship exists between the participant and researcher, I paid particular attention to establishing trust with the participants. Jones et al. (2014) stressed the importance of trust in the relationship between the researcher and participant, which should remain a central consideration throughout the entire study (initial contacts, establishing a relationship, active listening, showing appreciation, etc.). Care was taken to position myself as a researcher-collaborator, being careful not to position myself as an expert or someone from whom they needed to seek approval through specific responses.

There were two prospective participants who underwent the screening interview but were not invited to participate in the study. In both cases, they did not meet aspects of the outlined participant criteria, specifically, both explaining they did not feel they had any significant interactions with anti-inclusive family or friends, describing their family and friends as holding similar values to themselves. Not being included in the study had the potential to make a participant feel inadequate, that they had done something wrong, or that their time had been wasted. To minimize the potential for harm under these conditions, I explained during the screening interview that not all participants would ultimately be included in the study and that if they were not included, (a) I was incredibly appreciative of their willingness to consider being involved and (b) they would still hopefully derive an intangible benefit from thinking about and discussing all the screening interview questions. Additionally, the focus on establishing a trusting and authentic relationship quickly allowed me to ease any negative feelings a participant might have had.

## **Data Collection**

The number of participants in qualitative, phenomenological, research is not standardized. I initially recruited 12 participants and was open to continuing to seek additional participants who could provide data relevant to the study. That proved unnecessary as I began to hear, observe, and read repeating information. That was a sign that data saturation was occurring and additional participants were not needed (Jones et al., 2014).

Recorded interviews were uniquely positioned to accomplish the goals associated with qualitative research. The interviews allowed me to explore the participants' narrative material, which served as an opportunity to develop a richer and deeper understanding of the research question. I used a two-part, semi-structured interview approach, and had several general research questions outlined for each of the two formal interviews (Appendix E). Beyond the general research questions, I respected the way the participants framed and structured the responses, which was more fluid than the specific questions. My goal was for the participants' perspectives to unfold as they personally viewed it, not as I viewed it (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) distinguished between two types of interview questions: content mapping and content mining. Content mapping questions identify the dimensions or issues that are most relevant to the participant. Content mining questions explore the detail within each dimension. The structured part of the interview used the content mapping-related questions, with the content mining-questions comprising the unstructured and fluid part. I scheduled two 90-minute interviews with each participant; however, the time required to complete the questions varied widely. One participant's involvement was completed in the first 90-minute interview. The rest of the participants required two interviews but not necessarily the full 90 minutes of the second interview. Each participant received the content-mapping questions

for both interviews prior to our time together, as an opportunity to begin reflecting on their responses and thoughts. Content-mining questions served to clarify the participants' responses and gathering rich data to fully understand their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends.

I conducted one pilot interview with a participant identified through my sampling protocol. The information gained from that pilot interview was ultimately used in the study. The pilot interview provided a good opportunity to ensure questions were asked in a clear way, whether I gained the information I was pursuing, and whether the information provided rich enough data for analysis. Glesne (2011) confirmed a pilot study is a useful strategy for trying out the different aspects of proposed research, including clarifying the research statement and questions, challenging the assumptions about the context and topic, and providing a good opportunity to try out the research methods.

Interviews were coordinated with priorities centered on participant comfort, confidentiality, and convenience. I found a time and location that were convenient for the participant, and focused on maintaining an environment that was free from distractions and maximized privacy (Glesne, 2011). My intention was to complete all interviews in-person, with the rationale being that an in-person interview would help establish trust. Unfortunately, the interviews coincided with the national COVID-19 pandemic, which required me to move to a virtual format. In retrospect, I do not believe this compromised any relationship or data integrity.

To protect anonymity, pseudonyms were used for each participant as another privacy measure. It was also clear what information would be kept confidential and what information would be published (Wertz et al., 2011). Finally, audio recordings were deleted after the transcript was received. Transcripts will be retained for up to 10 years with the potential to be

used in future research or publication. Ultimately, using the interview as the tool for data collection allowed for the best opportunity to hear how the participants described their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends.

### **Data Analysis**

As previously noted, the interpretivist believes there is no objective truth; rather, the researcher is looking to understand the multiple perspectives available (Glesne, 2011). Accurate data (or truth) are achieved by congruence between the inquirer's account of the participant's experiences and the participant's own views on their experiences (Guba, 1990). The importance is not that the study can be recreated; rather, that the results drawn from the data make sense (Merriam, 2002). Embracing stories and experiences, as prioritized under phenomenological research, could quickly lead to a data set that is overwhelming. Through the data analysis process, it is critical to ground the interpretation of data against the research question, theoretical framework, and phenomena of study (whiteness broadly, and the experiences of white college-student social-justice allies narrowly).

Through the interview protocol, I gathered all the information I heard, and organized it in a way that made sense (Glesne, 2011) using a structured data coding strategy. Miles et al. (2014) described data coding as a way to give symbolic meaning to the qualitative data and offer sound recommendations to conduct qualitative data analysis. I conducted two to three rounds of data analysis, including: provisional coding (first round), subcoding (second round), and analysis against the theoretical framework (third round). Following is an explanation of each coding step, and also an example from the collected data.

First, provisional coding includes entering the data analysis with researcher-established codes, including codes representing what might appear in the data based on prior knowledge or

preparation. In my case, I established these themes around the content-mapping questions in the interview protocol. It is important to note that provisional codes can be revised, modified, deleted, or expanded to include new codes (Miles et al., 2014). As an example, the excerpt below came from one participant:

As I've gotten older it's gotten worse. I guess I feel it more because I'm growing older, I pay more attention. I feel more comfortable calling things out. When you're a 10-year-old kid you're not going to say anything, but now that I'm an adult, I feel comfortable having a conversation with the other adults in the room. I don't know, it gets tense too because one of the things that I think you can...It's always hard to call out family. When they say something you don't want to call them out because you got to live with them for the rest of your life. One thing that I've started doing is just don't laugh at a joke or don't respond to a conversation or something that I don't think is cool. That causes a lot of tension too, because they're like, "Why don't you laugh? That was a funny joke." I'll be like, "No, it wasn't. I don't think that." They'll be like, "Why don't you think it's funny?" "Because it's racist." Calling things out has definitely caused a lot of tension, and so on that side of the family we've usually just chosen not to talk about it more often than not, but things always come up.

In the first round of coding, I labeled this excerpt *Interactions with Anti-Inclusive Folks*.

However, this excerpt required more analysis.

Second, subcoding was used after the provisional coding was completed, when needed. At times, no further subcoding was necessary for a specific data point. When needed, it allowed me to further detail, differentiate or enrich the initial data classification (Miles et al., 2014). Continuing with the example from before, I further classified pieces of the excerpt using

subcodes. For example, I labeled the following paragraph with the subcode *Hesitations in Confronting*.

I don't know, it gets tense too because one of the things that I think you can...It's always hard to call out family. When they say something you don't want to call them out because you got to live with them for the rest of your life.

Similarly, I labeled the following paragraph with the subcode *Strategies for Confronting*.

One thing that I've started doing is just don't laugh at a joke or don't respond to a conversation or something that I don't think is cool. That causes a lot of tension too, because they're like, "Why don't you laugh? That was a funny joke." I'll be like, "No, it wasn't. I don't think that." They'll be like, "Why don't you think it's funny?" "Because it's racist." Calling things out has definitely caused a lot of tension, and so on that side of the family we've usually just chosen not to talk about it more often than not, but things always come up.

Third, I analyzed both the raw data and organized thematic data against the theoretical framework, critical whiteness, using pattern codes. Pattern codes usually consist of several (four is suggested), often interrelated, summarizers, which could include categories or themes, causes/explanations, relationships among people, or, in this case, theoretical constructs (Miles et al., 2014). Continuing with the same example, the following was coded as *Silence is Privilege*: "Calling things out has definitely caused a lot of tension, and so on that side of the family we've usually just chosen not to talk about it more often than not, but things always come up."

Rather than waiting until all interviews were completed to analyze the data, I conducted data analysis alongside data collection, which allowed me to concurrently think about existing data, collect new and better data in subsequent interviews, and assess when data saturation had



been reached. After each interview, I took time to journal about my reflections on the interview. Through the coding themes, and the process of writing, discussing, and reflecting, I was able to make meaning from the vast amount of data. In line with phenomenology, I created broad themes and then connected those themes through rich interpretations of the data, prioritizing the participants' voices and using the participants' meaning making as the guide for interpretation. The writing, discussing, and reflecting was a cyclical process that ultimately brought the participants' experiences to life, deepened the existing knowledge of the phenomenon of whiteness, and answered the research question (Jones et al., 2014). It was also during the data analysis process that critical whiteness emerged as an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. This is addressed in more detail in the limitations and delimitations section.

### **Trustworthiness**

Having congruence between the participants' lived experiences, the participants' understanding of their experiences, and my understanding of the data as the researcher allowed me to best answer the research question. Jones et al. (2014) highlighted a danger I tried to avoid as the researcher – entering the study with pre-conceived notions of what I was looking to find – and then specifically looking for data to support my preconception, often, at the expense of ignoring or minimizing other data. Instead, I worked to ensure a clear connection between the data and resulting interpretations.

Merriam (2002) argued that internal validity is a strength of qualitative research, and that the researcher functioning as the instrument is closer to actual reality than if an instrument with predefined items served as an intermediary between the researcher and the phenomenon. To further ensure validity, researchers must take care to triangulate their data and find data from many different angles to understand the multiple perspectives present (Glesne, 2011). After

several interviews, the same themes began to emerge, which increased in subsequent interviews. Seeing these themes emerge contributed to the trustworthiness of the data. Miles et al. (2014) offered several additional points for producing reliable data, including ensuring the interview questions are clear (this was achieved through the pilot interview) and making sure there is congruence among the research question, paradigm, and methodology. Approaching data analysis in this way allowed for better trustworthiness of the data.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The primary limitation of this study was the specific sample of white college-student social-justice allies. As with all qualitative research, the results of this study are not generalizable beyond the specific participants. However, while not generalizable, qualitative research produces vast amounts of detailed and rich data from a smaller number of cases (Patton, 1990). The findings are useful in informing the ways we conduct social-justice work, and help practitioners better support white college students engaging in social-justice work.

There are two noteworthy delimitations. First, the research site represented the primary delimitation. I used an institution in the western part of the United States with a student population over 30,000. The campus is predominantly white, with majority students representing 71% of the population and minority students representing 29%. Approximately 27% of students are first-generation, and 23% are Pell recipients. The campus centers access, diversity, and inclusion in its mission and values, and offers many opportunities for students to engage in social-justice-related activities. While appropriate for this research, again, the location is a choice I made that further limits the findings.

Second, the theoretical framework, critical whiteness, was decided upon after the data was collected. I chose to collect data, gain a general sense of the findings, and then make a

decision about a theoretical framework that seemed appropriate. There were costs associated with that decision. Had I chosen the framework prior to the interviews, I might have crafted the content-mapping questions slightly differently or followed-up differently with the content-mining questions, both of which could have provided additional data. This is a delimitation of the study. The connections between critical whiteness and the study's findings were established after data collection and are discussed in Chapter Five.

### Summary

Believing there is no objective reality and believing my (and the research participants') positionality is inseparable from the research, phenomenology represented the best paradigmatic approach to frame this research. The research here prioritized the participants' interpretation of their experiences, added to our knowledge about the phenomenon of whiteness, and interrogated whiteness through analysis under critical whiteness. Related, ensuring the right participants were chosen and that they had rich experiences to share, semi-structured interviews were used to pull out as much detail from those experiences as possible. Sound methodological practices congruent with qualitative, interpretivist, and phenomenological research guided the analysis process to help answer the research question, *How do white college-student social-justice allies describe their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends?*

## CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS

White people must take an active role in dismantling white supremacy, and these findings add to our understanding of the experiences of white college-student social-justice allies. Better understanding the phenomenon of whiteness through the specific research question, *How do white college-student social-justice allies describe their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends?* will aid higher-education faculty and staff working to engage white students in social justice. Similarly, the discussion in Chapter Five deepens our understanding of the data through the specific lens of critical whiteness.

The participants provided rich data in their descriptions of interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends. The participants, while allies, all exist within a dynamic and relational system that operates on myriad levels. The system includes values, beliefs, and rules for interacting and being, all of which function to uphold white supremacy (DiAngelo, 2011). It was critical in highlighting the experiences of white college-student social-justice allies, which include empowering stories of using their voices for justice, to also use critical whiteness as a theoretical framework to identify and deconstruct the racial construct of whiteness (Aronson & Ashlee, 2018, p. 59).

There were four primary themes within the findings, with additional subthemes within each. Theme 1 (There's More Concern than Promise) demonstrated the participants find their interactions with anti-inclusive family and friends frustrating and problematic, and have little hope for anti-inclusive family and friends changing. There are limited data demonstrating anti-inclusive family and friends changing for the better as a result of their interactions and relationships with the participants.

Theme 2 (Identities Beyond Being White are Significant) demonstrated the white participants also having a marginalized identity that often served as an entry point for social-justice engagement. The data further demonstrated the marginalized identity was often the primary reference point for participants, as opposed to their white racial identity. Theme 2 also highlighted the unique conflict that religion played in the participants' lives and their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends.

Theme 3 (Voices and Silence) demonstrated two conflicting findings; however, the data suggested both were true for all participants. First, the participants regularly used their voices to confront anti-inclusive friends and family, and second, the complete opposite (they remained silent). When the participants did confront anti-inclusion, the data suggested the participants found effective ways to be heard, had an easier time confronting those with whom they had closer relationships, and felt more empowered on campus. When remaining silent, the data suggested participants were fearful of confronting, concerned about damaging or losing a relationship, or did not feel they knew what to say.

Theme 4 (Strained, Changed, and Governed) chronicled the strained and lost relationships the participants experienced. The data also demonstrated how the participants and/or their families placed parameters around how they shared their social-justice engagement, and also the participants not maintaining any meaningful relationships with anti-inclusive friends. The following table summarizes the themes and related subthemes.

**Table 4.1***Summary of the Themes, Subthemes, and Sub-subthemes*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme(s)</b>	<b>Sub-Subtheme(s)</b>
Theme 1 - More Concern than Promise	Anti-Inclusive Interactions	
	Little Hope	
	Limited Positive Interactions	
Theme 2 - Identities Beyond Being White are Significant	Marginalized Identities and Social Justice	
	Difficult to Conceptualize Whiteness	
	Religion	
Theme 3 - Voices and Silence	Confronting	Effective Ways to Be Heard
		Personal Relationships and Confrontation
		Empowered on Campus
	Not Confronting	Reasons for Remaining Silent
Theme 4 - Strained, Changed, and Governed	Strained and Lost Relationships	
	Parameters	
	Selective Friendships	

There were 12 participants in the study. The following chart outlines the primary demographic information.

**Table 4.2**

*Participant Summary*

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Year in School</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>
Alex	4 <sup>th</sup>	Male	21
Atticus	4 <sup>th</sup>	Male	22
Bryn	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Male	21
Chris	4 <sup>th</sup>	Trans Non-Binary	22
Grace	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Female	20
John	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Male	20
Lindsay	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Female	22
Maggie	4 <sup>th</sup>	Female	21
Sam	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Female	21
Sophie	4 <sup>th</sup>	Female	22
Tommy	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Female	21
Tristan	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Gender Neutral	19

**Theme 1 (More Concern than Promise)**

Theme 1 demonstrates that the participants found their interactions with anti-inclusive family and friends frustrating and problematic. Also, they had little hope for changing anti-inclusive family and friends. There are limited data demonstrating anti-inclusive family and friends becoming more inclusive as a result of their interactions and relationships with the participants.

**Anti-Inclusive Interactions**

The participants spoke to a wide range of frustrations when they were interacting with anti-inclusive family and friends. Often, that was an unwillingness on the part of those individuals to engage in social-justice discussions, or they showed active resistance during the conversations. Many of the interactions were also problematic, whether racist, disrespectful

towards the participants, or dismissive of the participants' concerns. Grace shared her feelings on interacting with her family as her social-justice identity developed and her frustrations with how her family did not change as quickly as expected:

It's definitely not easy. I mean, just because I've learned these things, I can't expect others to automatically flip the switch and they're aware of all of it too. Or even when I first started, I thought, "Oh, I'll just explain it to them and they'll understand and change their ways." But I recognized, I think it was probably just...entering into the same family dinners or conversations and recognizing things that I wouldn't have recognized before, because I would've agreed with them or just let them slide.

Atticus shared even deeper frustrations with his family, specifically, his feelings they do not think critically about certain topics:

You want to be respectful, but at the same time, you want to scream and pull your hair and say, "Shut up. Try to think for yourself. If you know how to read, read this article." And that's what I want to say, but that can be so much more negative and that probably only reinforced what they've already held which it's only making the problem worse, digging yourself deeper. You're making their life worse too because the more you're mean to these people, the more absolute they'll get, and the more they will isolate themselves from the rest of the world because they can't keep up with the rest of the world.

Atticus also shared frustration about his interactions with anti-inclusive family and friends on social media:

In extended family, I definitely see a lot of interesting things. Especially Facebook. Facebook is such an interesting place and avenue for people now to kind of express



themselves. I think it's interesting because you feel like you know them so well and then they post something that's really, honestly, you know it's incorrect. But that's ... they're so invested in it and that's such a core aspect of who they are. It's almost better not to push the boat but sometimes you really want to.

Maggie shared how her grandmother's initial openness to engaging in social justice often changes as the discussions progress:

My grandma, my mom's mom, has actually brought up multiple times, she's like, "I don't want there to be conversations that we can't have. I don't want there to be tension between us," which is a great first step, but then when you start, at least I feel that when I start having a conversation with her about it, she'll bring it up to me and be like, "Oh great, let's have a conversation. This is great. I want to engage in this dialog. I want to know what you think." Then I'll be sharing my views about a subject or something and she'll be like, "That's just wrong." We can't have a conversation if you're going to shut it down.

When asked to share her general answer to the question, *How do you describe interactions with anti-inclusive family?*, Maggie offered:

I think they're tense. It's very, I can't think of the right word, but like walking on eggshells, trying to say the right thing and not upset the situation, because I think one of the most important things in social-justice work, especially when you're talking to somebody who doesn't agree with you or is against this type of work is keeping them engaged in the conversation, because a lot of people just check out and be like, "Oh, that's dumb," or leave. It's very difficult to find the right things to say, I think, is the way I would describe it.

Another participant, Chris, generally described their interactions with anti-inclusive family and their unwillingness to change:

Frustrating. I have no less love for them based on that. But especially knowing and being able to witness firsthand other people grow in their capacity for empathy and acceptance, to be in relationships and communication with people who have that same capacity, but just refuse to use it. It's really frustrating and I try not to let that get to me too much.

Because at that point, I don't think anything productive comes from attacking people or making them feel like they have to defend themselves. But it's like, I don't know where to draw the line of like, okay, you're in your 50s, you're not willing to talk about this, but it's been in your life experience and you know it's important to me and I wouldn't be talking about it if it didn't matter. It's like, what else do I have to do to flip the switch for other people?

Sam shared how a family member's willingness to engage in social justice can also vary by the topic:

My mom is hit or miss because sometimes she's very open to talking about certain things and not others. So I think with feminism, she likes to talk about that, but she doesn't really like to talk about race and things like that.

Regarding engaging around social justice with her father, Sam shared:

Sometimes he just won't want to have that conversation ever again. And even if I bring it up, he's like, "I don't want to talk about it, it's over, it's done with." So I think that's kind of hard when I'm wanting to have the conversation of, "This is why you shouldn't say this or this is why I disagree" when he's not really open to having the conversation to begin with.

During Lindsay's first opportunity to vote in a Presidential election, her mother was unsupportive of her personal values and politics:

My mom proudly announced that it was my first presidential election; she told me she was happy that her vote would cancel mine. And I was like, "Okay. What prompted you to say that?" because you don't just like say that, like you could literally just be quiet.

You could just literally say nothing. And didn't my mom tell me if you have nothing nice to say, don't say it at all? The same woman.

Tristan described their interactions with anti-inclusive family this way, "Summary is that they're abrasive, that they aren't willing to be open about it. And even when you attempt to be open, they don't want to talk about it and it's a subject that isn't brought up." Tristan continued to further share their difficulty in having social-justice conversations with their family:

And my family is very stuck in their ways and growing up, I realized that...well now I've realized that, because my dad always was like, "When kids go to college, they learn all these new things and think they're so insanely smart, because they've just gone through college and they know everything." And realizing that he wasn't just talking about school, but also social justice. Yeah. I guess that would kind of sum that up. So a lot of my family, it's not a subject to really talk about and, when it is brought up...It's not really brought up, which is even more difficult to casually bring it up because of my family. A lot of them are white and a lot of them do have the white fragility and it's ... I don't know how to say it, other than it's been difficult and it's been complicated and messy.

The data here are a sample of the many frustrating and problematic experiences the participants had with anti-inclusive family and friends, including an unwillingness to engage in social-justice discussions, active resistance during the conversations, and comments and beliefs

that are anti-inclusive and disrespectful towards the participants. When asked about their level of hope for anti-inclusive family and friends to change and be more supportive of social justice, the participants were mostly without hope.

### **Little Hope**

Grace's thoughts on hope for anti-inclusive family and friends changing summarized the sentiments of many of the participants. "Just having those conversations and recognizing that there are some people, I have some family members, that you could have countless conversations and it's not changing anything because it's kind of like the door has been closed." The participants often expressed the feelings that there was little hope of anti-inclusive family and friends changing, whether that was because they were set in their ways, resistant to change, or steadfast in their viewpoints. Chris also described having little hope for change:

It's like almost a naïve hope that one day something I say is going to resonate with them and it's going to wake them up and flip that switch. But it's also like beating my head against a brick wall. Definition of insanity. Doing the same thing over and over, hoping for a different outcome.

Regarding Maggie's belief in her anti-inclusive family and friends' ability to change:

My extended family, no, I honestly don't think they will. I think one of the biggest things is straight-up they just live in the South. They're white people who live in the South. My grandparents live in Arkansas. My uncle lives in Savannah. My aunt lives in South Carolina. They've lived there their whole lives. They've never moved outside of the South. I don't think they're ever going to change. I don't think they've ever had a perspective that's not like white southerners. When you've been like that for 50-plus years, you're most likely not going to break out of it. In terms of hope for change, I don't

have a lot there.

Atticus offered how this not only applies to those he has closer relationships with, like family and friends, but also people with whom he may be newly engaging in social-justice conversations:

If this person is just an angry person in general and I know that about them and I know they're a jerk, I'll just steer clear because I know I'm not going to get anywhere with them, especially if I start a conversation with someone and it's just, "You're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong," or they make no attempt to listen I'll get turned off really easily and just be like, "I'm sorry." And I'll straight up say, "I don't think this is going to be productive for either of us. Have a nice day. Goodbye," and I'll leave.

### **Limited Positive Interactions**

Despite the lengthy examples of frustrating and problematic interactions the participants had with anti-inclusive family and friends around social justice, there were limited examples that highlighted family and friends becoming more inclusive. Sometimes they embraced the participants as people and social-justice allies, sometimes they changed their viewpoints, and sometimes they simply were willing to engage authentically in conversations. Chris offered a story about how their sister had become more inclusive towards them with time and involvement:

I coordinate and volunteer at [redacted] Pride every single year. Last year, that childhood friend that came out before I did, he and my sister both came to visit me at the Pride Festival. They were having a real good time and I was volunteering. But that felt like progress for me because my sister really got to see like a huge part of my identity just being lived out in the streets of [redacted]. And it became like personal for her at that

point because she was like, “Oh, this is what my sibling does every year. This is what my sibling’s been doing for six plus years at this point.” So that was a good time of interaction. Then even just like, it took me so long to get my family to use Chris and my pronouns, and my sister was the person that like figured it out the fastest. Like it was just a small thing of being like, “You’ve been using my dead name for five years. Can you please stop?” She was, “Yeah. If you would have just told me that, like I would’ve done that.”

John shared his appreciation that his mother was always willing to engage in discussion and listen:

So one thing is that I do have pretty frequent conversations about social-justice issues that unfold over at [redacted] and even just broad social-justice issues like immigration for instance. So I do have pretty frequent conversations with my parents, especially my mom because I’m kind of around her. Especially now that all this is happening with the virus. I’m around her more since my dad goes to work, so I’m able to have those conversations with her. And for the most part it’s conversations that are reassuring. I guess...how I go about talking about these issues and kind of conversing with her, about what she thinks about them and how maybe we might have different opinions about certain things, but it’s always like she’ll listen to me.

Maggie found herself fortunate to receive regular support from both her parents:

Both my parents, I can sit down and have a legitimate conversation about identities and beliefs and things and have it just be a conversation, no tension, no yelling, nothing like that. It’s just legitimate conversation about our beliefs. Things like that I definitely think we can, my parents have come around on too. My mom, like I said, has gotten

involved in a ton of work groups. Then I've seen her come around and have conversations, and then I'll give her terms or things or just ideas that I've come across in my social-justice things, and then she'll bring them up at later points in time, so I can see the learning come down.

Similarly, Chris shared that while their mother gets defensive, she is always willing to engage in the conversation, something that Chris valued deeply:

My mom's great. She gets defensive. She gets very uncomfortable. But when it comes to supporting me and the work that I do, she's always been phenomenal with it. Before I knew that this was what I wanted to do, she knew that I would probably end up doing this kind of work. She's definitely been supportive in that context.

Tommy offered a story about her father reflecting on his previous statements and self-correcting himself, possibly as a result of the increased social-justice conversations that were happening at home.

My dad has used terms like thug and stuff, and he told us he felt anxious on a plane because there were Muslim people on it with him, I think, and then nobody said anything, and he was like, "Well, now I realize that that was probably a prejudiced thing to do." I was just like, "Yeah, dad."

Theme 1 (There's More Concern than Promise) shone light on the experiences of white college-student social-justice allies and their descriptions of interactions with anti-inclusive friend and family. While there were examples of positive changes that had happened with family and friends as a result of their interactions, there were more stories and data supporting that the allies' experiences were often frustrating and problematic. Through the lens of critical whiteness, the data here have important implications for discussion, including the complexity of whiteness,

and the white privilege associated with how and when the participants choose to enter anti-inclusive interactions.

Theme 2 (Identities Beyond Being White are Significant)

Theme 2 included most participants (11 of 12) holding a marginalized identity. The table below summarizes those marginalized identities using the participants’ preferred terms.

**Table 4.3**

*Participants’ Marginalized Identities*

<b>Participant Pseudonym/Preferred Pronouns</b>	<b>Marginalized Identity</b>
Alex (he/him/his)	Learning Disability
Atticus (he/him/his)	Physical Disability
Bryn (he/him/his)	Jewish
Chris (they/them/their)	Queer; Trans Non-Binary; Emotional Disorder; Learning Disorder
Grace (she/her/hers)	N/A
John (he/him/his)	Gay
Lindsay (she/her/hers)	Lesbian
Maggie (she/her/hers)	Lesbian
Sam (she/her/hers)	Bisexual
Sophie (she/her/hers)	Queer; Physical Disability
Tommy (she/her/hers)	Bisexual
Tristan (they/them/their)	Bisexual; Emotional Disability; Learning Disability; Gender Neutral

Additionally, Theme 2 demonstrated the role that marginalized identity plays as an entry point for social-justice engagement. For many, their marginalized identity, as opposed to their white racial identity, was often the primary reference point for their social-justice work, as opposed to their white racial identity. Finally, Theme 2 highlighted the unique conflict that religion played in the participants’ lives.

**Marginalized Identities and Social Justice**

Throughout the interviews, the participants shared different ways in which their personal



marginalized identities played a role in their investment in social justice. In Chris's case, that involvement was based on their LGBTQIA identity:

I was 16 or so, I had just come out of the closet, and so I was super focused on just queer advocacy for my community because that was what was affecting me. But then coming to [redacted] and seeing so many problematic things just go on un-talked about day after day, I just got sick of it and I'm not really the kind of person to sit back and be quiet...I, for my entire life, have either been in situations wherein I've been taken advantage of, I've been mistreated, discriminated against, so on and so forth. And it's been in my home, it's been in my schools, it's been in my social circles even. And it got to the point where, if I as a white person was feeling so negative all the time about things that I couldn't control, I can only imagine how other people would be feeling in the same position dealing with even more difficult narratives. So I think what made me interested in it was just not wanting to be a victim anymore and realizing that people that don't know how to use their voices or aren't given the opportunity to are being made victims of circumstances they didn't even put themselves in.

Sam also holds an LGBTQIA identity, which played a role in her social-justice ally identity:

I had all these media and family and friends that were saying if you're queer, this is what you need to look like and act like and present like and things like that. I didn't fit that box. I think I always knew, but I didn't really know what to say or what to call it until I was well into that journey, but I would say it definitely had propelled me to continue to learn more. I think it definitely propelled me in a different direction.

Atticus shared how growing up with a vision and hearing disability had contributed to his

orientation towards social justice, values, and his commitment to inclusion work:

I was the ugliest kid. And it wasn't just me that was saying that. That's what hurt. Kids are evil. They are mean. They will rip you apart. But I just honestly felt like, if it's within my power, that I would never try to make somebody feel the way that I was feeling. As cheesy as it is, it's ... probably at the root of it. And no, I constantly wondered, who would I be if I didn't go through that? I wonder if I'd be normal. I always wanted to be normal. That was the word and the goal, was to be normal. And I think that also made me feel guilty because there's a lot of people who had just as bad if not worse, much worse experiences based off of who they were. I didn't have any choice to be that kid but neither did they.

Regarding thanking him for sharing his story, Atticus continued:

I mean it's important. I think everybody needs context and I constantly wonder, if I didn't have context, who would I be? I think it was pretty easy to tell who I'd be sometimes, if I just look around who I'm talking to. I mean I see all these guys on campus and a lot of them are really nice and they're normal. But some of them are jerks. They don't know what they're talking about. They go out to the bars because they're looking for chicks and want to start fights. And that's just the opposite of what drives me. And I wonder if it's because, you never had anybody tell you no. You feel like the world is made for you because it is. It was but you're not willing to name that and acknowledge that a lot of your successes are not yours.

The stories surrounding the participants' marginalized identities were their own, and they were not uncommon stories. As noted, nearly all of the participants held marginalized identities. Different participants attributed their investment in social justice to their marginalized identities

to varying degrees; however, the data suggested a relationship between holding a marginalized identity and social-justice engagement.

### **Difficult to Conceptualize Whiteness**

The research question, *How do white college-student social-justice allies describe their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends?* does obviously center the interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends as the leading areas of inquiry. Put another way, the research question was not, “How do white college-student social-justice allies conceptualize their white racial identity?” There may not have been enough questions to adequately explore the participants’ understanding of their white racial identity. Despite this, there was a notable lack of specific and personal examples, mistakes, or experiences captured in the data above.

The participants, to varying degrees, were able to verbalize the role their white racial identity played in their lives. The concepts most commonly discussed included white privilege, the normalization of whiteness in society, and being conscious to take up only their fair share of space. Tommy reflected, “That’s the other thing: Being white is normalized in our society, so that’s why it’s like...my default in my mind is I’m normal, and that’s really sad and problematic.” While the participants’ conceptualizations of whiteness do not describe interactions per se, they provide helpful context for the ways that white college-student social-justice allies enter interactions. Related to Tommy’s reflection, Atticus felt whiteness was very normalized:

What it means to be a white guy, to me, means, honestly, at least where I’m from, that’s the normal thing. You’re either a white guy or you’re a white girl. And the other thing is you don’t really use the word white kid to describe yourself. You use the word kid,

every kid does, should. But to me, everything feels almost normal. I can recognize...I used to have that belief, work hard, you can achieve no problem. Because I could. A lot of people with the resources I had access to, yeah, I could do anything. But honestly, just being just a regular guy. And yeah, I know when I use the word regular that has a connotation everything else is not.

Sam reflected on how she had become increasingly comfortable with the concept of white privilege:

I think at first it was kind of like, oh, I recognize that I have privilege and I don't know what to do with it. And so, I think I would say probably a little bit of that is privilege guilt, and then realizing that's kind of useless, that you don't gain anything from having privilege guilt, and so kind of like, "Okay, how do I move past this?"

Tommy further explained an aspect of privilege by describing some of the benefits she receives and the way she is able to distance herself from racism:

I feel like I can walk by a police officer and not feel like I'm going to get questioned. I can walk into stores and not feel like I'm going to get looked at. Even freshman year, in the dorms, there was a lot of really racist incidents, like somebody put a paper noose in one of the halls and stuff like that. I didn't have to fear for my safety, like my friends did. They were talking about leaving.

Grace spoke to her understanding of what it means to be white, which highlighted the concepts of white privilege, systemic racism, and white supremacy:

There's a lot of privilege and power there that I didn't do anything to so-called earn, but I feel like systems are in play. I've recognized there's a lot of, I don't even want to label it as good or bad, but there's just privilege there and power systems there that you do have

an opportunity to then use for good or bad depending on whether you're just trying to, I guess, play the system to help you or play the system to have a benefit for everyone.

Maggie reflected on her reconciliation of the conflict between accepting the mutual truths that she has both benefited from white privilege and had challenges in her life:

I think at first I felt that stereotypical thing of like, "I'm not a racist. My life is hard too." The more I get into this, the more I reflect about, I'm white and so this aspect of my life is easier, and then these other identities make my life a little bit harder, but the binding of those two together give it a unique experience. Just because I'm white, I can still have a hard life, but my life is not hard because of my whiteness. I think that's one thing that I've had to separate out, and that once I understood that, trying to teach that to my white friends about you can have a hard life and still be white, or I guess benefit from being white.

Sophie described how she understood the connection between racism and her white racial identity:

I definitely see whiteness being the cause of racism, but I also think you can be white ... I don't think you can be white and not racist, but I think you can be white and antiracist, and white and be proud of your whiteness in some capacity without being oppressive to other people.

Sophie's reflection on being proud of her white racial identity was grounded within her background as Irish American, something she acknowledged struggling to find pride within because of its connection to whiteness:

Most of my mother's family is still in [redacted], so my ancestors came out here in the 1870s escaping the Irish famine, and they had a homestead in [redacted], so a lot of us are

still here. So that's where my Irish ancestors are from. So that's how I'm really connected to my Irish ancestry. I love learning about them, and I've actually really struggled with my racial identity because it's really hard to feel connected to white ancestors, sometimes I think, because they were very discriminatory, but also as Irish ancestors, they were escaping oppression and death, but it's been difficult to find pride in my family history and also to recognize the harm they've done.

Tommy was one of the few participants who referenced a specific mistake:

Another story that impacted me a lot...It was like a food night, like a food festival thing, and there was this Indian girl with a long ponytail standing in front of me, and I kind of knew her but not really. She was like my friend's friend. It's so embarrassing, I've never even said this out loud, but I touched her hair, I grabbed it and was like, "Ooh, it's so pretty," and she literally so fast was like, "Don't touch my hair," and it was so fast and so impactful for me. And then, at the time, I remember thinking like ... I felt really bad and a lot of shame and stuff.

The lack of specific and personal examples, mistakes, or experiences captured in the data around the participants' white racial identity was important to highlight. Often, questions about the participants' white racial identity were countered with impersonal or third-person examples, experiences drawn from their marginalized identity, or examples about other people. These responses supported an assertion that whiteness was difficult to conceptualize for the participants.

### **Religion**

While participants described their personal identities, including the marginalized ones, and their general reflections on social-justice engagement, religion was regularly cited as an area

of conflict. Religion was seen to hold values that were often counter to social justice, particularly for the LGBTQIA participants and around the support of LGBTQIA people generally. Alex offered a general reflection about his interactions with his grandparents and the intersection between religion and sexual orientation:

I only really talk to my grandparents about this stuff. Sometimes I walk that fine line of, “I’m not trying to be rude to you. I’m just trying to help you understand these things.” It’s usually around homophobia, and they’d be like, “Oh, I think that’s wrong.” I would be like, “But love is love.” And it’d be right before going to church, and the pastor would be like, “We need to let people in. We need to accept people that are coming in from the borders and stuff,” and then they would be contradicted about it. They’d be like, “I don’t think we should” type of a thing.

John offered the following on his experience attending Catholic schools and the places that contradicted his own identity:

I did grow up going to Catholic school for a good part of my life, up from second grade all the way through my senior year of high school ... I think there’s a lot of things that I learned through that time of schooling, that I kind of encountered a lot of conservative thought, for instance, and a lot of views that kind of went against my own sexuality. So it’s something that I’m still kind of trying to break down today. So I’m not super close to the Catholic faith.

Lindsay shared a story from when she came out, the unsupportive reaction she received from her parents, and how she could not be openly gay to maintain access to her health insurance:

I just don’t think that’s what God wants for you. Literally that’s like quote for

quote. They really disagreed with Obamacare and the way that, that inflated the marketplace, as far as I know I was on Medicaid at that point, I don't know. But apparently inflated the marketplace and my parents were having a really hard time before their insurance plans and all the care they needed and whatever because my father is self-employed and doesn't have a plan. And so they are on something called Christian Healthcare Ministries and it, literally, I would have to go to church every week to get healthcare and I couldn't be gay, which perpetuates, they're not approving of me, in a way, which is really interesting actually. But it's whatever, I mean it shows more about them than me.

Tristan shared a story from their grandmother's church where a member committed suicide, and how that experience created both hope and concern in her relationship with her grandmother:

My grandma, so trigger warning, my grandma, her church they had somebody commit suicide because kind of the church didn't really accept them because they were part of the LGBTQ+ community, and it made my grandma realize she may need to be more accepting to people that identify with those identities, and I definitely feel like she wants to do that, but I don't know how whole heartily she is to doing it. So I view her as a possibly ally maybe, but I'm still not sure because she is very religious, and a lot of religious groups are very anti- a lot of things, like homophobic, racist, and kind of other stuff.

Tommy offered generally regarding her Catholic upbringing, "I definitely was taught that homosexuality is bad and stuff like that, and so I felt a lot of shame surrounding that and liking girls." Tommy expressed frustration over her parent's connection to Catholicism:



I mean, my mom always says that she doesn't go to church for the politics and stuff, but ... I don't know, when a certain organization is not accepting of everybody, and harming people to some extent, it's like how can you support that? It's been kind of hard-ish. I definitely feel a lot of anger towards my parents ... just for raising me in a Catholic religion that was very oppressive.

Even outside of LGBTQIA-related support, other participants cited finding general conflict between religion and their social-justice-related values, including Atticus:

I used to be Christian. I used to really hold a lot of ... I think I still am, kind of religious to an extent. But I don't know, I've had my own issues with religions and how people practice it. Because I've also seen religion used as a system of oppression.

Sophie reflected on how even non-Christians are still impacted through the interplay between religion and whiteness:

I don't identify as Christian, but because whiteness is so rooted in Christianity, how much religion plays into whiteness and into discrimination, and how we view the world as white people and as white Americans. That was the thing that has been really hard to learn as someone who doesn't identify as Christian but benefits from Christian laws and rights.

Grace reflected on the development of her religious identity and how she is reconciling the conflict she experienced in her youth:

I still have, I don't really call it religion or not in the way that it used to be, I've recognized a lot of things that were religious ideology that I don't agree with, but I still have a belief in God, a belief in a higher power, but the way that that plays into being a social-justice ally is not the same way that others ... there would be differences because

under other's beliefs based in religion, it's not inclusive, it's very much based in whiteness, based around white culture, based on certain groups having the power, and I don't feel that way anymore ... it's just really figuring out what do you believe, why do you believe it? I'm still day-to-day going over that and making sure that if I'm saying I'm believing something, that it's aligning with my actions.

Theme 2 (Identities Beyond Being White are Significant) highlighted the seemingly critical role that having a marginalized identity plays in the experiences of white college-student social-justice allies. Several participants were clear that their marginalized identity played an important role in their social-justice advocacy. Others were less clear in knowing the exact role, if any, their marginalized identity played. However, it is noteworthy that 11 of the 12 participants held a marginalized identity; the overwhelming presence of this factor in the participants suggests some relationship. Theme 2 offered data that suggests religion serves as a source of conflict and tension for many white college-student social-justice allies. Thinking about critical whiteness, Theme 2 also demonstrates the complexity of whiteness as a concept. The participants offered many different conceptualizations of whiteness; however, only a few participants shared the ways they had personally benefited from white privilege or ways their lives intersected with concepts of whiteness.

### Theme 3 (Voices and Silence)

Theme 3 demonstrated two conflicting themes, with data to support both as being true. First, the participants regularly used their voices to confront anti-inclusive friends and family; second, the participants regularly remained silent in the face of anti-inclusion. When the participants did confront anti-inclusion, they had developed strategies to be taken seriously by anti-inclusive family and friends. The data also highlighted that participants had an easier time

confronting those with whom they have personal relationships and felt more empowered on campus. When participants chose to remain silent when faced with something anti-inclusive, it was most often out of general fear, concern about damaging or losing a relationship, or not having the confidence to speak up.

### **Confronting**

As noted above, there were multiple examples of the participants using their voices to challenge anti-inclusive family, friends, and even strangers. Bryn offered an example in which he chose to confront a Cleveland Indians baseball fan over his t-shirt:

I confronted this perceived-to-be white male this other day. He was wearing that Cleveland Indians baseball logo ... the Chief Wahoo. It's easier for me to confront perceived-to-be white people too because I feel like maybe they can still listen more. If not, it'll at least maybe plant a seed in their minds. This person didn't react well. He was like, "If you're offended or it offends other people, there's the door. There's the door. There's the door." I was like, "If other people can come up to him and say something, then maybe it can make a difference"; but, obviously, I wasn't expecting my confronting him to change his perception. I think that's the mindset to have ... you're not going to change their mind if they're doing one thing, but, hopefully, little things can add up.

John offered an example of his experience working for his college's newspaper during a time when there was an incident on campus. He found himself challenging policies and speaking out against the newspaper's leadership:

I was actually the main person who said, I think we should actually get an article out about this, and that kind of came from my role at [redacted], because I had Black students that I was meeting with who were just extremely upset about this and wanted to know

what they could do; and so I kind of felt like I owed it to them to cover this, fully and accurately ... So I personally met with the managing editor and editor in chief and I was like, "This is not right."

Maggie shared a story about a vacation with her grandparents, during which her grandfather was being racist towards Asians:

I took a road trip with my grandparents to Yellowstone a couple summers ago. When tourists come to America, Yellowstone is a huge national tourist location. We were camping in Yellowstone, and there was a ton of Asian tourists ... My grandpa kept calling them all Japanese. I was like, "That's racist." I was like, "They're not all Japanese." Then he said something along the lines of like, he said, "There's so many Japs here I'm going to need to pull another Hiroshima." I was like, "That's not a joke and that's not funny." He was like, "Why don't you laugh at it?" I was like, "That's not a funny joke."

Atticus shared a story where he used non-verbal cues to signal his disagreement to other students engaged in conversation:

I was walking to class ... There was these three ... I assume they were freshmen. They were walking behind me. You could tell they were white ... I got in front of them and they started talking about Asians and the Coronavirus. And they said the word cesspool. I'm forgetting the context. And I just turned over my shoulder and I kind of have a mean face, if I want to look pissed off, I can. And so I just turned and I looked at the one who had just talked. I just looked him in the eye for a half second. And I saw him close his mouth. And the three of them stopped talking for the rest of the way. And I was like, "Did I just check them?" But yeah, there was an Asian guy that walked by us on the way,

during the conversation. I was like, “Well what if he heard you?”

Atticus also shared another example of a time he challenged his uncle over something he said, and a creative shift in the conversation he used to get his point across:

We were talking about how my sister wants to live in Spain after she graduates ... And my uncle was like, “Well, it’s a really cool place. And a downside is all the Muslims.” And I was taken aback by that, and then I asked him a follow-up question, “What do you mean?” He’s like, “Well, it’s a pretty dangerous place.” And then, the way I approached it was, I was like, “Well, at least it’s a lot more safe than the United States.” And he didn’t really have a response to that. At first, he got angry, and then I think he thought about it, and I think he was like, “Okay. I can’t really argue against that.”

Tristan shared their experience asking a family member to change their language:

I asked her if she could start saying Native American instead of Indian American, I’m just like, “It’s one word, would you mind changing it for me?” And at first she was very much like, “I’m old, I don’t need to change,” but the more I talked to her and kind of was like this is more respectful, it’s not probably the one that everybody agrees with but it’s more respectful because Christopher Columbus came over and was like, “Oh I’m in India so these are Indians,” it’s more respectful towards people that are the original stewards of this land, and that they’re not just Indians because Christopher Columbus said they were, they are what identity they want to be.

### ***Effective Ways to Be Heard***

The participants cited, both directly and indirectly, several tactics they came to use when confronting others. These specific strategies or approaches to social-justice conversations with

anti-inclusive family and friends resulted in the other person being more open to listening. The most common strategies outlined were: (a) not to become angry or upset, (b) to be inquisitive and not immediately shut the other person down, and (c) to use stories that made the conversation feel personal. Sam also highlighted the value of having one-on-one conversations:

I think definitely having one-on-one conversations and intentional conversations ...

Like, “Hey, I noticed you said this. I personally don’t agree.” Or like, “Can you tell me more about why you think that?” And kind of having that conversation is way more beneficial, regardless if I change someone’s mind about something or not. I like to think that we can both come out of that conversation and have learned something or have learned about a different perspective.

Alex offered a powerful quote he shared that he used when talking to people with whom he had differing opinions, “You don’t have to be wrong for me to be right.” He expressed that the statement removed the perception there is a right or wrong answer in every given situation. John shared a mistake he made in the past as a way to offer a personal experience and connection point:

And this is something I especially used during the [redacted] incident...using my own personal experiences. And so I think for instance I have said the N-word in the past and I have done things when I didn’t know more about social-justice issues and I didn’t know the harm that I was doing when I was at a younger age. And I think as allies, I think white people, should not be afraid to acknowledge those personal experiences and explain how you’ve grown from them. So, yeah, that’s a tool that I use, acknowledging things that I’ve said in the past. And saying how I have learned from that.

Maggie outlined how she felt it was appropriate to draw a line when confronting

something anti-inclusive that somebody has said:

I usually just start with something like, “I don’t agree with that,” or like, “That’s not cool,” or like, “Don’t say things like that.” I think the first step is just expressing that that’s not going to fly or like that’s not okay, because a lot of the times, and especially in social-justice work, silence is equivalent with compliance. If you’re being silent, you’re just letting it go, you’re letting these things perpetuate.

Tristan reflected on their learning around the best ways to engage others in conversation, reflecting that was not something they were initially doing in an effective manner:

I’m learning that I need to be open and very gentle and I have to work with white fragility and whiteness rather than against it, and, so this is mainly coming from my cousin...I would have a lot of social-justice conversations with him without realizing it, and I was very much attacking him, and I never realized that until really recently. And just kind of understanding that I have to be open, if I go on the defensive, more people are going to be more hesitant to learning about it, and just being as open as I can be and accepting as I can be, so that way more people want to learn and more people want to communicate with me and knowing that I’m open to the conversation.

Sophie recommended storytelling specifically, and how that can be even more powerful than facts and research when engaging someone anti-inclusive around social justice, “So storytelling is something I really believe in, and I think storytelling is really powerful. And so, being able to have stories to tell people helps a lot.” Repetition was also a strategy that Sophie offered, and shared an example where she felt she had positively influenced her mother:

I think actually the important thing is repetition, so like saying it one way and then saying it another way, and then bringing it up later, especially around my family, just continually

bringing it up. My mother actually brought up racism in her book club which is all old white women ... They were reading a book about South Korea and how people are discriminated against for their nationalities more, and how like her book club friends were saying, "Well, I have it hard, too." And she's like, "Well, you have it hard but not because you're white." So, that was really cool to hear that back from her, so just like being repetitive and bringing it up in different situations.

### ***Personal Relationships and Confrontation***

When participants did confront something anti-inclusive, it was most common to happen with immediate family, as opposed to extended family or friends. When asked directly, most participants felt it was easier to challenge those they are closest with. Maggie reflected this theme with regards to her immediate family:

If it's my immediate family, I'll call them out almost all the time, be like, "Hey, that's not a funny joke." If it's my extended family or somebody that I'm not very close with, it might be half and half, also depending on the situation, how many people are there, things like that. My immediate family I'd say almost all the time, but extended family maybe not so much.

Sophie viewed engaging her parents as a way to maintain a close relationship:

Then with my parents, I try engage in a lot of things around them, because I want to keep a close relationship with them, and this is a big part of my identity, to talk about this, so I try to engage with them.

John reflected similarly, "Yeah, I guess the closest people in my life are my parents and it is easy to have those conversations." Atticus shared, "I think I almost make more of a conscious effort for my dad's side of the family just because I feel closer to them." Finally, Sophie also



shared, “Yeah. I’ve definitely ... because I’m close to my parents, it’s easier to engage with them because I see them so much and because they ask about my life.”

### *Empowered on Campus*

The themes within the data suggested that participants found it easier to use their voices and confront others when on or near campus. Some participants narrowed in on feeling more empowered on campus and in the campus community generally, and some participants narrowed further on work environments or other spaces they deemed safe. As Chris offered, “I’m not confrontational, when it’s just me. Like if I’m not in my advocacy space, like I’m not trying to start anything.” It was easier for Sophie to use her voice to confront something anti-inclusive when in her social-justice community on campus:

If I’m around the social-justice circles on campus, it’s a lot easier to talk about all this, I think, sometimes, because we have a shared language. A lot of them have studied social justice or engaged in it in different ways whether at [redacted] or [redacted] workshops or just affinity groups, and that’s at home or with childhood friends which I sometimes engage with or talk to, but not much, and especially with my parents’ friends. It’s harder to talk because we don’t have that shared vocabulary, so I’m constantly having to stop and explain what the vocab means, and so, especially if it’s around things they have never heard of...So it’s hard to sometimes, especially engaging with family, to use inclusive terms that they don’t know, to stay true to my values, but also to get across what I’m saying.

Maggie also offered thoughts on the difference between an on-campus environment and being away from campus:

I think especially being at [redacted] and then being involved in quite a few social-

justice-oriented programs, I feel a lot more comfortable. I think that's just this group and herd mentality. If you know that there's other people who think like you and who behave like you and who are going to support you, you're more likely to participate, or at least I'm more likely to participate in that activity, because I feel like I'm going to be backed up. At [redacted] I feel really comfortable... Then when I come outside of the university, I usually still engage in those conversations, but it always comes with a second thought, because usually I'm going to be the only person who thinks like this. I'm going to be the only person in my little family circle who thinks like this... At [redacted] I'm like, "Oh yeah, let's go, let's go do this right now." Then at home I feel like, "Do I really want to engage in this conversation?"

Atticus felt it was easier to confront people in the campus community because of being closer in age and being more likely to have a shared experience through being a college student: I think it's almost easier to talk to people here, just because we share, not necessarily the same racial identities, but we share the same identities of age, being students living in America, living in this environment. So I almost feel like it's more casual and easy to talk to people, especially about issues that are complex and heated, and what not, because at this point, they probably already have had several versions of the same conversation with somebody else, just because it's a college campus.

Similar to Atticus, Lindsay narrowed in on having a similar increased level of comfort from being around people of similar ages and experience:

I guess I would feel more comfortable in this environment because like ... saying cuss words in this environment because I know that people my age are going to also use them or that it might not be offensive to them for as many reasons as someone who's older

would find offense. It's almost like in a weird way, there's less tolerance for your own shell. I don't think I've ever put that together, but it's the generation that my parents are in, they don't tolerate anything but it does affect their own shell like they will be upset if someone is not speaking English. But my age group...doesn't feel as personal, I think there's a difference in how personal it is perceived.

The data supported that the participants regularly used their voices to challenge anti-inclusive family and friends. When doing so, the participants found effective ways to be heard. Finally, the data also highlighted how the participants felt more empowered when using their voices on-campus and in their social-justice circles. These themes are noteworthy because critical whiteness does assert that white people need to take responsibility for dismantling racism and other forms of hate. While promising, there was also a strong theme suggesting the participants regularly did *not* use their voices when seeing or hearing something anti-inclusive.

### **Not Confronting**

For the many examples the participants provided in which they had challenged the anti-inclusive beliefs of family and friends, there were also many examples of times when the participants did not challenge something anti-inclusive. Sometimes it was an intentional choice not to challenge something, out of general fear, concern about losing or damaging a relationship, or not knowing what to say. Chris shared how they regularly choose not to engage around anti-inclusive language:

With triggering language, I'm pretty good at hiding how I feel. It's not the greatest talent to have, but I'm able to hide my reactions and stuff. So if I'm affected, most people aren't going to know. So it depends on how much it impacts me, genuinely. If my dad makes an offhand comment, like using queer as a slur, because he's done that before too, I'm able

to brush that off.

When asked about the likelihood of engaging, Chris shared, “At this point, I’m probably trying to engage 30% of the time and trying not to 60% of the time.” Regarding confrontation, John shared, “It’s something that I am definitely getting better with. But it’s not something that...I do hesitate a lot.” Similarly, Bryn shared his hesitancy to speak up because of not wanting to damage the relationship:

Well, I guess I’ve been kind of naïve and not really pressing family that might have some...be racially biased or just racist in general. I don’t want that relationship to be different, especially since we’re going to see each other a lot.

Interestingly, when some participants were asked to provide examples of when they confronted something, they offered an example of someone else confronting something (demonstrating that they actually had not used their voices). Lindsay shared an example that demonstrated a situation where something anti-inclusive had received attention; however, she had not actively challenged the person:

Okay, so just most recently there’s this girl in my sociology class and I had sociology, quantitative sociology, which is I think stats almost and she had almost pretty mildly loudly announced that she had stopped seeing her tutor because they were Chinese and it was like blatant racism. But I just could not believe that I just existed in that. Like I felt like I was on a different planet, I could not believe that someone would say that.

When asked if she said anything in the situation:

No. Oh my God. Someone else said it. Someone else was handling it for me, someone else had handled it. They were like, “That’s racist bro.” I’m staring her down because she kept trying to defend herself a little bit and then they were like, “No, no, like talking

louder than her,” and I was like, “Awesome. Cool.” And it kind of dissipated within a minute.

The theme of participants regularly *not* confronting anti-inclusion seemed disconnected with the number of examples the participants were able to provide showcasing anti-inclusion. This suggested that while it was common to hear anti-inclusive language, participants regularly chose to stay silent in many situations. Choosing to remain silent when confronted with something anti-inclusive is certainly an example of white privilege when examining the data through critical whiteness.

### ***Reasons for Remaining Silent***

There were many data points suggesting that participants found it difficult to confront anti-inclusive family and friends, often resulting in the participants choosing to say nothing. In discussing why participants were hesitant to do so, the choice was most often grounded in general fear, concern over harming a relationship, lack of confidence in their ability to defend their opinion, or not believing intervening would make any difference. John shared his experience with one of his uncles, someone whom he had never confronted over his anti-inclusive beliefs:

One of my uncles is especially a very pro-Trump supporter ... you'll usually find him in the dining room at anybody's house arguing something political, and after a while it's ... I don't know, it's kind of a lot. But I guess I honestly have not spoken up against what he says because I guess I'm still learning how to do that; and I think if it was somebody who I wasn't related to, who I didn't like ... because I visited him frequently growing up, I think if it was anybody else, I would know how to speak up and explain, counter what they're saying. But because he's just so passionate and kind of just spewing fake

information, I don't know how to change his mind.

Maggie shared her hesitancy in calling out family, "It's always hard to call out family. When they say something you don't want to call them out because you've got to live with them for the rest of your life." Regarding confronting her grandparents, Tommy said, "It's hard because they're old." Tommy shared other reasons she was hesitant as well.

Probably knowing that, oh what I'm thinking is probably not right or not great, but this is what I've grown up knowing or this is what I've always believed and it's just easier to not know and to not have that conversation. It doesn't apply to me, it doesn't bother me, it doesn't affect how I exist in the world.

Sam narrowed in on the hesitancy she experiences in large group settings:

I think it can be uncomfortable ... If you're in a really large group setting that ... I don't necessarily want to be the one person, who's like, "Am I the only one feeling this way?" What if I say something and nobody else agrees? That can be really awkward and uncomfortable and make you feel unsafe returning to that space. But I think also, most of the time, I've found that I'm not the only one thinking it.

With regards to discomfort around challenging individuals, Sam further offered:

So I think that can also be uncomfortable and you don't know what those consequences could be or those repercussions could be. I think just like the uncertainty of it all, it was like, is this person going to appreciate what I'm saying to them? Are they going to potentially learn from it or are they going to educate themselves? Are they going to come out of it and be like, "Okay, how can I reflect?" Or are they going to be totally closed off? You don't know if you don't necessarily know that person.

Bryn connected maintaining the status quo with the decision not to engage, and further

connected that with the concept of white privilege:

Maybe it's keeping the status quo in terms of my personal status quo ... not having much conflict in my life or something like that. So then changing that. Change is hard. I feel like it's hard for everyone, but even I guess not being comfortable, and that comes from white privilege and usually being comfortable or at least this white supremacy mindset of just keep everything the same.

Grace expressed a similar concern to not being able to argue her opinion, and ground her opinion in facts. She also noted that sometimes she is not able to react or think fast enough to have a response:

It's not all fear of anything, it's more of like I want to be more solid in my learning because I do have family members that will question and if I don't have answers to that, the conversation doesn't go very far. Sometimes I'll avoid saying something because I myself am still learning about the concept, or learning all of the ways I can recognize something as a microaggression, but to be able to say this is why, "Yes, that's a microaggression." The whole thought process behind why it is can be hard to explain to someone as compared to just recognizing what it is. Sometimes I'll recognize it, but I won't say anything just for the fact that I'm still trying to figure out what to do after the recognition of it.

The concept of fear also presented itself in Grace's reflections about her small-town upbringing and the influence that has on her hesitancy to use her voice:

But what my guess would be ... would be mainly fear. The fear of being isolated, because I'm thinking of things that I thought of before I'm at the point where I am now. We're a small town, if you get isolated, you might feel like you're the only one because

the way the community is set up is it's not all super welcoming to beliefs outside of their own, so I'd say fear is a big one, and also change ... being from a small town ...

everything's habitually done ... the thought of something being different or ideas being different leads into fear, but just the thought of doing something that not everyone else is doing or saying something and not everyone else agrees with, at least in the community I'm in ... I mean it was for me even deciding to make the change to go to college and go to college out of state ... I feel like everything feeds into fear, the thought of what others will say about you, the thought of how they'll react.

Chris noted a unique data point, which connected their hesitancy to engage with their marginalized identity, and the results challenging someone could have on their personal safety:

Every situation is different. I need to be able to gauge my safety in engaging. I need to be able to feel out the environment and everything that I'm entering into. There are times where every part of me wants to engage, but I know that the minute I do, I'm endangering myself or other people or everyone, and it's not worth risking people's safety to say like, "Hey, you shouldn't have said that." So it depends completely on the situation, the people, the point, what we're arguing for or against, time and place, super, super key with social justice.

While the data suggesting participants both used their voices and did *not* use their voices could appear to be conflicting themes, it was important to highlight both as part of Theme 3 (Interactions: Voices and Silence). Each theme was supported in the data and gave evidence supporting the conclusion that the participants often did both. The decision to not use their voice was often accompanied by a struggle, whether general fear or concern over the loss of a valued relationship, that influenced how and when the participants acted. All of the data in Theme 3



have important implications for critical whiteness. A participant using their voice lends promising evidence that white college-student social-justice allies are using their voices to challenge anti-inclusion. Similarly, critical whiteness offers important additional context for making meaning of the data, including the participants' decisions to often not use their voices when faced with anti-inclusion are all manifestations of whiteness and white privilege.

#### Theme 4 (Strained, Changed, and Governed)

Theme 4 chronicled the strained and lost relationships the participants have experienced. The data also demonstrated how the participants, their families, or both placed parameters around how they share their social-justice engagement, and also the participants not maintaining any meaningful relationships with anti-inclusive friends.

#### **Strained and Lost Relationships**

A theme that emerged from the data how relationships with family and friends had changed as a result of the participants' social-justice identity. In some cases that included the loss of relationships, but more commonly it included the participants feeling less close to others, intentionally distancing themselves from others, or both. John shared more about his changed relationship with his uncle, who was regularly sharing his anti-inclusive beliefs at family gatherings:

I think my relationship with him has been impacted. I'm not close to him. In the past I might have been a little closer, but I just don't even get involved with him. Which is something I do want to change in the future, to stand up to what he's saying and all. But overall I think my relationship has been negatively affected by his conversations and his rhetoric, and I think that is a cost of being a social-justice ally, is that you're not always going to have people who agree with you, and that could negatively impact your

relationships with your literal family.

Chris also felt distanced from their family because of their social-justice engagement, specifically related to their family's seemingly passive interest:

Trying to live that kind of life has put a separation between my family and I because I'm really the only person that is active and doing something. My sister is aware and supportive but passive. Whereas I'm trying to go to protests, I'm trying to host workshops and do the whole nine yards, and learn. So that's strained familial relationships anyways because they just don't have the same drive.

Lindsay chose to remove her mother's access to her social-media accounts:

I mean right now I'm not friends with my mother on social media and there's the acquaintance setting ... you can remove a follower. So I just did that instead of blocking and unblocking ... the issues I have and the issues I fight for are not the ones that my mom agrees with.

Atticus had not necessarily distanced himself from his mentor from childhood; however, he did share that he chooses what he shares with him:

The things that we both enjoy and have in common, we can talk about all night long. We have pretty similar senses of humor. I try not to get into anything political with him just because I know that his access and familiarity with things probably isn't as good as mine, and I don't mean that to make him sound stupid, but I just know he doesn't care enough to want to know facts, and real things, and issues. And it's easier to live in ignorance than to realize, "Oh, things are sad, messed up and people are getting fucked over."

Grace also shared that this commitment to social justice can sometimes result in other

people choosing not to have a relationship with her:

I'd say one cost would be like relationships with others ... I've had an instance where someone who had certain ideals and beliefs and identified as Christian after I shared my learnings of, "Hey, I want to be inclusive and that includes everything. Gender identity expression, orientation, other's identities," so by me saying that and by me showing that I want to be inclusive I've had relationships where people were like, "Okay, well that's it. I'm not talking to you. I'm avoiding you." And that relationship was lost. But yes, it was a cost, but I've recognized that maybe I don't want to be in that.

### **Parameters**

The participants shared examples of circumstances in which parameters were placed on their social-justice identities. In some cases, the individual participants chose to limit what they shared about both their personal identities and social-justice engagement with others. In other cases, their families set the parameters on what they should share. Regarding self-placed parameters, Lindsay shared how she has always limited what her family can see on social media:

I didn't give anyone else a chance to see me for who I really was because I had just changed my Facebook settings and had been doing a lot of this for my own self-exploration ... what I really thought and what I was really developing wasn't at all what they agree with, so I was on the quiet about it.

Grace disclosed her caution about what she shares with others, and she specifically referenced recognizing that her actions and beliefs also reflected on her family:

It's very much different when we're at the family dinner table versus if we are at church on Sunday morning ... I guess I'm more cautious when sharing that because not only do I

have a relationship with my family but my family has a relationship with their friends and I have a relationship with many of them. The dynamic of that... I would not want to say something that would be taken a certain way by them and then have the three-part, the family, me and their friends—that whole dynamic. I wouldn't want people to get frustrated for no reason.

Maggie shared a rule growing up, “We don't talk about the news when we go to grandma and grandpa's. My mom was very explicit about that. She's like, 'Just let it go.' That's always been in place since I was very young.” Although Maggie did not set parameters around what she shared with her immediate family, there were rules in place around what was shared with her extended family:

When I came out, somehow my grandma on Facebook found out about it ... Then within the next day the whole family knew about it. It's just unspoken that nobody talks about that, or there's parameters, like if I have a partner I don't bring them to family gatherings, or once I hosted, it was my senior graduation party, and my girlfriend came. I had a conversation with my mom about, “You can't be girlfriends at this party,” because my grandparents were there. There's definitely parameters around my extended family, what you can and can't talk about, what you can't do, participate in, things like that. It's very clear for extended family. At least for me, I'm very cautious about things that I talk about with my extended family. It has been explicitly outlined by my parents, things you do and don't talk about.

Sam shared a similar experience with regards to her family asking her not to discuss social-justice-related topics:

Yeah ... I think my parents, they'll say, “Hey, you don't need to get into a whole

conversation about this at this event that we're going to or family outing," or things like that. I think they definitely have like, "Ooh, we're glad that you're passionate and involved in this. But so-and-so is not going to understand this." So just don't even get into it kind of thing.

Lindsay shared the parameters that had been placed on her regarding sharing her sexuality and limits on interactions with her nieces:

I know that I'm not supposed to disclose my sexuality to my oldest three nieces, but at the same time it's like if they come up to like talk to me, I'll explain what it might be in a very vague way that's not crossing any boundaries ... That's a family rule and that was established a very long time ago, that was established probably when I was 17. When I was super rebellious and out at [redacted], I actually wasn't allowed to see those nieces because I had such opposing views ... they just didn't want them to have anything to do with me.

Chris shared they had never shared their gender identity and sexual orientation with their grandparents: "Neither of them know how I identify because we just ... I primarily made the choice, but I was also encouraged by my parents to kind of leave them in the dark about it." Speaking further about these parameters:

Starting in my family, like I said, not telling my grandparents how I identify because dementia and evangelical Christian. I get it, but I wasn't the one to make that decision. At first, it was my parents saying, "Don't tell anyone." Or like, "Don't come out." They've been very adamant with like, "Don't tell too many people, you'll be misconstrued or you're going to be ostracized." And I'm like, "Well, I've already been ostracized. I've already been singled out. That's why I do this." Just in general, they keep to themselves

and they would like their children to do the same.

### **Selective Friendships**

As noted throughout the themes, participants regularly saw examples of anti-inclusion and those were often related to interactions with family. A few participants appeared to maintain meaningful relationships with anti-inclusive friends. One could infer that the nature of being family with someone forced an ongoing connection, whereas that is not the case with friends. John simply shared, “I would say that a lot of my friends are social-justice-minded.” Sam reflected, “It’s definitely something where it’s like, I am okay with surrounding myself with people, fewer people, but that have the same values.” Tommy maintained a small circle of friends:

With friends it’s really good...my three best friends are all white feminists ... they’re also queer, so it’s really good to communicate with them, and I also learn from them so much. I really like it. I don’t have that many friends. I only have a couple close friends, I guess.

Chris shared how socializing was difficult for them and how they have a small group of friends:

I’m not the kind of person to have a ton of friends. Socializing is really difficult for me, so I have two or three close ones and we all share the same values. So in that sense it’s, we all like feed into each other. I feel like I can talk to them about anything. We’ve had really great productive conversations surrounding privilege and lack thereof.

Even with the small circle, Chris found it easier to engage socially now because of having firm values:

I find socially ... not with my family, just socially it’s a lot easier for me to find my

people or people that I feel like I can get along well with because my values are out there. It's very obvious who I am and what I stand for, and I make sure of that because I don't ever want to be misconstrued as someone that I'm not. So in that sense, it's made socializing a lot easier for me because I can weed out who I'm going to get along with and who I'm not.

Sam shared the conflict she experienced over maintaining relationships where her values did not align with the other person:

Maybe in my first year ... when I would go home, I would see people from break. But I don't know, I think it's just being far away and being so involved. I've met people that I don't have to, I don't know, make excuses for necessarily, people that also have the same passions and interests as me and also value social justice. So it's like, "Oh, I'm friends with this person but they're homophobic." "Oh, I'm friends with this person but they're racist." It's like, "I'm not going to really make excuses for people like that." Why would I continue to keep friendships and relationships like that...that's kind of just me making excuses at that point. But I definitely do have a few strong friendships from high school and it's with people that are kind of in similar situations as me.

Maggie shared a similar reflection and offered that she met most of her current friends through her campus employment experience:

I usually keep more friends who are in with social-justice work. I find it harder and harder to just have conversations or joke around with people who aren't into that, aren't aware, or just blatant don't care about it. I would say yeah, a lot of my friends are within it. That also comes with a majority of my friends also work at either [redacted] or [redacted]. Both of those are social justice and social-service-oriented, and so naturally

people who flock there are already going to have at least some knowledge about that. That's where a lot of my friends come from.

Finally, Atticus shared his close friends mostly share his same values:

So, my close friends are a lot like me. They hold a lot of the same viewpoints, a lot of the same values ... I'm choosing with who I get really close with because I have friends in my fraternity that're my fraternity brothers who have very radical viewpoints and we usually don't talk about politics.

Theme 4 (Strained, Changed, and Governed) offered insight to the way white college-student social-justice allies experienced relationships. It was evident that relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends did not continue unaffected. In the case of family, strained relationships were common. Those strains were due to the participants distancing themselves from anti-inclusive family, or having parameters set on how they can share their social-justice identity. In the case of friends, the participants maintained few meaningful relationships with anti-inclusive friends. Under the framework of critical whiteness, there are important implications within the findings. The rules and culture of whiteness and white supremacy influence how the participants talk about anti-inclusion and how their families allow those discussions in certain spaces.

### Summary

The four themes and 11 subthemes further our understanding of the experiences of white college-student social-justice allies interacting with anti-inclusive family members and friends. Theme 1 (There's More Concern than Promise) highlighted the participants' many frustrating and problematic interactions with anti-inclusive family and friends, and also the participants' general lack of hope for those same anti-inclusive folks to change. That was not universal



though, and there were limited examples of anti-inclusive family and friends changing for the positive.

Theme 2 (Identities Beyond Being White are Significant) showcased the finding that most all the participants held a marginalized identity. In addition to holding a marginalized identity, Theme 2 also demonstrated there was a relationship between holding a marginalized identity and being invested in social justice. Most of the participants found it difficult to articulate or conceptualize how their whiteness was part of their social-justice work; their focus was more on their own marginalized identity. Finally, the findings indicated a conflict that white college-student social-justice allies have between their social-justice engagement, their marginalized identities, and religion.

Theme 3 (Voices and Silence) demonstrated that when the participants did use their voices to challenge anti-inclusive family and friends, they had developed several strategies for doing so: using personal stories, not getting angry or defensive, and knowing facts and research to back up any claims they made. Similarly, Theme 3 also demonstrated that there were many times when the participants were *not* using their voices. This was demonstrated through direct examples the participants provided where they decided not to use their voices. It was also demonstrated in the large number of examples the participants offered showing anti-inclusion contrasted with the limited number of examples the participants could offer showing direct confrontation.

Finally, Theme 4 (Strained, Changed, and Governed) demonstrated the relational aspects of the white college-student social-justice ally experience, specifically, that their social-justice identities were resulting in changed, strained, and lost relationships with family and friends. Theme 4 also demonstrated the ways participants or their families were placing parameters on

the ways their social-justice and/or personal identities were shared, and also the nature of the participants to limit their close friends to people that share their same values.

All of these themes were meaningful. As a phenomenon, we better understand the “what,” (Ahmed, 2007) both visibly and invisibly, direct and indirect, that surrounds the white college-student social-justice experience. The themes are only part of the story, though. Through the theoretical framework of critical whiteness, we can contextualize this experience within a broader picture. As noted in Chapter Four, whiteness and white supremacy, and the participants, exist within a dynamic, relational, and complex system all of which functions to uphold white supremacy (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 56). That system does not disappear, even when talking about white allies. Therefore, one should not look at the participants’ experiences in isolation.

Ahmed (2007) teaches us about the connection between phenomenology and whiteness: If we said that phenomenology is about whiteness, in the sense that it has been written from this ‘point of view’, as a point that is ‘forgotten’, then what phenomenology describes is not so much white bodies, but the ways in which bodies come to feel at home in spaces by being orientated in this way and that, where such bodies are not ‘points’ of stress or what we can call stress points. To make this point very simply: whiteness becomes a social and bodily orientation given that some bodies will be more at home in a world that is orientated around whiteness. (p. 160)

To that end, Chapter Five is a general discussion about the findings and implications for future research. In addition, Chapter Five also addresses the interrogation of whiteness; where and how does the phenomenon of white college-student social-justice allies intersect with critical whiteness. Upon examination, the themes are larger than the participants’ experiences and demonstrate broader manifestations of whiteness and white supremacy.

## CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When the findings from this study were connected with the related research and viewed through the theoretical framework of critical whiteness, there is ample material to discuss and make meaning of the data. To frame the discussion, I reflected on two analytical questions: *Where do the findings support or negate the existing literature?* and *How does critical whiteness inform the findings?* These analytical questions resulted in several critical discussion points and opportunities for further research, including: the minimization of racism, the invisibility of whiteness, white action and complacency, white privilege, and rules of whiteness. Following the discussion is a summary of the recommendations for future research, and a final conclusion and researcher reflection. The table below summarizes the findings in relation to the relevant critical whiteness concept.

**Table 5.1**

*Relationship Between Findings and Critical Whiteness*

Theme	Subtheme	Related Critical Whiteness Concept
Theme 1 - More Concern than Promise	Anti-Inclusive Interactions	Minimization of Racism
Theme 2 - Identities Beyond Being White are Significant	Marginalized Identities and Social Justice	Invisibility of Whiteness
	Difficult to Conceptualize Whiteness	Invisibility of Whiteness
Theme 3 - Voices and Silence	Confronting	White Action and Complacency
	<i>Not Confronting</i>	White Privilege
Theme 4 - Strained, Changed, and Governed	Strained and Lost Relationships	Rules of Whiteness
	Parameters	Rules of Whiteness

## The Minimization of Racism

There was strong congruence between the findings in this study and existing research related to strategies for navigating interactions with anti-inclusive family and friends. In their qualitative study, Sue, Rivera, et al. (2010) offered several effective facilitation techniques for classroom instructors to use when discussing something anti-inclusive. The findings in their study suggested instructors should be open to their own learning, feelings, and personal biases, and should also allow space for students to explore their feelings. Although not instructors, the participants used many similar techniques when interacting with anti-inclusive family and friends. John highlighted the first principle when he was willing to share mistakes he had made in the past, specifically his use of the N-word. He shared that, "...as allies, I think white people should not be afraid to acknowledge those personal experiences and explain how you've grown from them." Regarding the latter principle, Tristan shared how they approach social-justice conversations with anti-inclusive family and friends, specifically, "I'm learning that I need to be open and very gentle and I have to work with white fragility and whiteness rather than against it." Tristan allowed for the anti-inclusive person to explore their feelings as part of the process of challenging.

Sue, Alsaidi, et al. (2019), in their strategic framework for addressing microaggressions, narrowed in on the strategy of making the invisible visible, which includes calling attention to the microaggression. They also suggested the strategy of disarming the microaggression, which included shutting it down. These strategies were consistently demonstrated throughout the findings when the participants did use their voices to challenge anti-inclusive family and friends. In one of Sam's examples of challenging someone, she said, "Hey, I noticed you said this. I personally don't agree." Similarly, Maggie not only called attention to the issue but also drew a

more definitive stance, stating, “I think the first step is just expressing that that’s not going to fly or like that’s not okay, because a lot of the times, and especially in social-justice work, silence is equivalent with compliance.”

Smith and Redington’s (2010) qualitative research on effective interventions suggested their participants had found success in altering their interventions based on the perpetrator’s level of knowledge. Several of the participants in this study also suggested they vary their approach based on the person. For example, Grace shared when she is challenging her parents, she is likely to immediately share what she has learned, whereas with her grandparents, she has to ask them questions about what they believe prior to telling them about what she has learned. This approach makes her grandparents more open to hearing her ideas because she has demonstrated she is equally open to learning from them.

Smith and Redington (2010) also found their participants asked questions of and did not immediately shut down someone with anti-inclusive views. Sam entered conversations with statements like, “Can you tell me more about why you think that?” Sam also referenced liking to think both she and the other person could learn something from the conversation. Overall, this notion of asking questions, not shutting someone down, and keeping the conversation going were all supported in this study. The most common ways participants entered social-justice conversations with anti-inclusive folks were to not become angry or upset, to be inquisitive and not immediately shut the other person down, and to make it personal using stories.

The congruence between the facilitation techniques for instructors noted in the literature and the participants’ strategies is important to note. Viewing the current study’s findings through the lens of critical whiteness revealed an additional pattern: the participants’ minimization of racism. Several of the well-intentioned strategies participants deployed, including not becoming

too angry or upset, being inquisitive, and not shutting the other person down, can easily contribute to the minimization of racism. The minimization of racism was also sometimes revealed in the findings through statements such as, “But she’s a good person and doesn’t mean anything by it.” Another example was when participants unintentionally normalized racism. Matt talked about his extended family this way:

But I don’t think they really understand that that kind of conversation, that that kind of language is racist, because I don’t think they ever really had people kind of explain that to them and point that out. And so it’s just so normalized in their conversation that it’s just like they don’t even realize what they’re saying.

The minimization of racism suggests that discrimination and racism are no longer important factors affecting people of color. This belief allows white people to view events such as hate crimes and other prejudicial treatments and actions as people of color being hypersensitive and pushing a non-existent racial agenda (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 29). The minimization of racism, even while one is challenging someone anti-inclusive, demonstrates the complex nature of white supremacy and how it is upheld in our society. To adequately get anti-inclusive family and friends to listen to them, most participants used some form of the outlined strategies. Those strategies, in turn, both minimized what the anti-inclusive family member or friend was saying, and also granted them unfair latitude to engage in racism.

### The Invisibility of Whiteness

One of the most interesting themes in this study was that the majority of the participants held a marginalized identity. This was supported in the existing literature. Most directly, McKnight (2015) studied white male social-justice allies and found a relationship between being an ally and carrying a marginalized identity. Similarly, Munin and Speight (2010) established a

relationship between being an ally and having experiences feeling like an outsider, which could include holding a marginalized identity. And finally, Kordesh et al. (2013) found that antiracists often have a jarring experience spurring a realization that prevailing racial attitudes are problematic. Those jarring experiences could include external factors (such as seeing a hate crime) but also internal factors like holding a marginalized identity.

While participants having a marginalized identity was confirmed in the literature, it was still surprising how strongly this theme emerged, particularly because it was not a criteria for being a participant. Neither this study nor the supporting literature proved a causal relationship between being a social-justice ally and holding a marginalized identity, but they certainly suggested a relationship. However, having the marginalized identity does not necessarily make participants more aware of their whiteness or increase their understanding of racism. Cabrera (2012) offered the following about the white participants in his study who held a marginalized identity:

The participants were also affectively primed by their personal minority experiences.

While being a minority did not teach them specifically about racism, it prompted an awareness of systemic oppression and allowed them to draw parallels between their experiences and those of racial minorities. The intersection of emotional and cognitive preparation allowed the participants to criticize persistent, systemic racism, while also finding localized means of struggling against it. (p. 394)

Further research is needed to better explore the specific role that holding a marginalized identity plays in social-justice ally development. As noted in the findings, the participants felt their marginalized identities had played a role in their commitment to social justice in varying degrees. Some participants described a direct connection, and others felt it was a peripheral

influence. For example, on one end of that continuum, regarding his being gay, John stated, “I honestly don’t think it’s something I necessarily applied to social justice.” At the other end of the continuum, Sophie stated, “I think disability played a big role in me getting involved in social justice.” Tommy landed somewhere in between. Regarding her bisexuality, she felt it, “...might’ve kind of opened that door for me.”

Regardless of how influential the participant found their marginalized identity, the fact that 11 of the 12 participants held a marginalized identity suggested some relationship. Similarly, I was left wondering, if it were not for the marginalized identities, would the participants still be allies? More research is also needed on white college-student social-justice allies who do not hold a marginalized identity. How do their experiences compare against the white college-student social-justice allies who do hold a marginalized identity?

Taking this theme further and analyzing the marginalized identities through the lens of critical whiteness offers a manifestation of white supremacy, the invisibility of whiteness, which is a concept that maintains white supremacy. We better understand the complexity of whiteness and how it operates at both individual and system levels, including the way its manifestations are often rendered invisible (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018; Feagin, 2010). DiAngelo (2011) framed how white supremacy and whiteness are often invisible, particularly for white people. Through intentional and unintentional segregation, white people become so accustomed to functioning within predominantly white environments that the absence of diversity becomes synonymous with, “normal,” “good,” and “white.” This becomes truth for most white people, and establishes the white racial frame (DiAngelo, 2018). Whiteness becomes so normalized, its practices become difficult to see, verbalize, understand, and dismantle.

Although the research question in this study identified “white college-students...,” and



there were one to two content-mapping questions related specifically to whiteness, oddly, very little of the interview content specifically acknowledged whiteness. Identifying critical whiteness as the theoretical framework after data collection may have impacted this outcome. There were missed opportunities to further explore whiteness; nonetheless, the lack of whiteness-specific content seemed significant.

Often, when participants were offering examples of a time they had used their voices to challenge an anti-inclusive family member or friend, they quickly narrowed in on another manifestation of anti-inclusion outside of whiteness (such as racism as it impacts people of color, homophobia, etc.). For many of the participants, their response often related to their marginalized identity. Other times, even if the participant did not focus on their marginalized identity, they often still pivoted the conversation away from whiteness. As an example, when asking Sophie about her understanding of her white racial identity, our conversation quickly pivoted to two of her childhood friends of color and what it was like for them growing up. Sophie recognized the experiences of her friends of color were different from hers, because of her whiteness, but our discussion was centered on the experiences of her friends of color, rather than her own whiteness.

For participants, marginalized identity became the entry point for their understanding of anti-inclusion (racism, homophobia, etc.) as opposed to their white racial identity. Put another way, the participants' advocacy was often challenging the racism of others, homophobia, xenophobia, etc. and other such biases of others. However, that advocacy was not explicitly challenging whiteness, which remained largely invisible. This suggested that just because a white person is able to identify racial disadvantage, and just because a white person knows whiteness exists, does not mean they are able to recognize how whiteness operates in society (DiAngelo,

2011, 2018).

This was important to note because even the participants, all committed to social justice, had limited understanding or ability to verbalize ways their whiteness influenced their commitment to social justice. Further research is needed to explore the specific ways that white college-student social-justice allies conceptualize their whiteness. Kivel (2002) offered a reminder about why making whiteness visible is critical:

I want to begin here—with this denial of our whiteness—because racism keeps people of color in the limelight and makes whiteness invisible. To change this we must take whiteness itself and hold it up to the light and see that it is a color too. Whiteness is a concept, an ideology, which holds tremendous power over our lives and, in turn, over the lives of people of color. (p. 9)

#### White Action and Complacency

White action refers to the actions white people take when confronted with anti-inclusion. In this study, action was examined in relation to the participants' interactions with anti-inclusive family and friends. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, the action most often included challenging an anti-inclusive comment verbally, or using a nonverbal cue to signal disagreement. This was affirming, as one of the arguments within critical whiteness is that white people need to take responsibility for the elimination of white supremacy. "Antiracism refers to taking a committed stand against racism, a stand that translates into action that interrupts racism in all its forms, whether personal or institutional, blatant or routine, intended or unintended" (Trepagnier, 2006, p. 104). We know critical whiteness should include white people playing an active role in the elimination of white supremacy, through acknowledging and relinquishing white privilege, and using their voices to bring about change and challenge injustice (Tochluk, 2008). The

participants demonstrated through their voices and their actions ways they challenge anti-inclusion, making the many -isms visible (and, at times, whiteness), being conscious of the amount of space they take up, and committing to their own social-justice learning.

The positive actions of the white college-student social-justice ally participants should be acknowledged and encouraged. Ultimately, this is what we want as higher-education faculty and staff – more white college students engaging in social-justice advocacy and creating inclusive spaces. Again, however, a critical whiteness analysis might remind us that people of color have used their voices for much longer, more loudly, and regularly not receiving any credit. Similarly, focusing on critical whiteness reminds us to reflect on the participants’ actions in this study and where even more could and should be accomplished. It is easy to become complacent as an ally.

White folks cannot just speak out when it is convenient. That option only perpetuates white supremacy. Similarly, speaking out alone will not change anti-inclusive policies and systems (Kivel, 2002). White people must take greater action. Consistently speaking out is only one piece of the puzzle; taking action also includes organizing, protesting, writing politicians, making social-justice-centered monetary decisions, and partnering with people of color to force change to happen. Some of the participants did offer these examples; however, they were limited. Again, the findings suggest that white college-student social-justice allies do take action, and also that white privilege allows them to withdraw from taking action without significant impact on their lives.

### White Privilege

The opposite of white action, and a theme from this study that was not specifically represented elsewhere in the literature, was the participants regularly choosing not to speak up and use their voices when confronted with something anti-inclusive. This theme is particularly

noteworthy through the lens of critical whiteness, specifically, and an example of white privilege. Again, the nature of white privilege awards unearned benefits to white people: places they receive benefits, leniency, and special considerations, differently from people of color (McIntosh, 1988). White privilege is one of the most regularly cited components of whiteness. Critical whiteness seeks to show those privileges, which are often unnoticed by white people.

Castagno (2008) asserted a white person remaining silent in the face of something anti-inclusive is using white privilege (p. 318). Staying silent in the face of something anti-inclusive is problematic. When people make racist or other anti-inclusive comments and the bystanders remain silent, that silence is perceived as agreement. This perception empowers people to persist in their racism (Trepagnier, 2006, p. 49). Trepagnier (2006) suggested that it is even more critical for white people to use their voices to challenge other white people, because it is in the absence of people of color that the most racist comments are likely to be made.

Comparing the theme that the participants often did not use their voices to challenge something anti-inclusive with the idea that silence is oppressive presents another place even social-justice allies can be in collusion with white supremacy. There were many examples of participants not using their voices in the face of something anti-inclusive, probably even more examples than when they used their voices. The capability of individuals to opt in and out of challenging anti-inclusive family and friends without having that choice directly impact their day-to-day experience of those making the choice is a manifestation of white privilege.

The specific reasons allies hesitate to use their voices has not been fully explored in current research. Ashburn-Nardo et al. (2008) documented reasons allies may hesitate in taking action, including: knowing whether something is discriminatory, knowing how to confront something, taking responsibility for doing so, and actually taking action. There was limited

overlap in the theme from this study outlining reasons why the participants chose to remain silent. The findings in this study suggested the loss of a relationship, lack of confidence, and not knowing how to intervene as being relevant reasons. Bryn shared how he's hesitant to confront because he doesn't want his relationship with his family to change, especially because he sees them so often. When reflecting on interactions with her father, Tommy mentioned, "I didn't have the right vocabulary or knowledge of how I support what I'm saying," as a reason for hesitating when she hears something anti-inclusive.

Kivel (2002) offered similar and additional reasons why it can be hard for a white person to take action, in addition to how that compares to a person of color:

Interrupting racist comments can be scary because we risk turning the attack or anger toward us. We are sometimes accused of dampening the mood, being too serious or too sensitive. We may be ridiculed for being friends of the group being attacked. People may think we're arrogant or trying to be politically correct. They may try to get back at us for embarrassing them. If you're in an environment where any of this could happen, then you know that it is not only not safe for you; it's even more unsafe for people of color. (p. 107)

Connecting this hesitation to take action with the existing literature on meaningful diversity-related academic experiences, we must examine ways to do a better job empowering white college-student social-justice allies to take action. The existing literature documented many of the diversity-related academic experiences that are most impactful for white college students, including cross-racial interactions (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Chang, Denson, et al., 2006; Hurtado, 2005; Saenz et al., 2007), academic courses (Boatright-Horowitz et al., 2012; Case, 2007; Ross, 2014; Storms, 2012; Wright & Tolan, 2009), and intergroup dialogues (Alimo,

2012). When getting to know the participants during the early part of the interviews, they shared their participation in and cited as important several of these experiences and others. The most commonly referenced experiences included co-curricular opportunities (usually within Student Life, including residence halls, student involvement, leadership programs, and volunteerism). Meaningful cross-racial interactions and academic courses were also mentioned by several participants.

While diversity-related experiences are meaningful to the participants and make a difference in their commitment to social justice, there are opportunities to better incorporate taking action into these learning experiences. Sue (2017) affirmed this is not something we are currently doing well:

...we fail to prepare our White brothers and sisters for the alternative roles they will need to play to be effective; we do not provide them with the strategies and skills needed for antiracist interventions; and we do not prepare them to face a hostile and invalidating society that pushes back hard, forcing them to either readopt their former White biased roles or maintain their silence in the face of White supremacist ideology and practice. (p. 713)

White people have a responsibility to speak up. The choice not to take the initiative to use their voices when something anti-inclusive arises is not as simple as ignoring something. That decision has much larger implications, including their using white privilege to avoid taking action, and supporting white supremacy through silence and collusion with the perpetrator of the anti-inclusion. Kivel (2002) reminded us that white people using their voices with other white people can often be more effective and taken more seriously. This is another example of white privilege, and it presents an opportunity for a White person to use their privilege to dismantle

white supremacy.

Learning to intervene when hearing or seeing something anti-inclusive is critical. Even interventions that are not well received or are perceived as only mildly effective can still make a difference. Even a perpetrator who becomes defensive might think about what they have said and speak more carefully in the future. Similarly, speaking out encourages others to do the same (and overcome their hesitancy), draws a line about what is acceptable behavior, and eliminates any perception of colluding with anti-inclusion (Kivel, 2002). More work is needed to understand how experiences such as academic courses and intergroup dialogues are and are not preparing allies for action. Developing white college-student social-justice allies is predicated on pushing privileged students out of their comfort zones. Prompting action is a key distinction from theory alone (Cabrera, 2012, p. 379). Knowing how and when to act must become a central component to college's structured social-justice-related learning opportunities. Further research is needed to identify the structured learning opportunities that are most effective in pushing white college-student social-justice allies to take action, and then use those opportunities for models elsewhere.

Another question raised through the findings in this study is what, if any, connection the participants' marginalized identities had with the diversity-related academic experiences they identified as meaningful. In other words, did the participants seek out the diversity-related academic experiences or find them meaningful *because* of their marginalized identities, rather than because of the opportunities themselves? Further research is needed to parse out these two experiences. If data were found to suggest the marginalized identity was in fact the leading factor, it would be important to further investigate the most impactful experiences for white students who do not hold a marginalized identity. It seems possible the larger white student population does not hold a marginalized identity, so knowing how to most effectively influence

those students would be important to know.

### Rules of Whiteness

When the participants in this study did use their voices and take action, one theme that was supported in the findings was they were more comfortable doing so with those with whom they have closer relationships. There was limited existing research that supported this theme. Morey et al. (2012) did find that participants in their study were more likely to engage those with whom they had closer relationships in political discussions. While not directly related to social justice, political discussions and social-justice discussions bear similarities. Politics and social justice often intersect, and both are topics of which people hold strong opinions.

The impact that being a social-justice ally has on relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends was a central theme in this study. Participants distanced themselves from anti-inclusive family, and often let go of relationships with anti-inclusive friends altogether. Maggie and Alex both talked about strained relationships with family. Tristan shared losing an entire friend group because of their social-justice work: “The more I noticed social justice and informed them about it, the more it was weird, because they didn’t like how I was informing them about social justice.”

This theme was also supported through existing research. Smith and Redington (2010) studied white antiracists and documented their experiences having interpersonal conflict with anti-inclusive acquaintances, family, and friends. Malott et al. (2015) also studied white antiracists and found they often struggled to make and maintain relationships. All of this data, including from this study, showed there are costs associated with being a white college-student social-justice ally. Knowing how important family and friends are in a person’s life, these data are noteworthy. It is important for higher-education faculty and staff doing social-justice work to



understand the way white college-student social-justice allies must navigate their relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends.

The finding in this study that participants often set parameters, or had parameters set for them, around how they share their personal marginalized identities and social-justice values has further implications under critical whiteness. Maggie reflected on her Baptist extended family and shared, “I’ve always been careful with what I reveal about myself to people...If you don’t want to start something bad, you’ve got to keep it to yourself.” Similarly, Tristan’s father told them, “Oh you shouldn’t tell everybody about this,” regarding their sexual orientation and gender identity.

The phenomenon of whiteness contains conscious and unconscious norms and cultural expectations, including unwritten rules for how white people engage with other white people, all of which perpetuate white supremacy. Sue (2017) has exposed some of these dynamics:

White allies may be labeled “White liberal” troublemakers, isolated by fellow White colleagues, threatened to be disowned by family members, or risk not obtaining a raise or promotion they had hoped to receive...Ironically, as nonracist and antiracist identities are developed, the traditional support groups of family, friends, and colleagues often no longer play supporting roles. In fact, they can serve the opposite function of forcing allies to be silent or to return to their old ways. (p. 714)

In conclusion, the findings of this study supported existing research that suggested allies have strategies for effectively interacting with anti-inclusive family and friends (Smith & Redington, 2010; Sue, Rivera, et al., 2010; Sue, Alsaiddi, et al., 2019); that there is a connection between having a marginalized identity and being a social-justice ally (Kordesh et al., 2013; McKnight, 2015; Munin & Speight, 2010); that allies are often hesitant to take action for a

variety of reasons (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008; Kivel, 2002); and that allies are more likely to confront those with whom they have a closer relationship (Morey et al., 2012).

The findings also spoke to concepts of critical whiteness and highlighted some of the cultural norms and expectations around the phenomenon of whiteness and white supremacy. White people are not supposed to talk about social justice, or to challenge anti-inclusive white people. White people who do challenge are seen as outsiders and can experience costs, including lost and damaged relationships, associated with their decisions to use their voices. The parameters set by the participants or others, usually immediate family, demonstrate another way that white supremacy is maintained, through the active governing of how white people interact and engage with other white people around social justice, namely, the expectation that challenging anti-inclusion be avoided.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

This study on how white college-student social-justice allies describe their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends raised many additional questions. Areas of scholarship that should be more thoroughly explored in the future include:

- The specific role a white college-student social-justice allies' marginalized identities play in their commitment to social justice.
- The experiences of white college-student social-justice allies who do *not* hold a marginalized identity.
- The ways white college-student social-justice allies conceptualize their whiteness.
- Targeted research on why white college-student social-justice allies hesitate to take action and how they learn to overcome that hesitancy.
- The diversity-related learning experiences that most effectively teach white college-

student social-justice allies how to take action.

- The connection, if any, between white college-student social-justice allies who hold a marginalized identity and their seeking out and finding diversity-related academic experiences meaningful. If there is a connection, then exploring the opportunities that are most impactful for white college-student social-justice allies who do not hold a marginalized identity.

Each of these studies would further our understanding of the phenomenon of whiteness and the specific experiences of white college-student social-justice allies.

#### Implications for Practitioners

As a scholar-practitioner, I believe it is important to discuss how the findings from this study could and should directly impact practice. Two specific areas for consideration emerged with regard to white college-student social-justice allies: training and support. Training opportunities should include an increase in attention paid towards white college-student social-justice allies' white racial identity. The data in this study suggested the participants had trouble conceptualizing whiteness and were limited in their ability to articulate the ways that they contributed to oppressive systems. Their focus in addressing social justice and anti-inclusive behavior and interactions centered on their own marginalized identity, as opposed to their white racial identities. Learning about concepts like racism, systemic oppression, and history, as they impact others, are all important. Also, white allies must learn about their racial identity and how that identity shapes the way they see the world and contribute to oppressive systems.

Our training strategies in higher education (whether academic classes or co-curricular experiences) also have additional opportunities to better impact white allies. More attention should be paid to teaching white allies how to take action, the importance of taking action

consistently, and preparing them for the challenges from others they may experience when taking action. As discussed, the data here suggested the participants regularly chose *not* to take any action in the face of anti-inclusion because of fear, lack of confidence, and other outlined reasons. Those are missed opportunities to educate others and, at minimum, set expectations about acceptable behavior.

Finally, the findings from this study suggested that practitioners can provide more intentional support to white allies. The participants in the study experienced damaged and lost family relationships and friendships. Those changes in relationships, and other examples, including having parameters set on how they share their personal and social-justice identities, receiving limited or no support from family, and having to navigate conflict with religion, are all examples of places white allies may need support. In my experience, those items are not normal considerations when building social-justice curriculum for white college students.

### Conclusion

This study's findings furthered our understanding of the phenomenon of whiteness and increased our understanding of the experiences of white college-student social-justice allies in their interactions and relationships with anti-inclusive family and friends. I hope I have presented the findings in a way that does not lose sight of the magnitude and complexity of white supremacy. I would argue there are three truths coming from this dissertation.

First, the participants are an amazing group of college students. I could not be prouder of the group or feel more empowered after hearing their stories. They are future leaders: doctors, community organizers, lawyers, and who knows what else. I also believe they will work toward social justice and make a difference in the world wherever their journeys lead. Grace shared her desire to live out her social-justice beliefs: "It's real life. I feel like that's what it was different

for me. Like it's not just a class, this is in everything that you do...I want to get to the point where I'm living it."

Second, the experiences of white college-student social-justice allies are robust and sometimes difficult to navigate. Many of the same powerful influences that uphold white supremacy also make being an ally challenging. It can be challenging to take action against other white people in the face of anti-inclusion. Doing so can result in the loss of a friendship or a strained relationship with a family member. Allies must navigate a complex set of rules that govern expectations of white people and ultimately uphold white supremacy. It is a small community and can be hard to make and maintain friendships. The reality is that most white students are not social-justice allies. Chapter Three outlined the methods I used to generate participants, specifically, reaching out to a network of professionals for participant recommendations. While I generated a large prospective participant pool for a qualitative study, in comparison to the greater white college-student population, it was a small number. Many of the same students were recommended multiple times. Sue (2017) reviewed several qualitative studies that used participants who were identified as white allies by people of color. Regarding the participants, he noted:

I would submit that if similar studies were conducted, whether in the United States or Canada, the same names would probably appear over and over, indicating to me that the pool of white allies, from the perspective of people of color, is truly small. (p. 709)

The third truth from this study is that white supremacy is powerful, white allies still contribute to white supremacy, and we all have a lot more work to do. "Whiteness is a many-faceted phenomenon, slowly and constantly shifting its emphasis, but all the time maintaining a racial hierarchy and protecting the power that accrues to white people" (Kivel, 2002, p. 23).

When silent, white allies use and promote white privilege. Similarly, even when taking action, a white ally can minimize racism by using strategies to make the perpetrator more open to hearing what they are saying. White allies are subject to the many ways that whiteness is rendered invisible in our society. Well-intentioned white allies still participate in a white supremacist system. Being an ally is a lifelong commitment. Kivel (2002) reminded us:

Nobody needs fly-by-night allies, those who are here today and gone tomorrow. Being an ally takes commitment and perseverance. It is a lifelong struggle to end racism and others forms of social injustice. People of color know this well because they have been struggling for generations for recognition of their rights and the opportunity to participate fully in our society. (p. 103)

Being a white ally can be hard, scary, challenging, and there may very well be consequences. Taking consistent action, making it a lifestyle, and continually doing more are also the right things to do.

#### Researcher Reflection

Completing this dissertation was a whirlwind of emotion. There were moments of confidence, many more moments of doubt, feelings of inadequacy, confusion, excitement, and many other feelings too. When I entered the doctoral program at Colorado State University, I felt strongly I wanted my dissertation to somehow interface with social justice and white people. I'll offer I've been continually concerned about my ability to do that well. As I said in the conclusion, the participants are an awesome group. That feeling is easy for me to hold. As an educator, I believe in students strongly, believe in the power of a higher education, and appreciated the powerful stories of this amazing group of participants.

What was harder for me to hold was the reality that I'm a white researcher studying white

college-student social-justice allies, and talking extensively about whiteness. Was there something more behind my choice to study white students? Was I more comfortable with that? There's not a specific solution here or answer, and I believe this work is important and that we need to understand the experiences of white college-student social-justice allies. However, how do I avoid being a well-intentioned white person that ends up doing more harm than good? My hope is that using critical whiteness as a theoretical framework offers some reality check against becoming overly optimistic; racism is still happening, whiteness is still a complex system, and white allies are still perpetuating white supremacy.

Writing this dissertation also happened alongside a lot of personal reflection. In Chapter Five, when pointing out the places white college-student social-justice allies are in collusion with white supremacy, I'm speaking about myself too. When faced with anti-inclusion I also fail to speak up sometimes, and when I do, it's not always perfect. I receive many white privileges that grant me power, space, voice, influence, and undue credit around social justice. My reflections also highlighted for me that I live a more segregated life now than I did growing up, as a result of my current economic and educational privilege. I'm still not fully sure what do with that.

As I mentioned earlier, writing this dissertation helped me recognize I am speaking about myself. One day while writing a portion of this dissertation, I was at a coffee shop that was only hosting outside customers, the bathrooms and interior space closed because of COVID-19. A white-presenting woman approached the barista and asked to use the bathroom. The customer was told that the bathrooms were closed to the public and was directed to the nearest restroom. The customer became visibly furious, started yelling, and demanded to use the bathroom because she had to go very badly. Not only did she think it was unreasonable for her to be inconvenienced in the first place (by closing the bathrooms), she also felt the rules should be

changed for her specifically. This is not surprising and when I look for similar examples, I can find them readily. The part that was meaningful was my realization that only a few days prior, at the same coffee shop, when I had to use the bathroom and did not want to walk a far distance, I decided to use a hotel that was immediately next door. My plan was to walk confidently into the hotel and stroll through the first-floor lobby until I found a bathroom. I successfully used the bathroom, was not asked if I was a guest, and, in fact, received a warm smile from the front desk team member. Even doing anti-racism work, I did not process until after the second incident that my plan to, “walk confidently into the hotel” was grounded subconsciously in whiteness and white privilege. I knew that if I looked confident, I would not be questioned about my belonging; it would be assumed that I belonged. And it was.

I’m walking away incredibly proud of this piece of work and I hope others find it useful. Better engaging white folks in social justice feels especially timely. We’re currently living in a period in the United States where hate crimes are commonplace, as demonstrated by the statistics offered in Chapter One. Many people, including myself, attribute this increase to the current political climate in the United States and the divisive nature of the Trump administration and American politics. As an administrator in higher education, the campus hate crime statistics are not surprising, unfortunately. I regularly see and hear about acts of hate and discrimination on my own campus and on campuses around the country.

While living in Wisconsin, during election cycles, I found it particularly interesting to look at the maps showing voting patterns of individual towns and counties. While increasingly a swing state, around Wisconsin, you can find many Republican- and Democratic-affiliated counties. You will find several blue pockets representing the larger cities (Milwaukee) and the Wisconsin counties in closer proximity to the Twin Cities. However, there are also several blue



pockets around the state that fall near the different state colleges, which are influenced by the student population. Examples include Dane County (University of Wisconsin – Madison), Eau Claire County (University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire), and Lacrosse County (University of Wisconsin – Lacrosse) (Brilliant Maps, 2016).

I associate those blue pockets, much like the goals of higher education, to center around principles such as self-exploration, lifelong learning, exposure to new ideas and people, critical thinking, a better understanding of how the world's history has shaped contemporary society, empathy, multicultural competence, and a greater appreciation and understanding of those different than oneself. For many students, these are the learning outcomes achieved through a higher education. It's also the reason I believe our work, that of the faculty and staff, does change the world. Colleges are uniquely positioned to play a role in the elimination of hate and violence and the creation of an equitable world.

And the reality in Wisconsin, and many similar communities around the country, is that most people live in communities where the principles mentioned above (exposure to new ideas and people, multicultural competence, etc.) are not realized. Completing this dissertation coincides with many people in the United States reeling from the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, a Black jogger who was killed by two white men. A Facebook post by Gloria Atanmo (2020), author of *The Blog Abroad*, offered an important thought for white folks:

Regarding #AhmaudArbery, don't text your Black friends and ask if they're okay. Text your White friends and tell them to have open conversations with their racist uncles, cousins, family members who say racist sh\*t at family gatherings & you sit there in silence because privilege.

White people must play a strong role in social justice. In pursuit of a more equitable and

socially-just world, we need to better understand how White college-student social-justice allies are interacting with, maintaining relationships with, and ultimately positively influencing anti-inclusive family and friends. I'd like to believe doing that successfully has the potential to change the world.

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## APPENDIX A: OUTREACH EMAIL

**Study Title:** A Phenomenological Study on How White College-Student Social-Justice Allies Describe Their Interactions and Relationships with Anti-Inclusive Family and Friends  
Researcher: Jon Cleveland, Doctoral Student

RECOMMENDER OUTREACH EMAIL:  
Hey/Hi NAME!

I hope this email finds you doing well. As you might know, I'm a doctoral student in the Higher Education Leadership program at CSU. I'm starting to recruit participants for my research study, which is broadly focused on white college-student social-justice allies. More specifically, I'm interested in learning how white students that came to college and developed a social-justice ally identity navigate their relationships and interactions with family and friends from before getting into social-justice advocacy.

I'm reaching out to colleagues to ask for recommendations of undergraduate students that would be potential participants for my study, which will include participating in two 90-minute interviews. I'm not sure how closely you work with students, so I'd also welcome your recommendations of other folks I should speak with about finding participants. I'm looking for participants that:

- Are White/Caucasian students
- Are Undergraduates in at least their fourth semester of college?
- Have participated in any social-justice-related workshops, classes, or trainings
- Have a basic understanding of diversity (can describe concepts like racism, power, and privilege)
- I'm particularly interested in candidates that grew up in homogeneously white communities and had limited, if any, interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.

This is just to give you a general sense of what I'm looking for. Don't worry if you're not sure if they meet the specified criteria exactly – I'll set up an initial phone call to discuss everything. I'll take as many student names as you can think of that are likely to meet the criteria, and I'm also hoping you have one or two students that readily come to mind. One thing to highlight – I do plan to disclose your name to those you recommend (so they know how I came to contact them); however, I will not be able to share further information with you about whether the student chooses to participate.

Thank you for considering helping.

Sincerely,

Jon

## APPENDIX B: INTRODUCTION EMAIL

### RECOMMENDER OUTREACH EMAIL:

Hi NAME,

I hope this email finds you doing well. I got your name from RECOMMENDER. I'm a doctoral student at CSU studying white social-justice allies. More specifically, I'm interested in learning about how white students that came to college and developed a social-justice ally identity now navigate their interactions with family and friends.

I reached out to my network of colleagues and that's how I got your name as a potential great fit for the research. Are you open to being involved? It would be about a 4-hour time commitment (two 90-minute interviews) towards the end of March. It is very important to highlight your participation is completely voluntary. The person that recommended you will not be provided with any information from me about whether you choose to participate or not.

If you're willing to be involved and learn more, I'd love to set up a 15-minute phone call with you to give you more information in the next week or so.

Talk to you soon!

Sincerely,

Jon Cleveland

## APPENDIX C: SCREENING INTERVIEW

**Study Title:** A Phenomenological Study on How White College-Student Social-Justice Allies Describe Their Interactions and Relationships with Anti-Inclusive Family and Friends  
Researcher: Jon Cleveland, Doctoral Student

### VERBAL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT:

In conversational style, ...

Hey, my name is Jon Cleveland and I'm a doctoral student at Colorado State University in the Higher Education Leadership program. I'm conducting a research study on white college-student social-justice allies and I got your name from (recommender). Specifically, I'm interested in learning more about how white students that came to college and developed a social-justice ally identity and how they now navigate their interactions with family and friends from before getting into social justice.

I'm wondering if you'd be willing to be involved. Participation will take approximately four hours during February and March of 2020. That includes the 15 minutes for this phone call, two 90-minute interviews, and then 45 minutes for follow-up questions. I want to stress this is completely voluntary, you're under no obligation to participate. And, if you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without any negative consequence.

If you participate, I would like to record the interviews. In that sense, I would be collecting personally identifiable information including audio recordings, transcripts of the interviews, and then any notes I take. The data would always be securely stored and I would be using pseudonyms (you could pick yours!), so your privacy would be well-protected. When I report and share the data with others, we will combine the data from all participants. There are no known risks or direct benefits to you, but I hope to gain more knowledge on the experiences of white allies and hopefully think about ways to best support them on campus. I do think it's important to disclose [redacted to protect participant confidentiality].

Would you like to participate?

If no: Thank you for your time.

If yes: Proceed and confirm selection criteria.

That's awesome that you're interested in being involved. Can I ask you a few more questions to make sure you meet all the participant criteria?

- Do you identify as white?
- Are you in at least your fourth semester of college?
- How would you describe your experience before college? I'm particularly interested in candidates that grew up in homogenously white communities and had limited, if any, interaction with people of color.

- Have you participated in any social-justice-related workshops, classes, or trainings?
- How would you describe concepts like racism, power, and privilege?

Thanks so much for answering those questions for me.

If participant does not meet criteria: thank you for your time, and offer a very brief description of why it is not the right fit. Congratulate them on their social-justice work and affirm what good they must be doing to have (Recommender) recommend them.

If participant does meet the criteria: invite them to continue with the study.

Offer to give the participant your contact information and the Participant's Rights contact information (If you have questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the [redacted] IRB at: [redacted]).

## APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT

### CONSENT FORM – INTERVIEW WITH AUDIOTAPING

Colorado State University  
Consent to Participate in Research

**Title Study:** A Phenomenological Study on How White College-Student Social-Justice Allies Describe Their Interactions and Relationships with Anti-Inclusive Family and Friends

#### **Introduction and Purpose**

My name is Jon Cleveland, a doctoral student at Colorado State University, studying how white students that came to college and developed a social-justice ally identity navigate their interactions and relationships with family and friends from before getting into social justice. This research is being overseen by Sharon Anderson, a professor in the College of Education and my doctoral advisor.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to participate in my research, I will conduct two interviews with you at a time and location of your choice. The interview will involve questions about your background, involvement on campus, your experiences with social justice, your thoughts on social justice, and then your interactions and relationships with family and friends from before you had this identity. Each interview should last about 90 minutes. With your permission, I will audiotape and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide, and will be used for transcription purposes only. If you choose not to be audiotaped, I will take notes instead. If you agree to being audiotaped but feel uncomfortable or change your mind for any reason during the interview, I can turn off the recorder at your request. Or if you do not wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time.

I expect to conduct only those two interview; however, follow-ups may be needed for added clarification. If so, I will contact you after the interviews by phone and/or email.

#### **Benefits**

There is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study. It is hoped that the research will help [redacted to protect participant confidentiality] support and develop social-justice allies. I do think it is important to disclose [redacted to protect participant confidentiality].

#### **Risks/Discomforts**

Research often comes with risks and it is important that you know that ahead of time. I do think this study has minimal risks. The biggest risk I have identified is that you might find yourself uncomfortable with some of the questions – for example – say we start talking about your social-justice identity and how that has changed, or maybe damaged, your relationship with your grandmother. That could be upsetting.



Know that you do not have to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable talking about. You would also be welcome to take a break at any point too if that would be helpful. Again, I do not anticipate this representing the bulk of our conversation, but want you to know it is a possibility.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised; however, I am taking precautions to minimize this risk.

### **Confidentiality**

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, I will securely store audio recordings, transcripts, and notes in locations only I and the principal investigator (Sharon) can access.

We will transcribe the audio recordings as soon as possible after the interview, and then destroy the audio files. When the research is completed, I will save the transcriptions and other study data for possible use in future research done by myself or others. I will retain these records for up to 10 years after the study is over. The same measures described above will be taken to protect confidentiality of this study data. I may be asked to share the research files with the sponsor or the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee for auditing purposes.

### **Compensation**

There is no monetary compensation for participation in this study.

### **Rights**

*Participation in research is completely voluntary.* You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop taking part in the project at any time. Whether or not you choose to participate in the research and whether or not you choose to answer any questions or continue participating in the project, there will be no penalty to you or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me at 608-695-5135 or [jon.cleveland@colostate.edu](mailto:jon.cleveland@colostate.edu). You may also contact Sharon Anderson at [Sharon.anderson@colostate.edu](mailto:Sharon.anderson@colostate.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the [redacted].

\*\*\*\*\*

## CONSENT

Do you consent for your interview to be audiotaped?

Yes

No

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (*please print*)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Study Title:** A Phenomenological Study on How White College-Student Social-Justice Allies Describe Their Interactions and Relationships with Anti-Inclusive Family and Friends

Researcher: Jon Cleveland, Doctoral Student

- Content-Mapping Questions for Interview One
  1. How did you become invested in social-justice work?
  2. Why is social-justice work important to you?
  3. How would you describe your racial identity? What does it mean to be white?
  4. How do you view whiteness and the connection to racism?
  5. What are some of your own biases and prejudices?
  6. How do you define racism and tell me about examples where you see racism with your family and friends?
  7. What is it like with family and friends now that you identify as a social-justice ally?
  8. How would you describe your interactions and relationships with family and friends that don't share your beliefs?
- Content-Mapping Questions for Interview Two
  1. Tell me more about your interactions and relationships with family and friends that don't share your beliefs.
  2. How have these interactions and relationships changed as a result of your new beliefs around social justice?
  3. Do any specific interactions come to mind where your beliefs were clearly different than a family member or friend?
  4. Do you (and if so, when and how) challenge family and friends that don't share your beliefs?
  5. Have you found any effective strategies for challenging family and friends that don't share your beliefs?
  6. How do you know those strategies are effective?
  7. What feelings do you have or things do you think about during these interactions?
  8. What, if any, are the changes in relationships you have experienced as a result of intervening and challenging different beliefs?
  9. What does the future look like for you with regards to social-justice work and your interactions and relationships with family and friends?